FYRISH BESS

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

TGP Landscape Architects Ltd
Suite 4.01, 4th Floor
100 West Regent Street
Glasgow
G2 2QD

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1 Introduction

The proposed Fyrish BESS (the 'Proposed Development') is located 970m to the west of Alness, Highlands. This Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) of the Proposed Development has been prepared by TGP Landscape Architects Ltd, a firm of independent consultants, on behalf of the applicant Field Fyrish Ltd ('Field'). The LVA report has been prepared with the aim of identifying the predicted landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development, comprising a 200 MW Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) with associated infrastructure, including cable route to the existing substation, access and ancillary works, including landscaping and biodiversity enhancement.

The LVA is augmented by supporting text and graphics within the appendices. This includes the following figures within **Appendix D**:

- Figure 1a – Zone of Theoretical Visibility and Viewpoints;
- Figure 1b – Zone of Theoretical Visibility including Building and Vegetation Screening;
- Figure 2 – Landscape Character;
- Figure 3 – Landscape Designations, Ancient Woodland and Visual Receptors; and
- Figure 4 – Residential Receptors; and
- TGP drg. no. 2214/L01: Landscape Plan.

1.1 Scope of the LVA

The LVA seeks to identify the potential landscape and visual effects that would occur as a result of the Proposed Development and is organised in the following sections:

- Guidance and Methodology – outlines the general methodology, with reference to established guidance (full version in **Appendix A**);
- Planning Policy Context;
- Baseline Description – including the fabric, character and quality of the local landscape which could be affected by the Proposed Development, as well as a description of the main visual receptors within the Study Area;
- Proposed Development and Mitigation – describes the aspects of the Proposed Development which have the potential to result in landscape or visual effects, and the measures incorporated into the project design to mitigate these potential effects;
- ZTV and Viewpoint Analysis – analysis of the geographic extents of visibility and the potential magnitude of change at a selection of viewpoints;
- Construction Stage Effects – assesses the effects of the Proposed Development during the temporary construction stage;
- Landscape Effects – assesses the effects arising from the Proposed Development on the landscape fabric, landscape character and landscape designations within the Study Area;
- Visual Effects – assesses the effects arising from the Proposed Development on the visual amenity of the receptors within the Study Area;
- Cumulative Effects - considers the combined effects of the Proposed Development in combination with other notable electrical infrastructure; and
- Conclusions – a summary of the LVA results.

1.2 Study Area

A 4km radius Study Area has been adopted from the Proposed Development for the assessment of landscape and visual effects (as measured from the main development area where the proposed BESS compound would be located). This has been informed by analysis of Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) maps and an early appraisal of potential effects for a Proposed Development of this scale. It is considered that any notable landscape or visual effects would be confined well-within this geographical area.

2 Guidance and Methodology

2.1 Guidance

The methodology presented here is based on the following best practice guidance:

- *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition (GLVIA3),* Institute of Environmental Management and Appraisal and the Landscape Institute, 2013;
- *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland,* Prepared on behalf of the Countryside Agency and NatureScot, Land Use Consultants, 2002;
- *Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Guidance,* NatureScot, 2022;
- *Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments,* Highland Council, 2016; and
- *Visual Representation of Development Proposals, Technical Guidance Note 06/2019;* Landscape Institute, 2019.

In addition, reference has been made to other published guidance and the appraisal work has drawn on the following relevant baseline information:

- *National Landscape Character Assessment (web-based interactive map),* NatureScot, 2019;
- Ordnance Survey Land ranger (1:50 000) and Explorer (1:25 000) maps;
- Field surveys; and
- Aerial photography.

2.2 Methodology

The LVA aims to identify and evaluate the potential landscape and visual effects arising from the Proposed Development. Wherever possible, identified effects are quantified, albeit the nature of landscape and visual appraisal requires interpretation by professional judgement. In order to provide a level of consistency to the appraisal, the prediction of magnitude and appraisal of the residual landscape and visual effects have been based on pre-defined criteria.

GLVIA3 states that: “Professional judgement is a very important part of the LVIA.” (para 2.23) “In all cases there is a need for the judgements that are made to be reasonable and based on clear and transparent methods so that the reasoning applied at different stages can be traced and examined by others” (para 2.24).

Landscape and Visual Appraisals are distinct, though linked procedures. The appraisal of the landscape effects takes cognisance of the potential changes in the physical components of the

landscape and associated changes in its character and how it is experienced, which may in turn affect the perceived value ascribed to the landscape.

Visual effects relate to changes in the composition of existing views as a result of changes to the landscape, to people's responses to the changes and to the overall effects with respect to visual amenity.

Level of Effect

The level of any identified landscape or visual effect has been assessed in terms of being Major, Moderate, Minor or Negligible. Intermediate correlations are also possible and depend upon professional judgement, e.g. Major/Moderate. These categories are based on the juxtaposition of visual or landscape sensitivity with the predicted magnitude of change, as set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Landscape & Visual Effects Matrix

Receptor Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change				
		Substantial	Moderate	Slight	Negligible
	High	Major	Major/Moderate	Moderate	Minor
	Medium	Major/Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/Minor	Minor/Negligible
	Low	Moderate	Moderate/Minor	Minor	Negligible

This juxtaposition is not used as a prescriptive tool, rather it allows for the exercise of professional judgement. Thus, in some instances a particular parameter may be considered as having a determining effect on the analysis. Where the landscape or visual effect has been classified as Major or Major/Moderate this is considered to be notable. Where Moderate effects are predicted, professional judgement is applied to ensure that the potential for notable effects arising has been thoroughly considered. The complete appraisal methodology is set out in **Appendix A**.

3 Assumptions

The following assumptions have been made in respect to the LVA:

- The Site – refers to the land located within the red line boundary (as shown in Figures 1 – 4). This encompasses the main development area where the BESS compound would be located, as well as adjoining areas that correspond with the proposed cable route to the existing Fyrish Substation, and access tracks. All distances listed within this LVA are in measured in relation to the main development area unless stated otherwise.
- The Proposed Development – comprises the Battery Containers, Substation and ancillary infrastructure including cable route, fencing, CCTV, access / parking, earthwork bunds, landscaping and SuDS. The main components likely to contribute to landscape and visual impacts are described in greater detail in Section 6.
- For the purposes of the LVA, the Proposed Development is regarded as being permanent. The construction stage would be temporary, approximately 36 months in duration.

- The landscape proposals within the Site (comprising new planting, SuDS and earthwork bunds) form an integral component of the Proposed Development. The proposals are illustrated in TGP drg. no. 2214/L01: Landscape Plan.
- Viewpoint locations included in the assessment are from publicly accessible locations.
- Visual effects are assessed on the basis of good visibility. Visual effects can be expected to vary e.g. poor visibility at times of low cloud, rainfall and dusk. At these times a reduction in visual clarity, colour and contrast would be experienced. Reduced visibility would limit the extent of view, particularly from mid to long distance views. Consequently, the assessment of effects is based on the worst-case scenario, where the Proposed Development would be most visible.

4 Consultation

Consultation in relation to the Proposed Development has been undertaken with the Highland Council in the form of an EIA Screening Request, which confirmed that the project did not constitute EIA development.

In addition, public exhibition and consultation events were held to inform local residents of the Proposed Development and obtain feedback, and a formal pre-application advice process was completed with THC.

Proposed viewpoint locations were shared with THC (email dated 11/09/2024). The viewpoint locations are listed in Table 2 below, alongside the rationale for their selection.

Table 2: Viewpoint Locations

Viewpoint	Rationale
1. View southwest from the B9176 near Culcraggie Lodge	Representative of close proximity views from local road to the northeast of the Site, experienced by road users.
2. View north from NCR 1 & John O'Groats Trail at the B817 / B9176 junction	Representative of close proximity views from promoted cycle / walking route to the south, experienced by recreational receptors and road users.
3. View northeast from minor road on the edge of Novar GDL	View from local road on the edge of a designated landscape, experienced by recreational receptors.
4. View northwest Core Path RC03.03 at Teaninich Beach	View from walking route extending along the Cromarty Firth, experienced by recreational users.
5. View southeast from Cnoc Fyrish (Core Path RC05.01)	Elevated view from key summit, accessed via promoted Core Path. Experienced by recreational hillwalkers.

5 Planning Policy Context

The following section identifies the planning policy and other planning guidance material specifically relevant to the LVA. This includes consideration of the following:

- *National Planning Framework 4*, Scottish Government, 2023;
- *Highland-wide Local Development Plan,* Highland Council, 2012;
- *Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2,* Highland Council, 2024;
- *Sustainable Design Guide,* Highland Council, 2013.

5.1 National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)

NPF4 recognises the distinctive landscapes across the regions of Scotland and respective areas of high landscape quality. Its overarching policies seek to protect the integrity of key landscapes and landscape features from significant adverse effects. There is also general support for proposals to enhance, expand and improve woodland and tree cover.

Policy 11 focuses specifically on Energy, and sets out high-level support for all forms of renewable, low-carbon and zero emissions technologies. This includes both energy generation and energy storage developments, such as battery storage. NPF4 acknowledges that significant landscape and visual impacts are to be expected for some forms of renewable energy. Where these impacts are localised and/or appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they will generally be considered to be acceptable.

5.2 Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP)

The HwLDP sets out THC's vision statement and spatial strategy for the area alongside the policies against which the Proposed Development will be assessed. Policy 67: Renewable Energy Development is of relevance to the Proposed Development and states that THC will support renewable energy proposals where they are located, sited and designed such that they will not be significantly detrimental to a range of factors, including the natural environment and visual amenity.

Key landscape policies comprise Policy 61: Landscape, which highlights the importance of scale, form, pattern, materials, and cumulative effects in relation to landscape character, and Policy 57: Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage, which seeks to safeguard sites / features of local to international value. Other landscape-related policies comprise:

- Policy 28: Sustainable Design;
- Policy 29: Design Quality and Place-Making
- Policy 36: Development in the Wider Countryside;
- Policy 51: Trees and Development;
- Policy 52: Principle of Development in Woodland;
- Policy 74: Green Networks
- Policy 77: Public Access; and
- Policy 78: Long Distance Routes.

5.3 Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (IMFLDP2)

The IMFLDP2 sits alongside the HwLDP and Supplementary Guidance. The IMFLDP2 sets out guidance for development at a more localised level within the Moray Firth area. Key landscape-related policy comprises:

- Policy 2: Nature Protection, Restoration and Enhancement, seeks to safeguard habitat and biodiversity;
- Policy 5: Green Networks, aims to protect and enhance existing green networks;
- Policy 8: Placemaking, requires all proposals to go through a design-led approach and take account of feedback obtained via public consultation;
- Policy 9: Delivering Development and Infrastructure, states that the Council will assess development proposals with regards to their impact on the infrastructure network and community facilities.

In addition, the INMLDP2 sets out development allocations within main settlements. The Proposed Development Site is located well outside any settlement boundary. The 'Placemaking Priorities' for Beauly illustrate that there are no intentions to extend the settlement boundary in a southerly direction (beyond the existing railway line) towards the Site. Accordingly, all allocated sites are located at the northern side of the settlement (further away from the Site).

5.4 Sustainable Design Guide

The Sustainable Design Guide incorporates additional information in relation to sustainable design, with the aim of conserving and enhancing the character of the Highland area, using resources efficiently, minimising potential environmental impact of development, and enhancing the viability of Highland communities.

As part of this process, tree felling and removal of habitats such as woodlands, hedgerows and meadows should be avoided. New planting should be based on native species with the aim of enhancing biodiversity. Works should take cognisance of bird nesting seasons, and bat roosts. The layout, scale, and proportion of development proposals should respond to local landscape character.

6 Baseline Description

6.1 Local Landscape Context

Figure 1 illustrates the geographic location of the Proposed Development, which is located on the northern side of the Cromarty Firth, 970m west of Alness.

The landscape across the Study Area comprises gently rolling farmland along the lower-lying coastal areas (at an elevation of 0-100m AOD). The farmland is broken up by tracts of woodland and forestry, in combination with localised settlement and associated transport routes. The key settlements comprise Alness to the northeast, and Evanton to the southwest. These villages are linked by the B817, which runs broadly parallel to the arterial routes of the A9 and Far North Line around the Firth. The low-lying coastal landscape also incorporates estate parklands at Novar,

southwest of the Site.

Further inland, the landform rises steeply to the north / northwest, where it reaches 453m AOD at the summit of Cnoc Fyrish. The southerly-facing slopes of the landform incorporate increased forestry and woodland coverage, whilst the upper slopes and summits comprise open moorland. The Cnoc Fyrish monument stands at the summit, forming a popular vantage point for recreational visitors, with expansive views across the Cromarty Firth and surrounding summits.

At a local level, the main development area within the Site comprises pastoral grassland, at an elevation of 35-45m AOD. It is bounded by established woodland to the north, as well as and existing field boundaries along its other sides, incorporating scrub and field trees. The local landscape is traversed by an overhead line that extends east-west through the Site. The proposed underground cable route would extend in a northeasterly direction from the main development area, following the route of the B9176, before being routed northwards along the access road to the existing Fyrish Substation. The existing farm track at Clashnabuiac Farm to the south would be utilised for one of the two proposed access tracks.

In addition to Fyrish Substation, other elements of existing infrastructure within the Study Area comprise overhead lines. These extend outwards from the Substation to the north and southwest.

6.2 Landscape Character

Figure 2 illustrates the Landscape Character Types (LCTs) within the Study Area as defined within NatureScot's National Landscape Character Assessment (2019), which represents the most up-to-date assessment of landscape character across the Study Area. The Proposed Development is located within the Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT. The key characteristics and sensitivities of this LCT are as follows:

<u>Key Characteristics of the Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT</u>

- *'Complex pattern of farmland, tree cover, forests and woodland on sloped, often terraced land rising from firths or river plains to mid-elevations and often backed by large scale forest plantations where there are adjacent hills.*
- *Overall impression of a well-treed landscape, but within which farming is the dominant land use.*
- *Generally higher proportion of trees, woodland and forest plantations in upper slopes, forming a well-connected network within which fields are located.*
- *Terraces of open land, interspersed with forest plantations and woodlands on mid slopes. • Gradual change to more open landscapes at lower levels.*
- *Wide range and distribution of archaeological sites indicating a long history of human settlement.*
- *Occasional large settlements in a predominantly rural landscape.*
- *Views from more open, terraced areas across lowlands or firth to hills or out to sea.'*

The sensitivity of local landscape character, specific to the Proposed Development and its locality, is assessed within **Appendix B** as being Medium.

Relationship to Adjacent Character Types

The surrounding area to the northwest encompasses parts of the Forest Edge Farming LCT and the Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT, at distances of 660m and 870m respectively. In addition, the Open Farmed Slopes LCT is located 3.8km to the southeast of the Proposed Development, on the opposite side of the Cromarty Firth. The key characteristics of these LCTs are listed in **Appendix C**.

6.3 Landscape Designations

Landscape planning designations and policies are considered in the determination of the sensitivity of landscape and visual receptors as they provide an indication of value ascribed to the landscape or visual resource. With reference to **Figure 3**, the Site is not located within a landscape designation, and there are no landscape designations within the Study Area. However, the Novar Garden and Designed Landscape (GDL) is located 280m to the west of the Proposed Development at the closest point, and is considered within the following assessment.

6.4 Visual Baseline and Receptors

The following section describes the visual receptors within the 4km Study Area.

Local Residents

With reference to **Figure 1**, Alness represents the main settlement within the Study Area, located 970m to the east of the Proposed Development. In addition, the village of Evanton is located 2.5km to the southwest.

Other residents within the Study Area are limited to dispersed dwellings and farmsteads outside these settlements. With reference to **Figure 4**, those located within 1km comprise:

- No.2 Clashnabuiac, located within the Site, south of the compound. As part of the Proposed Development this building would change in use from residential to commercial, under the ownership of Field for the duration;
- Culcraggie Lodge, 120m to the northeast;
- Clashnabuiac, 130m to the south;
- No.2 Culcraggie Farm Cottages, 420m to the east;
- Dairy House, 500m to the southwest;
- Deer Park Cottages (nos. 1-5), 650m to the southwest;
- Dilkusha, 660m to the south;
- Beechwood, Wheel Inn, Raalyam, and Shalimar, 680m to the south;
- No.1 Culcraggie Farm Cottages, 700m to the northeast;
- Finlay View and Colmar, 740m to the south;
- Fyrish House and Little Fyrish, 790m to the northwest;
- Ballachraggan Farm Cottages (nos. 1-2), 830m to the east;
- West Contullich, 830m to the northeast; and
- Culcraggie Farmhouse, 940m to the east.

Recreational Receptors

With reference to **Figure 3**, recreational routes and outdoor destinations / attractions within the Study Area are listed below:

- NCR 1, located 520m to the south of the Proposed Development at the closest point;
- John o' Groats Trail, on the same route as NCR 1m, 520m to the south;
- Core Path network. Those within closest proximity to the Proposed Development comprise Core Paths RC16.08 and RC03.12, which link together between Evanton and Alness, sharing the same route as NCR 1. All other Core Paths are located at distances of >1km from the Proposed Development.
- Cnoc Fyrish Monument, 2.1km to the northwest.

Alness Golf Club (2.2km to the northeast of the Proposed Development) and Blackrock Caravan Park (located 3.0km to the southwest) are located outside the ZTV. Accordingly, they are not considered further in this assessment.

Road and Rail Receptors

Potential vehicular receptors within the Study Area are limited to road users on the following roads:

- B9176, extending along the eastern edge of the Site at the closest point;
- B817, located 520m to the south of the Proposed Development at the closest point; and
- A9, located 940m to the south at the closest point.

Potential rail users within the Study Area comprise those on the Far North Line, 660m to the south of the Proposed Development at the closest point.

7 Proposed Development and Mitigation

This section describes the aspects of the Proposed Development with the potential to cause landscape and visual effects within in the Study Area.

7.1 Proposed Development Description

The location of the Proposed Development is illustrated on **Figure 1**. The Proposed Development would involve localised areas of ground clearance to facilitate construction within the Site, and the introduction of the following key elements:

- Substation building (5.5m height), 132kV transformers (6.32m height), auxiliary transformers (2.71m height), Generator (2.6m height) and Fire Water Storage Tank (5.09m height);
- Grid connection, comprising underground cable route to Fyrish Substation, routed via the B9176 and along the substation access track;
- Battery Containers (3.2m max height including concrete platform, excluding light);
- Medium Voltage (MV) Skid (3.6m height);
- Acoustic fence (5m height);
- Perimeter fence, 2.4m palisade fence;
- CCTV cameras and security lighting (5m max height);
- Access track (8m width) and internal tracks (5m width) of crushed aggregate, and parking;

- SUDS, including attenuation basin;
- Earthwork bunds to the north, east and southeast of the proposed compound; and
- Landscape planting, and mitigation features.

The LVA takes cognisance of each of these elements and makes reference to them within the appraisal where relevant.

7.2 Landscape Design and Mitigation

Site Location

The Site selection process has sought to identify an appropriate location for the Proposed Development. The location of the Proposed Development has been chosen to avoid any notable ridgelines or visually prominent sections of skyline. The Proposed Development also avoids designated landscapes that are recognised for their scenic value. Instead, the Proposed Development is located on a relatively low-lying, undesignated plateau.

In addition, the main development area within the Site (where the proposed compound would be located) benefits from partial visual containment by field trees and parcels of woodland in the surrounding area. This limits the potential spread and extent of visibility, as well as the potential influence upon surrounding landscape character. The Site also currently incorporates existing infrastructure in the form of overhead power lines, which extend east-west through the centre of the Site. The proposed infrastructure would therefore be introduced to a locality that already hosts electricity infrastructure.

Site Design

In terms of design, the proposals seek to incorporate a comprehensive mitigation strategy to effectively integrate the Proposed Development into the surrounding landscape. This involves consideration of the scale and spread of the Proposed Development, and the most appropriate methods of lessening its potential influence on landscape and visual amenity. To this end, the Proposed Development has been designed to achieve the following landscape objectives:

- Land clearance and occupation would be limited to necessary areas only to minimise the geographic spread of the infrastructure and limit the potential impact on the local landscape fabric.
- The underground cable connection to Fyrish Substation would be routed along the B9176, and the existing substation access track. The cable trench would be 1m in width, with a working corridor of 5m. It is envisaged that there would be no loss of existing trees along the road verge to facilitate these works.
- In terms of colour and materials, the perimeter fence around the compound would be painted with a recessive colour (green or similar approved) to soften the appearance of the Proposed Development.
- Proposed landscape works would incorporate the creation of native woodland and tree planting, which would extend around the outer edges of the compound (refer to TGP drg no. 2214/L01: Landscape Plan). The landscape works would provide additional visual containment to the main elements of proposed infrastructure, and represent the addition of beneficial elements to the local landscape.

- The planting approach would be based on native broadleaved species to combine visual containment and screening, and also contribute towards biodiversity enhancement. The selected species would comprise Alder, Birch, Oak, Willow, Rowan, Hawthorn, Blackthorn, and Scots Pine or similar. Accordingly, the planting proposals would be in accordance with local landscape character and would contribute towards biodiversity enhancement.
- In addition, species-rich wildflower meadow would be introduced around the compound, including the SUDS area and across the proposed earthwork bunds. This approach would further soften the appearance of the Proposed Development and provide enhancement to local biodiversity. The wildflower meadow would be sown at the first available season and would establish rapidly thereafter.
- The visual containment of the proposed infrastructure would be further augmented by the creation of new earthwork bunds located to the north, east and southeast of the compound. These bunds would be graded into the surrounding terrain, and finished with a species-rich wildflower mix as described above.

8 ZTV and Viewpoint Analysis

The potential landscape and visual effects arising from the Proposed Development have been analysed in two ways:

- Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) map analysis, to provide a general overview of the geographical extent of visibility of the Proposed Development within the Study Area; and
- Analysis of the potential effects at key viewpoints.

8.1 Zone of Theoretical Visibility Analysis

Theoretical visibility mapping of the Proposed Development is illustrated in **Figures 1a – 1b**. The ZTV illustrates the maximum overall visibility of the proposed buildings.

The ZTV in **Figure 1a** has been prepared on the basis of 'bare ground' and does not take into account the potential screening effects of surrounding buildings or vegetation. The ZTV in **Figure 1b** incorporates the screening influence of surrounding buildings and vegetation. This is based on 2m Digital Surface modelling (aerial photography derived).

With reference to **Figure 1a**, the theoretical extent of potential visibility would be continuous across the surrounding areas of coastal farmland within 1-2km of the Proposed Development to the east and west, and across the open water of the Cromarty Firth to the south. ZTV coverage towards the north extends across the southerly-facing slopes of Cnoc Fyrish, out to approximately 1.6km. Thereafter, potential visibility drops off abruptly.

With reference to **Figure 1b**, potential visibility would be restricted to more localised areas, where it would be highly fragmented due to the screening influence of surrounding tree cover. To the south and west, ZTV coverage is largely contained within 500-600m of the Proposed Development. To the east, there would be sporadic visibility out to 1km. Potential views from the landscape to the north would be contained by established woodland / forestry to the north of the compound.

8.2 Viewpoint Analysis

Viewpoint analysis has been carried out on a selection of key viewpoint locations to assess the likely level of effects arising as a result of the Proposed Development. With reference to the geographical extent of visibility illustrated within the ZTV, a total of five viewpoints have been selected as being representative of views from publicly accessible locations within the Study Area (see **Figure 1**).

Viewpoints 1, 2 and 5 are illustrated as photomontages, illustrating the form and appearance of the Proposed Development, including boundary fencing. Viewpoints 3 and 4 are subject to greater amounts of intervening screening. Accordingly, these viewpoints are illustrated as wireline visualisations, showing the location and massing of the buildings, and the surrounding landscape context.

Viewpoint 1: View southwest from the B9176 near Culcraggie Lodge

This viewpoint is located at the side of the local road network, 365m to the northwest of the compound (within the Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT) and represents views experienced by local road users. The existing views to the southwest are characterised by pastoral farmland in the foreground, which is demarcated by established gorse scrub at the opposite side of the field. Established tree cover is visible in the landscape beyond. Built form within the view comprises low-height overhead lines extending across the foreground field and adjacent farmland.

Predicted View

The Proposed Development would be located beyond the intervening gorse scrub at the far end of the foreground field. Accordingly, views would be limited to the infrastructure on the eastern edge of the compound, which would be experienced behind the existing overhead line. The proposed boundary planting would provide additional screening of the Proposed Development as it steadily establishes.

Effects on Visual Amenity

The sensitivity of road users at this location is assessed as being Medium. The magnitude of change would be Slight/Negligible based on the restricted, part-screened nature of the view, in combination with the presence of intervening infrastructure (overhead line), which would remain the more prominent element within southwesterly views. The resultant level of effect would be Minor, not notable.

After approximately ten years post-completion (hereafter referred to as 'Year 10'), the establishment of planting along the Site boundary would further soften the appearance of the Proposed Development. The magnitude of change would reduce to Negligible, and the residual level of effect would be Minor/Negligible, not notable.

Landscape Effects

This viewpoint is located within the Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT, which is assessed as being of Medium sensitivity to the Proposed Development. The Proposed Development

would represent the introduction of additional built form to the local agricultural landscape. However, the proposed infrastructure would be partly-screened and experienced in a local context that incorporates existing infrastructure in the form of overhead lines in the foreground. On balance, the magnitude of change would be Slight/Negligible at most, and the level of effect would be Minor, not notable.

The establishment of proposed planting would reflect the existing tree cover within the surrounding area, and introduce landscape elements of value. By Year 10, the establishment of tree cover would further integrate the Proposed Development into the landscape. The magnitude of change would reduce to Negligible, and the level of effect would be Negligible, not notable.

Viewpoint 2: View north from NCR 1 & John O'Groats Trail at the B817 / B9176 junction

This viewpoint is at a key road junction, which is traversed by walking and cycle routes comprising NCR 1, John O'Groats Trail and the Core Path network (where path RC16.08 joins path RC03.12). It is located 589m to the south of the compound, within the Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT. It is representative of views experienced by recreational walkers / cyclists, as well as road users.

The existing views to the north comprise sloping arable farmland, backed by established tree cover. In the distance the landform rises steeply towards Cnoc Fyrish, where the southerly-facing slopes are extensively forested. The Cnoc Fyrish Monument is visible as a distant feature on the skyline to the northwest (outside the illustrated field of view). Built form within the view incorporates the farmstead and barns at Clashnabuiac, as well as overhead lines extending west-east in the fields beyond.

Predicted View

The Proposed Development would be experienced beyond the intervening farmland, almost entirely screened by the intervening landform. Views would be limited to the southeastern part of the compound, which would be fully back-clothed by the forestry on the rising landform beyond the Site, and represent a low-lying addition to the landscape, well below the skyline. As the proposed planting establishes over time, views of the Proposed Development would become increasingly restricted.

Effects on Visual Amenity

The sensitivity of walkers / cyclists at this location is assessed as being High. The sensitivity of road users is considered to be Medium. The Proposed Development would represent a discreet, low-lying element, accounting for a narrow angle of view. The magnitude of change would be Slight/Negligible and the level of effect would be Moderate/Minor for walkers / cyclists, and Minor for road users, not notable.

As the proposed planting establishes, the Proposed Development would be increasingly screened. By Year 10, the magnitude of change would reduce to Negligible, and the level of effect would be Minor for walkers / cyclists and Minor/Negligible for road users (not notable).

Landscape Effects

This viewpoint is located within the Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT, which is assessed as being of Medium sensitivity to the Proposed Development. The Proposed Development would introduce additional built form to the local agricultural landscape, in the context of existing built form and infrastructure (overhead line). The influence of the Proposed Development would be tempered by the low-level nature of the proposed infrastructure and its back-clothing by tree cover. The magnitude of change would be Slight/Negligible at most and the level of effect would be Minor, not notable.

As the proposed planting establishes, the Proposed Development would be increasingly screened. By Year 10, the magnitude of change would reduce to Negligible, and the residual level of effect would be Negligible, not notable.

Viewpoint 3: View northeast from minor road on the edge of Novar GDL

This viewpoint is located on the edge of Novar GDL, 670m to the southwest of the compound (within the Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT). It represents views experienced by recreational walkers. The existing views to the northeast are characterised by arable farmland in the foreground, enclosed by surrounding tree cover and woodland. Through breaks in the tree cover there are distant views towards the Cromarty Firth, encompassing parts of Invergordon and the rigs within the nearby bay. Other built form within the view comprises overhead lines and the farmstead at Clashnabuiac in the middle distance.

Predicted View

The Proposed Development would be located in the middle distance, beyond the existing tree cover that demarcates the local field pattern. Accordingly, the proposed infrastructure would be entirely screened by existing vegetation, particularly during summer months. During periods of leaf-fall in winter months, in potential glimpsed views between the trees the Proposed Development would remain a very discreet element, low-lying and back-clothed by tree cover. As the proposed planting establishes over time, views of the Proposed Development would become increasingly limited.

Effects on Visual Amenity

The sensitivity of walkers at this location is assessed as being High. The Proposed Development would represent a relatively discreet, low-lying element within the view, subject to screening by intervening built form and tree cover. Based on glimpsed views in winter months the magnitude of change would be Negligible and the level of effect would be Negligible, not notable. As the proposed planting establishes, the Proposed Development would be increasingly screened. By Year 10, there would be no discernible effect.

Landscape Effects

This viewpoint is located within the Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT on the edge of the Novar GDL. At this location the sensitivity of the local landscape is assessed as being High/Medium. The Proposed Development would represent a very discreet element within the

landscape beyond intervening tree cover. Based on glimpsed views in winter months the magnitude of change would be Negligible and the level of effect would be Negligible, not notable. By Year 10, there would be no discernible effect.

Viewpoint 4: View northwest Core Path RC03.03 at Teaninich Beach

This viewpoint is located on the footpath extending along the coast of the Cromarty Firth, 1.92km to the southeast of the compound (within the Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT). It is representative of views experienced by recreational walkers. The existing view is characterised by the beach along the edge of the Firth, which gradually rises towards the coastal farmland. The field pattern to the northwest is demarcated by lines of trees and larger areas of woodland and forestry. The terrain rises steeply in the distance towards the summit of Cnoc Fyrish, which forms part of an undulating skyline. The distant slopes are extensively forested. Built form comprises isolated dwellings / farmsteads and overhead lines. The A9 transport corridor also extends through the landscape, albeit its presence is primarily discernible due to the movement of vehicles. The Cnoc Fyrish Monument forms a small feature on the distant horizon.

Predicted View

Potential views of the Proposed Development would be restricted due to the screening influence of intervening vegetation (including coniferous tree cover). At this distance, there would be no discernible effect on visual amenity or landscape character.

Viewpoint 5: View southeast from Cnoc Fyrish (Core Path RC05.01)

This elevated viewpoint is located 2.11km to the northwest of the compound, at the side of the promoted footpath that leads towards the Cnoc Fyrish Monument (within the Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT). It is representative of the expansive views experienced by recreational walkers towards the summit of the hill. The existing vistas encompass the full extent of the Cromarty Firth, and parts of the Black Isle on the opposite side. The coastal landscape to the south predominantly comprises arable agriculture, demarcated by field trees, shelter belt and larger areas of woodland. The settlements of Alness and Invergordon are visible to the east, whilst parts of Evanton can be seen to the south. Other built form in the view comprises isolated dwellings / farmsteads, associated transport corridors and scattered infrastructure, including rigs within the Firth.

Predicted View

The Proposed Development would be located in the low-lying landscape at the foot of Cnoc Fyrish. Views would be restricted by the underlying landform in combination with intervening woodland and forestry, which would fully screen the northern parts of the compound. The proposed infrastructure located further south would be experienced well-below the distant horizon, where it would account for a narrow angle of view in the context of the agricultural barns at Clashnabuiac and surrounding tree cover. As the proposed planting establishes over time, the infrastructure would be enclosed by tree cover and views of the Proposed Development would soften further.

Effects on Visual Amenity

The sensitivity of recreational walkers at this location is assessed as being High. The Proposed Development would represent a minor addition to the existing view, in a visually discreet location on the low-lying foot slopes. The proposed infrastructure would be spatially separate from the Cromarty Firth and the Black Isle, which form the key focal points within the view. Accordingly, the magnitude of change would be Slight/Negligible at most, and the level of effect would be Minor, not notable. At Year 10, the magnitude of change would reduce to Negligible, and the effect would remain Minor.

Landscape Effects

This viewpoint is located within the Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT. The Proposed Development would represent a relatively discreet new element within the geographically separate, low-lying coastal farmlands to the southeast. It would exert very limited influence on the existing landscape characteristics at this location. The magnitude of change would be Negligible and the resultant level of effect would be Minor/Negligible, not notable. At Year 10, the effects would remain the same.

9 Construction Stage Effects

Whilst it is the operational stage of the Proposed Development that would give rise to prolonged landscape and visual effects, temporary effects at the construction stage would also occur based on the following operations:

- Erection of temporary perimeter fencing;
- Installation of temporary construction compound (including storage and welfare facilities);
- Creation of temporary laydown areas;
- Site clearance and excavation works for foundations, and ducting for cabling;
- Formation of earthwork bunds within the eastern parts of the Site;
- Increased vehicular movement within the Site;
- Gradual introduction of proposed buildings and associated tracks; and
- Reinstatement works, including the removal of the temporary accommodation.

The works detailed above would give rise to some landscape and visual effects. The detailed construction programme is not known at this stage, although is anticipated to be approximately 36 months in duration. The associated effects would be temporary and would mainly arise through the gradual introduction of proposed buildings/infrastructure. The effects arising from other operations, including the vehicle movement, construction of the fencing and excavation works would be localised, and whilst potentially visible, would not appear prominently in views from the surrounding areas. As such, the construction phase effects would be limited in extent and duration.

9.1 Construction Stage Landscape Effects

During the construction stage, areas of existing grassland and localised scrub / tree cover would be

cleared within the main development area of the Site to facilitate the introduction of the proposed compound. There would also be localised clearance of ground cover along the proposed cable route between the main development area and the existing Fyrish Substation, albeit this would avoid loss of trees. Excavation works would be undertaken as required for the parking and access, foundations of the buildings and cable route, resulting in a change to the current landscape fabric within the Site. The construction operations would introduce temporary new elements within the Site, such as laydown areas and the temporary compound / site office. In addition, there would be a short term, temporary increase in vehicle movements to and from the Site. However, the main construction activities would be predominantly focused within an area contained by woodland to the north, and retained field trees and scrub along the field boundaries on the other sides of the Site.

In terms of landscape fabric; the existing grassland and localised scrub / tree cover within the main development area is considered to be of Medium/Low sensitivity to the Proposed Development due to its commonality, and its ability to regenerate in a relatively short period of time. The magnitude of change on would be Moderate, resulting in a Moderate/Minor effect.

In terms of landscape character; the construction stage effects would be limited to a very localised part of the Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT. The construction operations would result in the disturbance of the existing ground cover, introduction of temporary fencing / laydown areas, and an increase in the intensity of human activity and vehicular movements within the Site. This would contrast with the more rural characteristics of the agricultural landscape, albeit in the context of the existing overhead line that extends through the Site. The landform and woodland / tree cover across the surrounding area would restrict the influence of the construction activities across wider parts of the LCT, and as a result the effects (including indirect effects) would be very localised. In summary, the Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT is assessed as being of Medium sensitivity to the Proposed Development. The magnitude of change on local landscape character during the construction stage would be Moderate and the level of effect would be Moderate. With reference to the localised nature of effects and temporary nature of the construction phase, this is assessed as being not notable in this instance. There would be no discernible influence on the characteristics of the wider area, or the LCT as a whole.

9.2 Construction Phase Effects on Visual Amenity

The visual effects of the activities during the construction phase would be temporary, intermittent and limited to localised areas in the vicinity of the Site due to the containing effect of surrounding landform and tree cover, in combination with the low-lying nature of activities associated with Site clearance / excavation.

The most open views would be experienced from No.2 Clashnabuiac and Culcraggie Lodge. As described above (Section 6.4) No.2 Clashnabuiac would change in use from residential to commercial as part of the Proposed Development, and accordingly is not considered further. Residents at Culcraggie Lodge would experience close proximity views of the construction activities within the main development area, and those associated with the proposed cable route. The

construction activities would be experienced in the context of surrounding farmland and forestry, as well as the existing overhead line extending east-west through the local area.

There would also be glimpsed views of the construction operations from the localised section of the B9176 extending past the eastern edge of the Site, as experienced by road users. In particular, road users on the B9176 would experience close proximity views of the construction activities associated with the cable route, where it extends along the roadside. However, these views would be transient, and of short duration.

Views of the construction activities from wider parts of the surrounding area would be limited to elevated vantage points at the summit of Cnoc Fyrish, experienced by recreational hill walkers. These views would be limited to very short sections of the footpath at the summit of the hill, due to the screening influence of the intervening landform and woodland. From the most open views the construction activities would be experienced at distance, representing a discreet addition to the adjacent low-lying coastal farmland, accounting for a narrow angle of view.

In all cases, the construction activities would be experienced below the skyline, and would be back-clothed by tree cover and / or the distant landscape.

Along with the site clearance / excavation activities, material storage and an increase in traffic movement at the Site, the visual effects would occur primarily from the gradual appearance of the proposed infrastructure (considered below under 'Operational Effects'). The influence of construction activities on existing views would be reduced through good site management. On balance, the visual magnitude of change experienced by residents at Culcraggie Lodge would be Substantial/Moderate based on open views of the construction works associated with the cable route, which extends past the property, resulting in a Major/Moderate level of effect (notable). Views of the construction activities within the main development area would be partly restricted by intervening vegetation, and would be experienced at an oblique angle to the primary direction of view from the dwelling.

Road users on the B9176 would also experience a Substantial/Moderate magnitude of change from localised sections closest to the Site, resulting in a Moderate effect, which is assessed as notable in this instance with reference to the close proximity views of the works associated with the cable route. As above, views of the construction activities within the main development area would be tempered by intervening vegetation, and would be experienced at greater distance.

The views of construction operations experienced by other receptors would be more restricted. The magnitude of change experienced by walkers on the path linking to the summit of Cnoc Fyrish would be Slight/Negligible at most. The resultant level of effect would be Minor, not notable.

10 Operational Landscape Effects

This section examines the effects arising as a result of the Proposed Development with reference to landscape fabric within the Site, landscape character and landscape designations.

10.1 Effects on Landscape Fabric

The landscape within the main development area of the Site comprises pastoral grassland, with localised areas of scrub / tree cover. It is assessed as being of be of Medium/Low sensitivity to the Proposed Development.

The Proposed Development would result in the permanent loss of a localised area of this farmland, in the context of surrounding agriculture and woodland / forestry. The Proposed Development would introduce several elements of infrastructure (as listed in Section 7.1), which would be enclosed within a fenced compound. The Proposed Development would also incorporate new areas of native woodland planting, species-rich wildflower meadow and SuDS elements (as described in Section 7.2). These elements would represent the addition of beneficial landscape features to the locality that would exert increasing influence over time as they become more established.

On balance, the magnitude of change upon the fabric within the Site would be Moderate, giving rise to a Moderate/Minor level of effect, not notable.

10.2 Effects on Landscape Character

The effect of the Proposed Development on landscape character largely depends on the key characteristics of the receiving environment; the degree to which the development may be considered to be consistent with or at odds with it; and how the proposal would be perceived within its setting.

Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT

The Proposed Development would be located within the Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT. With reference to sensitivity analysis within **Appendix B**, the local landscape character is assessed as being of Medium sensitivity to the Proposed Development. The effects on landscape character would be direct (predominantly affecting the Site itself) and indirect (affecting the visual and perceptual characteristics of the surrounding area).

In terms of direct effects, existing ground cover in the main development area of the Site comprises grassland with areas of scrub / trees, which would be cleared to facilitate introduction of the proposed buildings / infrastructure, and proposed access track to the east of the compound. The proposed access extending to the south would link with the existing farm track at Clashnabuiac, negating the need for lengthy new links to the road network. There would be no loss of characteristic *'forest plantations and woodlands on mid slopes'* or the *'higher proportion of trees, woodland and forest plantations in upper slopes'*. Similarly, there would be no effect on any archaeological sites distributed throughout the LCT. With reference to TGP drg. no. 2214/L01: Landscape Plan, the Proposed Development would incorporate native woodland planting along all sides of the compound, which would represent beneficial elements within the local landscape, whose influence upon landscape character would steadily increase over time in accordance with their establishment.

In terms of indirect effects, the ZTV illustrated in **Figure 1b** demonstrates that potential views of the

Proposed Development would be restricted to very localised parts of the LCT due to the containing influence of the surrounding landform and tree cover. These views would be predominantly limited to the main development area and the immediate surroundings within 400-500m to the south, southwest and east. The limited ZTV coverage reflects the *'complex pattern of farmland, tree cover, forests and woodland… backed by large scale forest plantations'.* As a result, the Proposed Development would be partly-screened or fully screened within '*views from more open, terraced areas across lowlands or firth to hills or out to sea'* and it would exert very limited and geographically localised influence upon the existing *'predominantly rural landscape*'.

In summary, the main effects would be focused within the main development area, and immediately adjoining farmland within 100-200m towards the south, and 30-40m to the southwest and east. The effects towards the north would be curtailed by woodland. Within this localised area the magnitude of change would be Substantial/Moderate and the level of effect would be Major/Moderate, notable. At greater distances, the effects would diminish abruptly due to intervening tree cover / woodland and the landform. Accordingly, across other parts of the LCT, the magnitude of change would be Slight/Negligible at most. The level of effect would be Minor at most, not notable. Across the vast majority of the Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT there would be no views of the Proposed Development and no effect.

By Year 10, views of the proposed infrastructure would become more contained by the established planting around the compound. Accordingly, the main effects would be focused within the confines of the main compound.

Other LCTs

With reference to **Figure 1b**, potential views of the Proposed Development would be limited to very localised parts of the Forest Edge Farming LCT and Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes – Ross & Cromarty LCT (both located to the north / northwest of the Proposed Development). Many of these areas also correlate with existing tree cover, including areas of Ancient Woodland (as illustrated in **Figure 3**), which would completely inhibit potential views towards the Site. As a result, views of the Proposed Development would be extremely limited. From very localised areas with a more open outlook (such as the upper-most slopes of Cnoc Fyrish), the Proposed Development would represent a very minor addition to the geographically separate low-lying landscape, in the context of surrounding tree cover (see Viewpoint 5). As such, the magnitude of change on the Forest Edge Farming LCT and Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes – Ross & Cromarty LCT would be Negligible. The resultant effect would be Minor/Negligible at most, not notable.

To the southeast, ZTV coverage is continuous across parts of the Open Farmed Slopes LCT within the Study Area. However, potential views would be tempered by the location of the Proposed Development on the opposite side of the Cromarty Firth, at a distance of 3.8km to the northwest. Accordingly, there would be no discernible effect upon the landscape characteristics of this LCT.

10.3 Effects on Landscape Designations

The Proposed Development would not be located within a landscape designation, hence there will be no direct effects. Potential effects on designations will instead be limited to indirect effects, based on views of the Proposed Development.

Novar GDL

Noval GDL is located 280m to the west of the Proposed Development. With reference to **Figure 1b**, potential views of the proposed infrastructure would be almost entirely screened across the GDL due to the extent of tree cover within the intervening farmland, and along the outer edges of the GDL. As illustrated in Viewpoint 3, this includes the eastern edge of the GDL in closest proximity to the Proposed Development. Potential views would be limited to winter months, during periods of leaf fall, and would remain heavily filtered. There would be no views from central areas within the GDL.

In summary, based on glimpsed views in winter months from the eastern edge of the GDL, the magnitude of change would be Negligible and the level of effect would be Negligible, not notable. By Year 10, there would be no discernible effect.

11 Operational Visual Effects

This section examines the visual effects based on changes to the existing view as experienced by people within the surrounding landscape (as described in Section 6.4). This process draws on the results of the ZTV and viewpoint analysis.

11.1 Visual effects experienced by Local Residents

The Appraisal below considers the effects experienced by local residents in settlements, as well as those in isolated residential dwellings / steadings in closest proximity to the Site. In all cases, sensitivity is deemed to be High.

Alness

Alness is located 970m to the east of the Proposed Development. With reference to **Figure 1b**, potential views would be limited to extremely localised and fragmented areas, from which views of the proposed infrastructure would represent a very minor element within the background landscape to the west, beyond intervening buildings, garden vegetation and field trees. The magnitude of change would be Negligible at most, and the level of effect would be Negligible, not notable. The vast majority of residents would experience no views and no effect.

Evanton

The village of Evanton is located 2.5km to the southwest of the Proposed Development. With reference to **Figure 1b**, it is outside the ZTV. Residents would experience no views of the Proposed Development and no effect.

Isolated Residential Dwellings / Steadings

Potential views experienced by residents in isolated properties are considered below, with reference to **Figure 4**. In each case the identifier (R1 – R14) on the plan is listed below for reference.

No.2 Clashnabuiac (R1) is located to the south of the Proposed Development (50m from the compound). The building is primarily south-facing, with the main views therefore focused away from the proposed infrastructure. As described in Section 6.4, this building would change in use from residential to commercial as part of the Proposed Development, and would remain unoccupied for the duration. Accordingly, this building is not considered further as a residential receptor.

Culcraggie Lodge (R2) is a two-storey property, located 120m to the northeast of the Proposed Development (300m from the compound). The property is primarily south-facing, with a garden area that extends around northern and southern sides of the house. Potential views of the Proposed Development would be experienced at an oblique angle to the primary direction of view from front-facing windows. The proposed infrastructure would be located beyond existing gorse scrub along the intervening field boundary, and the proposed earthwork bund to the northeast of the compound, which would result in partial screening. The clearest views would be experienced from upper storey windows, from which there would be more elevated views across the intervening vegetation and proposed bund. On balance the magnitude of change would be Moderate, and the level of effect would be Major/Moderate, notable. As the proposed planting within the Site gradually establishes, views of the proposed infrastructure would be subject to increasing amounts of intervening screening, in particular, elements located further to the west. By Year 10, the magnitude of change would reduce to Slight, and the level of effect would be Moderate. This is assessed as notable in this instance based on more open views from upper storey windows, towards infrastructure in the southeastern part of the Site.

Clashnabuiac (R3) is a two-storey property, located 130m to the south of the Proposed Development (275m from the compound). The property is primarily south-facing (with the main views focused away from the proposed infrastructure), with a garden area located on its southern side. Potential views of the Proposed Development from the rear of the property would be restricted by the intervening barns / outhouses and tree cover to the north of the property. Accordingly, views of the proposed infrastructure would be very limited, and experienced beyond intervening built form. The magnitude of change would be Slight, and the level of effect would be Moderate at most. This is assessed as not notable in this instance with reference to the extent of intervening built form and the absence of any effect on the principal views to the south. By Year 10, the establishment of tree planting within the Site would further restrict views of the proposed infrastructure. The magnitude of change would reduce to Negligible, and the level of effect would be Minor, not notable.

No.2 Culcraggie Farm Cottages (R4) are located 420m to the east of the Proposed Development. The dwellings are located outside the ZTV, hence residents would experience no view and no effect.

Dairy House (R5) is located 500m to the southwest of the Proposed Development. The dwelling is located outside the ZTV, hence residents would experience no view and no effect.

Deer Park Cottages (nos. 1-5) (R6) are located 650m to the southwest of the Proposed Development. The dwellings are located outside the ZTV, hence residents would experience no view and no effect.

Dilkusha (R7) is located 660m to the south of the Proposed Development. The dwelling is located outside the ZTV, hence residents would experience no view and no effect.

Beechwood, Wheel Inn, Raalyam, and Shalimar (R8) are located 680m to the south of the Proposed Development. ZTV coverage is limited to fragmented parts of the garden areas. Potential views of the Proposed Development from these garden areas would be restricted to winter months and would remain heavily filtered by vegetation and the intervening landform. The Proposed Development would be barely discernible.

No.1 Culcraggie Farm Cottages (R9) is located 700m to the northeast of the Proposed Development. The dwellings are located outside the ZTV, hence residents would experience no view and no effect.

Finlay View and Colmar (R10) are located 740m to the south of the Proposed Development. The dwellings are located outside the ZTV, hence residents would experience no view and no effect.

Fyrish House and Little Fyrish (R11) are located 790m to the northwest of the Proposed Development. The dwellings are located outside the ZTV, hence residents would experience no view and no effect.

Ballachraggan Farm Cottages (nos. 1-2) (R12) are located 830m to the east of the Proposed Development. The dwellings are located outside the ZTV, hence residents would experience no view and no effect.

West Contullich (R13) is located 830m to the northeast of the Proposed Development. The dwelling is located outside the ZTV, hence residents would experience no view and no effect.

Culcraggie Farmhouse (R14) is located 940m to the east of the Proposed Development. The dwelling and garden area is on the cusp of the ZTV. Potential views of the Proposed Development from the property and garden would be predominantly restricted to winter months and would remain heavily filtered by vegetation and the intervening landform. The Proposed Development would be barely discernible.

11.2 Visual effects experienced by Recreational Receptors

The Appraisal of effects experienced by recreational receptors is described below, listed in order of increasing distance from the Proposed Development. Recreational receptors are considered to be of High sensitivity unless stated otherwise.

<u>NCR 1 and John o' Groats Trail</u>

NCR 1 and the John o' Groats Trail follow the same route in the Study Area, located 520m to the south of the Proposed Development at the closest point.

With reference to **Figure 1b**, potential views would be almost entirely absent due to the screening influence of the landform in combination with intervening vegetation. Potential views would be

limited to a localised 100m long section at the junction of the B9176 and B817. From this localised section, views of the Proposed Development would be limited to the proposed infrastructure within the southeastern part of the compound, representing a low-lying addition to the landscape beyond intervening farmland. The Proposed Development would account for a narrow angle of view, and would be fully back-clothed by the forestry on the rising landform in the distance (see Viewpoint 2). The magnitude of change would be Slight/Negligible at most, and the level of effect experienced by walkers and cyclists would be Moderate/Minor, not notable. There would be no views of the Proposed Development across all other sections of the route.

As the proposed planting within the Site establishes, the Proposed Development would be increasingly screened. By Year 10, the magnitude of change would reduce to Negligible at most, and the level of effect would be Minor, not notable.

Core Path network

Core Path RC16.08 and RC03.12 link together between Evanton and Alness, where they share the same route as NCR 1. The effects experienced by walkers would be the same as described above.

Core Paths RC03.02, RC03.05 and RC03.07 form a circuit at Coul Hill / Coulhill Wood, 1.4km to the northeast of the Proposed Development. Potential views of the proposed infrastructure would be fully screened by intervening woodland. Walkers would experience no views and no effect.

Core Path RC03.03 extends across the low-lying coastal landscape at Alness Point, 1.5km to the southeast of the Site at the closest point. Potential views of the Proposed Development from this path would be screened by intervening landform and vegetation (see Viewpoint 4). At this distance, there would be no discernible effect on views.

Core Path RC05.01 extends from the carpark at Clais-Druim a' Bhathaich towards the summit of Cnoc Fyrish, 1.5km to the northwest of the Proposed Development at the closest point. The lower sections of the path extend through established woodland (Ancient Woodland), which contains views. From more elevated westerly sections of the path, the route extends across open moorland, resulting in expansive panoramic views across the Cromarty Firth. From the edge of the path, there would be views of the Proposed Development within the low-lying farmland at the foot slopes. The proposed infrastructure would be partly screened by intervening tree cover, and experienced in the context of scattered settlement / built form (see Viewpoint 5). The magnitude of change would be Slight/Negligible at most, and the level of effect would be Minor, not notable. There would be no views and no effect across the vast majority of the path. As the proposed planting within the Site establishes, the infrastructure would be enclosed by tree cover and views of the Proposed Development would soften further. At Year 10, the magnitude of change would reduce to Negligible, and the effect would remain Minor.

All other Core Paths are located at greater distance, and subject to intervening screening that would inhibit potential long-distance views of the Proposed Development. Accordingly, walkers on these routes would experience no discernible effect.

Cnoc Fyrish Monument

The Cnoc Fyrish Monument is located 2.1km to the northwest of the Proposed Development. It is located on the cusp of the ZTV. Potential southeasterly views of the Proposed Development from the Monument would be subject to screening by the intervening landform, and tree cover across the lower slopes of Cnoc Fyrish. Accordingly, clearer views of the proposed infrastructure would be limited to wider parts of the surrounding area, where the proposed infrastructure would remain partly screened from view and represent a disceet addition within the low-lying landscape (refer to Viewpoint 5, which is located on the edge of the footpath that leads towards the Monument). There would be no effect on key views across the Cromarty Firth to the south. The magnitude of change would be Negligible, and the effect would be Negligible not notable.

11.3 Visual effects experienced by Road and Rail Receptors

The sensitivity of road users and rail passengers is considered to be Medium in all cases unless otherwise stated.

B9176

The B9176 extends past the Proposed Development to the east (230m from the compound). With reference to **Figure 1b**, ZTV coverage is focused on a 1.2km long section between the B817 junction in the south and the access for Culcraggie Lodge to the north.

For road users travelling south, the first views of the Proposed Development would be experienced from the 300m section south of the access to Culcraggie Lodge. From this localised section, there would be glimpsed views of the proposed infrastructure in the eastern part of the compound beyond foreground trees, and intervening gorse scrub (see Viewpoint 1). Thereafter the Proposed Development would be located behind the direction of travel.

For road users travelling north, the first views of the Proposed Development would be experienced upon passing the junction with the B817. From this section of the road, views of the proposed infrastructure would be restricted by the intervening landform and would be limited to the southeastern part of the compound, which would represent a low-lying addition to the landscape, back-clothed by forestry (see Viewpoint 2). As the road user travels further north, views of the Proposed Development would remain restricted due to roadside trees and gorse scrub in combination with the intervening landform. Further north, from the 200-300m section on approach to the proposed eastern access, views of the Proposed Development would briefly open up, and there would be close proximity views of the Site access, as well as the proposed earthwork bunds and SuDS located on the eastern side of the compound. In addition, proposed infrastructure within the compound would be visible in the landscape beyond. As the road user travels further north, the Proposed Development would be located behind the direction of travel.

In summary, the clearest views of the Proposed Development would be experienced by road users travelling northwards on the B9176, from a 200-300m section on the eastern edge of the Site. From this localised part of the route, there would be clearer views of the access, earthworks and localised

infrastructure within the eastern part of the compound. The associated magnitude of change would be Moderate and the level of effect would be Moderate. This is assessed as notable in this instance based on the proximity of view. However, given the transient nature of these views, they would be experienced for a very short duration. Across all other sections of the route (comprising the majority of the B9176), the proposed infrastructure would be subject to screening by vegetation and landform, and would represent a very discreet addition to the landscape. The magnitude of change would be Slight/Negligible at most, and the level of effect would be Minor/Negligible, not notable.

As the proposed planting establishes around the southern and eastern sides of the compound, the Proposed Development would be increasingly screened in views from the B9176. By Year 10, the magnitude of change experienced from the 200-300m section on the eastern edge of the Site would be Slight at most, and the level of effect would be Minor, not notable. From the vast majority of the route there would be no views of the Proposed Development.

B817

The B817 is located 520m to the south of the Proposed Development at the closest point. With reference to **Figure 1b**, ZTV coverage is limited to a 100m section at the junction with the B9176. From this section of the road, views of the Proposed Development would be limited to the proposed infrastructure within the southeastern part of the compound, representing a low-lying addition to the landscape beyond intervening farmland (see Viewpoint 2). The magnitude of change would be Slight/Negligible at most, and the level of effect experienced by road users would be Minor, not notable. There would be no views of the Proposed Development across all other sections of the route.

As the proposed planting establishes, the Proposed Development would be increasingly screened. By Year 10, the magnitude of change would reduce to Negligible, and the level of effect would reduce to Minor/Negligible, not notable.

A9

The A9 is located 940m to the south of the Proposed Development at the closest point. With reference to **Figure 1b**, ZTV coverage is limited to fragmented sections of the road between Dilkusha and Alness Business Park (to the south / southeast of the Proposed Development), with a combined coverage of approximately 400m. Potential views of the proposed infrastructure from these sections of the A9 would be limited to road users traveling west, and would be restricted by a combination of roadside embankments, intervening field trees, and the landform, which rises to the north. The clearest views would be experienced during winter months, albeit would remain predominantly screened and back-clothed by tree cover. As such, the Proposed Development would represent a very discreet, low-lying element within the background landscape, experienced for a very short duration. The magnitude of change would be Slight/Negligible at most, and the level of effect experienced by road users would be Minor, not notable. There would be no views of the Proposed Development across all other sections of the route.

As the proposed planting establishes, the Proposed Development would be increasingly screened. By

Year 10, the magnitude of change would reduce to Negligible, and the level of effect would reduce to Negligible, not notable.

Far North Line

The Far North Line is located 660m to the south of the Proposed Development at the closest point. Potential views of the proposed infrastructure would be restricted to a 50m section of the line near Dilkusha. From this localised section, the Proposed Development would be subject to screening by the intervening landform, which rises towards the north. The magnitude of change would be Negligible, and the level of effect experienced by passengers would be Negligible, not notable. There would be no views of the Proposed Development from any other section of the route.

12 Cumulative Effects

This section examines the potential cumulative effects of the Proposed Development in combination with other similar elements of electrical infrastructure within the Study Area. As informed by review of The Highland Council planning portal, undertaken 17th Feb 2025, the assessment includes consideration of the following developments:

- Existing overhead line (OHL) extending east-west through the Site;
- Existing Fyrish Substation, within the Site, 650m to the north of the compound;
- Associated OHL network extending outwards from Fyrish Substation to the north and southwest;
- Existing Alness Substation, 2.2km to the northeast;
- Consented Balnacraig BESS (ref: 22/05167/FUL), 1.8km to the northeast, currently under construction; and
- Consented Contullich Energy Storage Facility (ref: 23/05999/FUL), 1.8km to the northeast.

In addition to the above, there are additional proposals within the Study Area at pre-application stage. These include the proposed 132kV OHL to connect the proposed Abhainn Dubh Wind Farm to the existing Fyrish Substation (planning ref: 25/00218/SCRE). Given the lack of information in relation to the proposals, including the route of the OHL / locations of the towers, this is excluded from further consideration. In addition, the proposed Ceislein Wind Farm (ref: 24/03524/SCOP), comprises up to 20 turbines, with tip height up to 250m, and associated BESS. The closest turbine would be located 3.4km from the Proposed Development, within a geographically separate upland context, on the opposite side of Cnoc Fyrish. Given the lack of certainty regarding the final turbine layout and tip height, this is also excluded from further consideration.

The cumulative effects in association with existing developments are considered certain, and those with consented developments are considered very likely. Accordingly, these are considered together within the following assessment.

Landscape and visual receptors described in Sections 10 and 11 above as undergoing / experiencing a Negligible or Slight/Negligible magnitude of change (or less), are excluded from consideration in the cumulative assessment on the basis that the Proposed Development would exert such a limited

effect in its own right that it would not meaningfully contribute to potential cumulative effects. As such, it would not tip the balance from a minor cumulative effect to a notable cumulative effect.

12.1 Cumulative Landscape Effects

Cumulative Effects on the Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT

With reference to the preceding landscape character assessment in Section 10.2, the main effects of the Proposed Development would be focused within the main development area, and immediately adjoining farmland within 100-200m towards the south, and 30-40m to the southwest and east (curtailed to the north by adjacent woodland).

In addition to the Proposed Development, the existing Fyrish Substation, Alness Substation and associated OHLs are located within the Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT. The consented Balnacraig BESS (under construction) and Contullich Energy Storage Facility will also be located on the northern edge of the LCT, in close proximity to one another. These schemes currently / will exert direct effects upon local landscape character in their own right, albeit in each case these effects are restricted by established tree cover and woodland in the surrounding area. As such, there would be no coalescence of effects with the Proposed Development. Instead the existing characteristics would re-exert themselves across the intervening landscape.

In summary, the Proposed Development would contribute to cumulative effects in combination with the existing Fyrish Substation, Alness Substation and OHLs, as well as the Balnacraig BESS and Contullich Energy Storage Facility, which are located to the north / northeast of the proposed compound. The influence of other cumulative developments would be localised in each case, and focused across geographically separate parts of the surrounding landscape. The intervening tree cover and woodland (including Ancient Woodland), which represents a key characteristic of this LCT, would restrict cumulative effects.

On balance, the characteristics of the Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT would remain predominantly unchanged. The cumulative magnitude of change across the LCT would be Slight/Negligible, and the level of effect would be Minor, not notable. The Proposed Development would exert extremely limited and localised incremental cumulative influence.

12.2 Cumulate Visual Effects

Cumulative Effects Experienced by Local Residents: Culcraggie Lodge (R2)

As above, residents at Culcraggie Lodge would experience views of the Proposed Development within the same field of view as the existing OHL within the Site. There are / will be no views of any other cumulative development, and no change to the level of effect reported within the main assessment.

Cumulative Effects Experienced by Local Residents: Clashnabuiac (R3)

Potential views of cumulative developments from Clashnabuiac are restricted by intervening barns / outhouses and tree cover to the north of the property. There are partial views of the OHL network

within wider views towards the northwest, within a different field of view to the Proposed Development. There are / will be no views of any other cumulative development. Based on the restricted nature of visibility, there would be no change to the level of effect reported within the main assessment.

Cumulative Effects Experienced by Road Users: B9176

Road users on the B9176 currently experience views of the existing OHLs in the landscape to the north / northwest of the road. The towers are typically subject to screening by roadside vegetation in combination with intervening woodland (including areas of Ancient Woodland), and accordingly represent background elements in the wider landscape. There will also be views of the Balnacraig BESS (currently under construction) and the consented Contullich Energy Storage Facility from northern sections of the road, between Contullich and Balnacraig. These developments will be located in close proximity to one another (in adjoining fields), hence will merge to form 'one' development in views from this section of the road.

As described in the main assessment in Section 11.3, key views of the Proposed Development from the B9176 would be restricted to a localised 200-300m section of the road extending along the eastern edge the Site. From this section, there would be views of the site access, earthwork bunds and eastern parts of the compound.

In summary, the Proposed Development would be experienced sequentially from the B9176, in combination with the Balnacraig BESS and consented Contullich Energy Storage Facility, which would be perceived as 'one' development, and the existing OHL network. However, the combined effects would be restricted to localised parts of the road. Overall, the cumulative magnitude of change would be Slight and the level of effect would be Moderate/Minor, not notable. The Proposed Development would exert limited incremental cumulative influence, which would steadily diminish over time in accordance with the establishment of proposed planting within the southern and eastern parts of the Site.

13 Conclusions

In summary, the Proposed Development would be located in an area of gently rolling pastoral farmland, on the northern side of the Cromarty Firth. The local landscape is characterised by tracts of woodland and forestry, in combination with localised settlement and associated transport routes.

The Proposed Development would result in the introduction of a compound incorporating a substation, battery storage containers and associated infrastructure, as well as landscape planting and earthworks, and ecological enhancement measures including SuDS. The planting approach includes new areas of native woodland and species-rich meadow, which would visually contain the proposed infrastructure and contribute towards biodiversity enhancement.

In terms of landscape effects, the containment by surrounding woodland and tree cover, in combination with the rolling landform means that the main effects would be primarily focused within the main development area, and adjoining areas within 100-200m towards the south, and 30-

40m to the southwest and east. This accounts for an extremely localised part of the host Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT. There would be no notable effects on wider parts of this LCT, neighbouring LCTs, or any landscape designation.

Visual effects would also be extremely restricted based on the relatively low height of the proposed infrastructure in combination with the visual containment of the Proposed Development by surrounding vegetation and landform. Accordingly, notable visual effects would be limited to a small number of receptors in closest proximity. This includes residents at Culcraggie Lodge, which is located within 300m of the proposed compound. The level of effect would reduce over time in accordance with the establishment of proposed planting, albeit would remain notable. Notable effects would also be experienced by road users on localised parts of the B9176, approximately 200-300m in length, where the route extends directly past the access on the eastern edge of the Site. These effects would be experienced transiently, for a short duration, and would steadily reduce over time in accordance with the establishment of proposed planting measures. By Year 10 the effects would not be notable. There would be no notable effects on views experienced by other residents, recreational receptors, or road users.

In terms of cumulative effects, the Proposed Development would augment the presence of existing and consented electricity infrastructure within the Study Area. These comprise the existing Fyrish Substation, Alness Substation, and OHL network (including existing OHL extending through the Site), as well as the Balnacraig BESS (which is under construction), and the consented Contullich Energy Storage Facility. The Proposed Development would be located in the same context as the existing OHL extending through the Site. However, it would be geographically separate from all other cumulative developments, and physically separated by intervening areas of woodland, including Ancient Woodland. As such, there would be no coalescence of effects on the local landscape. Cumulative visual effects would be primarily restricted to sequential views as experienced by road users on localised sections of the B9176, and would not be notable overall.

In conclusion, it is assessed that the Proposed Development could be accommodated at the Site with limited and localised effects on landscape character and visual amenity.

References

Publications

Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition (GLVIA3); Institute of Environmental Management and Appraisal and the Landscape Institute, 2013.

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Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Guidance; NatureScot, 2022.

Visual Representation of Development Proposals; Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/2019 (2019).

National Landscape Character Assessment (web-based interactive map), NatureScot, 2019.

National Planning Framework 4, Scottish Government, 2023.

Highland-wide Local Development Plan, Highland Council, 2012;

Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2, Highland Council, 2024;

Sustainable Design Guide, Highland Council, 2013.

Appendix A: LVA methodology

Landscape Effects

The starting point for the assessment of landscape effects was a desk-based review of published landscape assessments.

The sensitivity of the landscape to change resulting from a Proposed Development is not absolute and varies according to the existing landscape, the nature of the Proposed Development and the type of change being proposed. Good practice guidance differentiates between baseline sensitivity of the landscape and the sensitivity of a landscape to a specific development proposal. Accordingly, the concept of 'sensitivity to change' to new development, as described within the baseline published landscape character assessments, is distinct from the consideration of landscape sensitivity to the specific development proposal.

The baseline for consideration of landscape effects is the established landscape character. The landscape effects of a Proposed Development are considered against the key characteristics of the receiving landscape. The degree to which the Proposed Development may change 'the distinct and recognisable pattern that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse' (Countryside Agency and NatureScot, 2002), enables a judgement to be made as to the significance of the effect in landscape character terms. This involves consideration of where the Proposed Development may give rise to a different landscape character type or sub-type.

In general terms, a distinctive landscape of acknowledged value (e.g. covered by a designation) and in good condition is likely to be more sensitive to change than a landscape in poor condition and with no designations or acknowledged value. General guidance on the evaluation of sensitivity is provided below; however, the actual sensitivity would depend on the attributes of the landscape receiving the proposals and the nature of those proposals.

In order to reach an understanding of the effects of development upon the landscape it is necessary to consider different aspects of the landscape as follows:

- Landscape Fabric / Elements: The individual features of the landscape, such as hills, valleys, woods, hedges, tree cover, vegetation, buildings and roads for example which can usually be described and quantified;
- Landscape Quality: The state of repair or condition of elements of a particular landscape, its integrity and intactness and the extent to which its distinctive character is apparent;
- Landscape Value: The importance attached to a landscape, often used as a basis for designation or recognition which expresses national or regional consensus, because of its special qualities/attributes including aesthetic or perceptual aspects such as scenic beauty, tranquillity or wildness, cultural associations or nature conservation interest; and
- Landscape Key Characteristics: The particularly notable elements or combinations of elements which makes a particular contribution to defining or describing the character of an area, which may include experiential characteristics such as wildness and tranquillity.

The sensitivity of the landscape to a particular development considers the susceptibility of the landscape and its value. The overall sensitivity is described as high, medium or low. This is assessed by taking into account the existing landscape quality, landscape value, and landscape capacity or susceptibility to change, which often vary depending on the type of development proposed and the particular site location, such that sensitivity needs to be considered on a case-by-case basis. This should not be confused with 'inherent sensitivity' where areas of the landscape may be referred to as inherently of 'high' or 'low sensitivity.

For example, a National Park may be described as inherently of high sensitivity on account of its designation, but it may prove to be less sensitive to particular development and/or the design of that development.

Alternatively, an undesignated landscape may be of high sensitivity to a particular development and/or the design of that development regardless of the lack of local or national designation. The main factors to consider are discussed as follows:

Landscape susceptibility according to GLVIA3 means "the ability of the landscape to accommodate the Proposed Development without undue consequences for maintenance of the baseline situation and/or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies". Judgements on landscape susceptibility include references to both the physical and aesthetic characteristics and the potential scope for mitigation that would be in character with the landscape.

The judgements regarding susceptibility and value of the landscape character are identified within the sensitivity table included within **Appendix B**. These relationships can be complex and value alone does not automatically or by definition have high susceptibility to all types of change. Examples and on the evaluation of landscape sensitivity are provided below:

Table A.1: Landscape sensitivity criteria

High Sensitivity	Landscape character, characteristics and elements which would generally be of lower landscape capacity or scope for landscape change, and of notable landscape value and quality. These are landscapes that may be considered to be of particular importance to conserve and which may be particularly sensitive to change if inappropriately dealt with.
Medium Sensitivity	Landscape character, characteristics and elements where there would be a moderate landscape capacity or some scope for landscape change. Often include landscapes of moderate landscape value and quality which may be locally designated.
Low Sensitivity	Landscape Character, characteristics and elements where there would be higher landscape capacity or scope for landscape change to accommodate the proposed type of development. Usually applies to landscapes with of lesser landscape susceptibility or higher landscape capacity for the Proposed Development.

The level of landscape effects is not absolute and can only be defined in relation to each development and its location. It is for each assessment to determine the assessment criteria and thresholds using well informed and reasoned judgements.

The magnitude of landscape change arising from the Proposed Development at any particular location is described as substantial, moderate, slight or negligible based on the interpretation of a combination of largely quantifiable parameters, as follows:

- degree of loss or alteration to key landscape features/elements or characteristics;
- distance from the development;
- duration of effect;
- landscape backdrop to the development; and
- landscape context of other built development, particularly vertical elements.

In order to differentiate between different levels of magnitude the following definitions are provided:

Table A.2: Landscape magnitude of change definitions

Substantial	Total loss or extensive alteration to key landscape elements/features/ characteristics of the baseline, or introduction of uncharacteristic elements which would give rise to a fresh characterising effect.
Moderate	Partial loss or alteration to one or more key landscape elements/features/ characteristics of the baseline and/or introduction of elements that may be prominent, but not necessarily substantially uncharacteristic with the attributes of the receiving landscape (which could co-characterise parts of the landscape).
Slight	Minor loss or alteration to one or more key landscape elements/features/ characteristics of the baseline and/or introduction of elements that may not be uncharacteristic with the surrounding landscape or may not lead to a characterising or co-characterising effect.
Negligible	Very minor loss or alteration to one or more key landscape elements/features/ characteristics of the baseline and/or the introduction of elements that are not uncharacteristic of the surrounding landscape. Change would be barely distinguishable approximating to no change.

Having established where the observation of varying levels of change to the landscape baseline may occur, the geographical extent of the change can be identified and a judgement made as to the level of effect in landscape character terms at varying scales.

The importance of the effect on the landscape resource may be determined by correlating the magnitude of the landscape change (substantial, moderate, slight or negligible) with the sensitivity of the landscape resource (high, medium or low). The following table sets out the main correlations between magnitude and sensitivity.

Table A.3: Landscape effects matrix

Landscape sensitivity	Magnitude of Change				
		Substantial	Moderate	Slight	Negligible
	High	Major	Major/Moderate	Moderate	Minor
	Medium	Major/Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/Minor	Minor/Negligible
	Low	Moderate	Moderate/Minor	Minor	Negligible

Visual Effects

The sensitivity of potential visual receptors will vary depending on the location and context of the viewpoint, the activity of the receptor and importance of the view. Visual receptor sensitivity is defined as high, medium, or low in accordance with the criteria in Table A.4.

Table A.4: Visual sensitivity criteria

High Sensitivity	Residents within the curtilage of their homes; users of outdoor recreational facilities including footpaths, cycle ways and recreational road users; people experiencing views from important landscape features of physical, cultural or historic interest, beauty spots and picnic areas.
Medium Sensitivity	Road users and travelers on trains experiencing views from transport routes. People engaged in outdoor sport other than appreciation of the landscape, e.g. nature conservation, golf and water-based recreation.
Low Sensitivity	Workers, users of facilities and commercial buildings (indoors) experiencing views from buildings.

The magnitude of visual change arising from the Proposed Development at any particular location is described as substantial, moderate, slight or negligible based on the interpretation of a combination of largely quantifiable parameters, as follows:

- distance of the viewpoint/receptor from the development;
- duration of effect;
- extent of the development in the view;
- angle of view in relation to main receptor activity;
- proportion of the field of view occupied by the development;
- background to the development; and
- extent of other built development visible, particularly vertical elements.

It is assumed that the change would be seen in clear visibility and the assessment is carried out on that basis. Where appropriate, comment may be made on lighting and weather conditions. In order to differentiate between levels of magnitude the following definitions are provided in Table A.5:

Table A.5: Visual magnitude of change definitions

Substantial	Where the proposals would have a defining influence on the view. Change very prominent leading to substantial obstruction or complete change in character and composition of the baseline existing view.
Moderate	Where the proposals would be clearly noticeable and an important new element in the view. It may involve partial obstruction of existing view or partial change in character and composition of the baseline existing view
Slight	The proposals would be partially visible or visible at sufficient distance to be perceptible and result in limited or minor changes to the view. The character and composition, although altered will be similar to the baseline existing situation
Negligible	Change would be barely perceptible. The composition and character of the view would be substantially unaltered, approximating to little or no change.

The threshold for different levels of visual effects relies to a great extent on professional judgement. Criteria and local circumstances require close study and careful judgement.

Beneficial effects upon receptors may result from a change to a view by the removal of eyesores or through the addition of well-designed elements which add to the sense of place in a beneficial manner.

The following Table A.6 sets out the main correlations between magnitude and sensitivity.

Table A.6: Visual effects matrix

Visual sensitivity	Magnitude of Change				
		Substantial	Moderate	Slight	Negligible
	High	Major	Major/Moderate	Moderate	Minor
	Medium	Major/Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/Minor	Minor/Negligible
	Low	Moderate	Moderate/Minor	Minor	Negligible

Level of Effect

As per the matrices in Table A.3 and Table A.6; the level of any identified landscape or visual effect has been assessed in terms of major, moderate, minor, negligible or none. Intermediate correlations are also possible and depend upon professional judgement, e.g. Major/moderate. These categories are based on the juxtaposition of viewer or landscape sensitivity with the predicted magnitude of change. This matrix should not be used as a prescriptive tool but must allow for the exercise of professional judgement. Effects which area judged to be Major/moderate or Major are considered to be notable. Where Moderate effects are predicted, professional judgement is applied to ensure that the potential for notable effects arising has been thoroughly considered.

Type of Effect

Landscape and visual effects are described with reference to type (direct, indirect, secondary or cumulative), timeframe (short, medium, long term, permanent, and temporary) and whether they are beneficial or adverse (beneficial or adverse). The various types of effect are described as follows:

Temporary / Residual Effects

If a proposal would result in an alteration to an environment whose attributes can be quickly recovered, then judgements concerning the significance of effects should be tempered in that light. Commercial development applications typically include permanent, long-term elements as well as minor alternations to landform resulting in residual landscape and visual effects.

Direct/Indirect

Direct and indirect landscape and visual effects are defined in Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3). Direct effects may be defined "*result directly from the development itself"* (para 3.22). An indirect (or secondary) effect is one that results "*from consequential change resulting from the development*" (para 3.22) and is often produced away from the site of the Proposed Development or as a result of a complex pathway or secondary association. The direct or physical landscape effects of the Proposed Development would generally be limited to an area around the development itself. Any indirect landscape effects are concerned with the view of the changes from outside the local landscape.

Beneficial/Adverse

Landscape and visual effects can be beneficial or adverse and in some instances may be considered neutral. Beneficial effects upon landscape receptors may result from changes to the landscape involving beneficial enhancement measures or through the addition of well-designed elements, which add to the landscape experience or sense of place in a complementary manner.

The landscape impacts of the Proposed Development have been considered against the landscape baseline, taking account of the landscape characteristics. Taking a precautionary approach, changes to rural landscapes involving construction of man-made objects of a large scale are generally considered to be adverse, as they are not usually actively promoted as part of a district wide landscape strategy and therefore in the assessment of landscape effects they are assumed to be adverse, unless specified otherwise in the text.

It is important to recognise that for the same development, some may consider the visual effects for a development of this nature as adverse or beneficial. This depends to some extent on the viewer's predisposition towards landscape change but also the principle of commercial building features in the landscape. Taking a precautionary approach in making an assessment of the 'worst case scenario', the assessment considers that all effects on views which would result from the construction and operation of the Proposed Development to be adverse, unless specified otherwise in the text. It is noted, however, that not all people would consider the effects to be adverse.

Visualisation Methodology

Zone of Theoretical Visibility Maps

Computer generated Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) Maps have been prepared to assist in viewpoint selection and to indicate the potential influence of the Proposed Development in the wider landscape.

With reference to **Figure 1a**, the ZTV has been prepared at 1:30,000 scale to indicate the extent of potential visibility on the basis of bare ground, and does not include the screening effects of intervening established tree cover.

Figure 1b illustrates the ZTV incorporating the screening influence of surrounding buildings and vegetation. This is calculated based on GetMapping 2m Digital Surface Model (Aerial Photography Derived).

The Visibility Map indicates areas from which it might be possible to secure views of part, or parts, of the Proposed Development (based on its maximum height / elevation). However, use of the Visibility Maps needs to be qualified on the following basis:

- There are a number of areas within the Visibility Maps from which there is potential to view parts of the proposal, but which comprise open moorland, or other land where the general public do not appear to exercise regular access;
- The Visibility Maps do not account for the likely orientation of a viewer – for example when travelling in a vehicle.

In addition, the accuracy of the Visibility Maps has to be considered. In particular, the ZTV presented in **Figure 1a** is generated from Ordnance Survey (OS) Landform Panorama digital data based on a gridded terrain model with 5m cell sizes. The resolution of this model cannot accurately represent small-scale terrain features, which can therefore give rise to inaccuracy in the predicted visibility. This can lead to underestimation of visibility – e.g. a raised area of ground permitting views over an intervening obstruction, or can lead to overestimation of visibility – such as where a roadside embankment obscures a view.

Appendix B: Landscape Character Sensitivity

The sensitivity of the Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT is assessed in detail below. Landscape sensitivity is not absolute and can only be defined in relation to each development and its location taking account of susceptibility as described in the methodology. To understand the sensitivity of a particular landscape and its location it is good practice to consider a range of criteria as set out in the table below.

The table below highlights the inherent sensitivities of this landscape to the development proposed, with reference to characteristics as described within NatureScot's 2019 *National Landscape Character Assessment* where relevant. Extracts from this document are included in italics.

Table B.1: Sensitivity of the Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT

Factors affecting the sensitivity	Lower Sensitivity	Higher Sensitivity	Characteristics of local landscape at the Site	Sensitivity Rating
Physical				
Scale	Large scale featureless landscapes	Small to medium scale landscapes with some scaling features	The scale of the local landscape is reduced by the spread of tree cover, albeit the sense of scale is increase in more open areas, where there are expansive views to the south, across the Cromarty Firth.	Medium
Openness	Enclosed and sheltered landscapes	Open and exposed landscapes	The LCT is described as *'well treed'* and this is evident within the locality of the Proposed Development, which incorporates areas of Ancient Woodland in the surrounding area.	Low
Landform	Smooth regular flowing, flat or uniform landscapes	Dramatic, rugged and complex landscapes	The LCT is described as *'often terraced land rising from firths or river plains to mid-elevations and often backed by large scale forest plantations where there are adjacent hills.'* The local landscape reflects this, and encompasses in a relatively low-lying location at the foot slopes of Cnoc Fyrish, which rises towards the northwest.	Medium
Land cover	Extensive areas of simple regular land cover (including farming and forestry)	Complex, intimate or mosaic cover	Local landcover comprises a mix of rough grassland, scrub and tree cover, as well as larger areas of woodland within the surrounding area.	High/Medium
Complexity and patterns	Simple and sweeping lines, linear features and patterns	Complex or irregular patterns	The LCT is described as a *'complex pattern of farmland, tree cover, forests and woodland'.*	High/Medium
Built Environment	Contemporary masts, pylons, industrial elements, buildings infrastructure, settlements	Established, traditional or historic built character	The local landscape is rural, albeit influenced by existing overhead lines extending east-west through the Site, as well as scattered properties and barns in adjoining areas.	Medium/Low
Overall physical sensitivity				Medium

Factors affecting the sensitivity	Lower Sensitivity	Higher Sensitivity	Characteristics of local landscape at the Site	Sensitivity Rating
Perceptual				
Wildness / Sense of Remoteness	Busy evidence of human activity	Remote, peaceful or sense and tranquillity, solitude and emptiness	The locality is rural in character. However, the agricultural landuse, and presence of existing overhead lines within the Site signify this is a landscape influence by human activity.	Medium/Low
Perception of Change	Dynamic or modern landscapes	Ancient landscapes, designed landscapes or with obvious historical continuity	As above, traditional farming practices are merged with more contemporary elements in the form of overhead power lines, suggestive of a landscape with modern features.	Medium
Overall Perceptual Sensitivity				Medium
Visual				
Landscapes that form settings, skylines, backdrops, focal points	Generally low lying landscapes without distinctive landform or horizon	Areas with strong features, focal points that define the setting or skyline	The local landscape is low-lying and back-clothed by the rising landform to the north / northwest, as well as tree cover in other directions, thereby limiting any potential influence on the existing skyline.	Low
Views intervisibility	Visually contained and have limited inward or outward views	Extensive views within or of the area with distant horizons.	The rolling landform and extent of tree cover restricted within the local landscape. Clearer views are obtained from higher ground in the wider area.	Medium/Low
Overall Visual Sensitivity				Low
Value				
Rarity	Commonplace	Rare	The local landscape comprises a blend of farmland, woodland and scattered settlement, which is not uncommon. The rising summit of Cnoc Fyrish to the northwest, represents a more distinct feature.	Medium

Factors affecting the sensitivity	Lower Sensitivity	Higher Sensitivity	Characteristics of local landscape at the Site	Sensitivity Rating
Designated scenic quality	No specific designation	National or regional designation	Nover GDL is located to the west of the Site. There are no other landscape designations within the Study Area.	Medium
Cultural associations	No specific cultural associations	Strong cultural association	There is a 'wide range and distribution of archaeological sites indicating a long history of human settlement.' Novar GDL is located to the west.	High/Medium
Amenity and recreation	Limited amenity function	Well used for amenity/recreation, especially for National trails or other long distance routes	There is an extensive network of Core Paths, as well as long distance routes comprising NCR 1 and the John o' Groats Trail (which share the same route). The Monument at the summit of Cnoc Fyrish is a popular visitor destination accessible via sign-posted path.	High/Medium
Overall Value				Medium
Overall Sensitivity of the Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT				**Medium**

Appendix C: LCT Descriptions

The following text describes the key characteristics of neighbouring LCTs within the Study Area, with reference to NatureScot's 2019 *National Landscape Character Assessment*.

Forest Edge Farming LCT

- *'Gentle to moderately steep convex slopes, occasional minor straths and glens with sinuous burns and rivers, and occasional high level, flatter undulating moorlands.*
- *Rocky, steeper slopes occur in the southern part of the type.*
- *Mix of agriculture and farming, varying from an equal balance to marginally more agriculture.*
- *A patchwork of semi-improved and improved pasture, arable fields, conifer forestry blocks, woodlands, shelterbelts, trees and hedges.*
- *The topography and geometric pattern of enclosure are emphasised by walls, hedges and hedgerow trees.*
- *Variable field sizes, many are large and open and dominate the landscape; others are smaller and create diverse patterns and textures.*
- *The contrasting upland character of higher ground emphasised by stone walls, rough grassland and less tree cover.*
- *The scale of woodlands is in keeping with the geometry of fields and narrow roads.*
- *Conifer forests vary in size, the larger ones superimposed on the field pattern.*
- *The edge of forestry blocks creates enclosed spaces around fields and buildings, and forms a dark background to enclosed features.*
- *Tree cover creates enclosed or intermittent distant views and helps to screen structures such as pylons and masts,*
- *Far reaching views to the south and east from high ground or open areas, often framed and enhanced by foreground trees.'*

Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes - Ross & Cromarty LCT

- *'Broad, rounded hills and upland moorlands with smooth, gentle slopes down to broad straths, creating an undulating skyline.*
- *Occurs in a large tract which weaves around and between the adjoining Rounded Mountain Massif and Rugged Mountain Massif – Ross &Cromarty and unifies the mountain groups.*
- *Large areas of uniform moorland vegetation with occasional surface detail of rivers, lochs, riparian woodland, woodland patches, and regenerating trees.*
- *Large coniferous forests on accessible lower slopes.*
- *Broad straths with natural, meandering rivers and occasionally highlighted by green, unenclosed, improved pastures and riparian trees.*
- *Occasional major trunk roads curve through the lowest major straths, with very little associated service development.*
- *Small groups of mainly traditional buildings around road junctions and at rail stations.*
- *Man-made structures of pylons, wind farms and reservoirs occur as occasional features within a large scale landscape.*
- *Many archaeological features on lower ground from prehistoric, medieval and later periods.*

- *Large, remote interior areas of vast scale with wildness characteristics.'*

Open Farmed Slopes LCT

- *'Open, convex, generally north-east facing farmed slopes.*
- *Smooth slopes of arable and pasture fields forming a regular pattern, lined with occasional small trees, fences or gorse hedges.*
- *Mix of crofting, small holdings and large farms giving rise to a patchwork of rectangular fields of different sizes.*
- *Areas of distinctive crofting patterns with generally smaller fields and regularly scattered croft buildings.*
- *Areas of distinctive, large, regular fields of large farms, with occasional small patches of birch woodland and conifer plantations and lines of trees descending the slopes.*
- *Scattered settlement patterns and network of minor roads running along contour lines, with few groupings in villages or towns.*
- *Ever present views which are open, expansive and outward looking.'*

Appendix D: Landscape Figures