Agenda Item	**6.4**
Report No	**PLN-092-22**

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: North Planning Applications Committee

Date: 06 December 2022

Report Title: 22/01635/S36: ESB Asset Development UK Limited

Land 2375M NW Of Keepers Cottage, Dalnessie, Lairg

Report By: Area Planning Manager North

Purpose/Executive Summary

Description: Chleansaid Wind Farm - Erection and Operation of a Wind Farm comprising 16 turbines 12 turbines at 200 metres and 4 turbines at 180 metres, generating around 96MW and associated infrastructure (access tracks, borrow pits, substation, control building) and includes battery energy storage facility 20MW

Ward: 01 – North, West And Central Sutherland

Development category: Major (Electricity Act Consultation)

Reason referred to Committee: Major development (Electricity Act Consultation)

All relevant matters have been taken into account when appraising this application. It is considered that the proposal accords with the principles and policies contained within the Development Plan and is acceptable in terms of all other applicable material considerations.

Recommendation

The application is recommended for **RAISE NO OBJECTION** as set out in Section 11 of the report

1. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

1.1 The Highland Council has been consulted by the Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit (ECU) on an application made under Section 36C of the Electricity Act 1989 (as amended). The application is for a wind farm comprising of 16no three blade turbines with an operational life of 35 years, with each turbine anticipated to generate 6MW of energy. The applicant has stated that the candidate turbines comprise twelve turbines with a maximum blade tip height of 200m and four turbines with a maximum height of 180m to tip while the maximum proposed hub height of 118.5m and rotor diameter of 163m are indicative at this stage and yet to be confirmed. Each turbine would have an associated external transformer and switching gear contained within weatherproof housing of approximately 5.5m x 3m x 3m at each turbine location. The windfarm as a whole is expected to generate approximately 96MW of power. The application includes associated ancillary works and infrastructure consisting of:

- permanent crane hardstanding areas of approximately 77m x 28m at the base of each turbine with a total combined area of approximately 2,156SQM;
- one permanent meteorological mast of up to 125m and associated hardstanding area of 30m x 20m;
- Two permanent Lidar facilities (light detection and ranging facilities) to be housed within 2.6m high palisade fenced compounds with associated hardstanding areas of 30m x 20m;
- a total of 11.12km of new access track and 5.9km of upgraded existing access track with associated water crossings (of which six will be new), passing places / temporary laydown areas every 500m, and turning heads. Tracks will be typically 5.5m wide with 1m shoulder verges either side, widened to 7m plus shoulders at bends, and excavated;
- a 75m x 45m substation construction compound and battery energy compound;
- a 100m x 75m control building and substation compound enclosed by post and rail fencing and containing laydown area, storage yard, and transformer equipment. The compound will be divided into two further component compounds bounded and separated by palisade security fencing to accommodate:
    - an 'Independent Power Producer (IPP) compound with control building, parking, and welfare facilities (for use by the applicant); and,
    - a Transmission Network Operator (TNO) compound with control building (for use by SSE);
- up to 4 temporary construction compounds including 2no mobilisation compounds (to initiate construction) located close to the entrance of the main site measuring 123m x 30m and 165m x 30m; a main construction compound with site office and staff and visitor welfare facilities at Turbine 1, and an additional compound at Turbine 8.
- The applicant intends to retain and convert the main construction compound into an energy storage facility with:
    - batteries contained within modular battery housing with associated heating, ventilation, and air conditioning;
    - paired power conversion systems comprising bi-directional inverters and transformers;
    - switchgear, metering, and transformer equipment.
- 2no borrow pits to provide aggregate for access tracks, turbine bases, and hardstandings – the site's main construction and substation compounds will be installed in Borrow Pit 1; and,

- underground cabling linking the turbines with the substation.
- telecommunications equipment.

1.2 Access to the site would be taken from the A836 using the Dalnessie Estate track that has been upgraded, along with forestry track through Dalchork Forest, for use during construction of Creag Riabhach Wind Farm (HC application ref. 20/02195/FUL). A new access spur is proposed between the forestry plantation and the Dalnessie Estate buildings into the development area. Grid connection from the on-site substation to the National Grid would be subject to a separate consent application by the network operator.

1.3 The applicant has requested a 50m micrositing allowance for turbine and access tracks to accommodate unknown ground conditions, whilst also maintaining environmental buffers (e.g. set back from water courses, known archaeology, etc.). Micrositing would impact the final layout of the development including its associated infrastructure. The final design of the turbines (hub and tip heights, rotor diameters, colours, and finish), aviation lighting, substation and control buildings, compounds, ancillary electrical equipment, landscaping and fencing etc, would be expected to be agreed with the Planning Authority at the time of project procurement, although the applicant expects turbines to be of a matt mid-tone grey colour finish to reduce discernability over long distances. As such, it should be noted that the 200m and 180m tip height of the turbines are presented as worst case scenarios for the purposes of the assessment. Whilst typical drawings for these elements are set out in the application, turbine manufacturers regularly update designs that are available, thereby necessitating the need for some flexibility on the approved design details (see Environmental Impact Assessment Report Volume 1 Chapter 2), the final details of which, can be secured by Condition.

1.4 The anticipated windfarm construction period is 21 months, which includes commencement on site through to site commissioning, testing, and reinstatement works. The applicant has stated that construction activities would be carried out in accordance with an approved finalised Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP), and has included a Schedule of Environmental Commitments that will inform the final CEMP. The final document would require to be approved by the Planning Authority in consultation with relevant statutory bodies before the start of development.

1.5 As stated, the wind farm has an expected operational life of 35 years from the date of final commissioning after which it would be decommissioned with all above ground infrastructure dismantled and removed from the site, including all turbine components, transformers, substation and associated buildings, and infrastructure. Turbine foundations would remain on site however, although the exposed concrete plinth of the turbine foundations would be removed to a depth of 0.5m below the surface and regraded with soil and planting where appropriate. Cables would be cut away below ground level and sealed. The applicant acknowledges that these matters would not be confirmed until the time of the submission of the decommissioning and restoration plan.

1.6 The applicant utilised the Council's Pre-Application Advice Service for major developments in 2019 for which the applicant presented a scheme of up to 20no wind turbines of up to 200m tip height (ref. 20/02047/PREMAJ). The applicant was advised that based on the information submitted for the advice request and the information presented at the meeting, it would be unlikely that the Council would be in a position to support the proposed wind farm. The response stated that [w]*hilst the Council is supportive of renewable energy developments in principle, this must be balanced against*

the environmental impact of development. Given the range of landscape designations in proximity, this is a particular sensitive area to accommodate the scale of wind farm envisaged.

1.7 In addition to pre-application consultation with the Council and consultees, the applicant undertook online public consultation between 30 July 2021 and 27 August 2021, which included a dedicated website hosting a public exhibition and five online public Q&A events, in-line with the extant Covid Regulations at the time. Following the relaxation of the regulations, the applicant held two in-person public consultation events on 26 and 27 November 2021 in Rogart and Lairg respectively. Information regarding the specific public consultation process as well as how public consultation has influenced the design of the proposal is included in the Statement of Community Consultation submitted with the application.

1.8 The application is supported by an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) that contains chapters on Consultation; Environmental Impact Assessment Process; Planning Policy Context; Landscape and Visual Impacts; Cultural Heritage and Archaeology; Ecology (non-avian); Ornithology; Geology, Hydrogeology, Hydrology, and Peat; Noise and Vibration; Traffic and Transport; Aviation, and Radar; Socio-Economics, Land Use, Recreation and Tourism; Other Issues covering Telecommunications and Shadow Flicker; and a final chapter dedicated to Climate Change Mitigation. A description of the design evolution and alternatives is provided in the Proposed Development chapter while mitigation is considered within each of the chapters. A Planning statement and the aforementioned Statement of Community Consultation have also been submitted in support of the application.

1.9 No variations have been made in the course of the application.

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 The proposal site extends over 504ha of which 12.3ha would be developed for permanent turbine infrastructure and 25.5ha would be developed for access track. Temporary compounds, areas of hardstanding, and, construction track buffer zones will temporarily increase the land take for the 21 month construction period. The majority of the site is undifferentiated heather moor formed over blanket peatbog on the western slopes of Sròn Leathad Chleansaid (393m), a low rounded peak within the Landscape Character Type (LCT) Rounded Hills - Caithness & Sutherland as identified by NatureScot mapping (Landscape Character Type LCT 135). However, only a narrow strip of the application site along its northwest boundary is within that LCT whereby the application site straddles the boundary of Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland LCT to the east, and Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT (NatureScot LCT 134) to the west, with the majority of the site, and turbines, falling within the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT. The site lies mostly above 190m above ordnance datum (AOD) with ground levels sloping northwards towards the Allt nan Con-uisge, which dissects the site, before rising northwards towards the ridge of Leathad Chleansaid before dropping again at the northern edge of the site. This depression between this northern slope and the steeper slope of Sròn Leathad Chleansaid's summit marks the site's north and western boundary. Turbines will indicatively be sited between 210m and 380m AOD.

2.2 The Allt nan Con-uisge is the main waterbody flowing through the site, which flows northwest to southeast forming a broad shallow valley in the west and southern area of the site. The watercourse is fed by four small tributaries within the site and discharges to the River Brora, which flows just east of the site boundary, and ultimately to the North

Sea to the east. At the north of the site is the Abhainn Sgeamhaidh, which flows south-westward into the River Tirry and then on to Loch Shin, which ultimately discharges to the North Sea also.

2.3 The site's location is on the Dalnessie Estate approximately 11km NNE of Lairg while there are minor settlements and small housing groups along the A836 and A838 corridors that run to the west of the site at Achnairn, Colaboll, Dalchork, and Saval approximately 7.3km to 8.4km to the southwest and south, and Rhian approximately 4.5km west. There are further residential properties at Achnaluachrach 7.9km to the southeast running along the C1038 through West Langwell, East Langwell, to Farlary over 17km away. South of this area is the Strath Fleet / A839 corridor that also contains several small settlements and housing groups including Rogart and Pittenrail. The Crask Inn is 9.6km northwest of the application site, and there are no further properties on the northbound section of the A836 until near Altnaharra.

2.4 In terms of Natural Heritage, the site is bound by commercial forestry along its western flanks with no further woodland identified within the application site. There are no statutory nature conservation designations within the proposal site, although it is within proximity of the following RAMSARs, Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA), and Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI):

RAMSAR

- Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands (8.6km)

Special Areas of Conservation

- River Navar (6km)
- Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands (8.6km)

Special Protection Areas

- Lairg and Strath Brora Lochs (3.1km)
- Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands (8.6km)
- Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors (5.9km)

Site of Specific Scientific Interest

- Lairg and Strath Brora Lochs (3.1km)
- Skinsdale Peatlands (8.3km)
- Ben Klibreck (5.2km)
- Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors (5.9km)
- Cnoc an Alaskie (8.6km)
- Grudie Peatlands (10.8km)
- Strath an Loin (12.4km)

The distances as given above are approximate and are measured from the application site boundary, as such the separation distances from the nearest turbines to the designated area are greater.

2.5 The following Wild Land Areas (WLAs) are within proximity of the application site:

- WLA 34 – Reay - Cassley (9.7km)
- WLA 35 – Ben Klibreck-Armine Forest (adjoins the site's boundary)
- WLA 37 – Foinaven-Ben Hee (8.6km)

2.6 The EIAR includes Phase 1 Habitats and National Vegetation Classification (NVC) Surveys that identify a number of potential Ground Water Dependant Terrestrial Ecosystems (GWDTEs), which are protected under the Water Framework Directive. The surveys identified NVC communities with GWDTE potential within the application site as Wet Heath (M15), Rush-Pasture (M23), and Mire (M25).

2.7 NatureScot's 2016 Carbon & Peatland Map indicates that the whole of the site is covered by Classes 1 and 2 Priority Peatland Habitat, which is land covered by peat-forming vegetation or vegetation associated with peat formation. NatureScot describes both Priority Peatland Habitats as nationally important carbon-rich soils with deep peat, with Class 1 areas found along the western and central areas of the site, which are likely to be of high conservation value, and Class 2 areas potentially of high conservation value and restoration potential. Peat probing at the site has established varying peat depths with the deepest area being 7.75m, according to topography, whereby areas of very deep peat correspond with low-lying areas around the Allt nan Con-uisge in the central-west area of the site.

2.8 Ornithological Surveys have also been carried out that identify the site and immediate surrounds are frequented by a varied range of birds including but not limited to Greylag Goose, Whooper Swan, White-tailed Eagle, Golden Eagle, Hen Harrier, Merlin, Red Kite, Snipe, Wood Sandpiper, and Lapwing. The EIAR also reports the results of Protected Species Surveys for Badger, Bats, Fish, Freshwater Pearl Mussel, Otter, Pine Marten, Red Squirrel, Water Vole, and Wild Cat. No baseline surveys were carried out for Amphibians, invertebrates, or reptiles, while deer are actively managed by the Dalnessie Estate and so were also excluded from survey work. The surveys report evidence of water vole using the site but no evidence of badger, pine marten, otter, red squirrel, or wild cat. Bat Activity Surveys identified the calls of five species of bats, Common and Soprano Pipistrelles, Noctule, Brown Long-eared, bat, and Myotis bat, although activity was generally low across the site with no favoured roosting or foraging locations identified.

2.9 In terms of built and cultural heritage, the EIAR identifies no designated Built and Cultural Heritage Assets within the application site (the Inner Study Area) although the Dalnessie, settlement North of Feith Osdail Scheduled Monument is adjacent to the access track near the site's main entrance, as is the EIAR appears to omit the Cnoc a' Bhreac-leathaid shielings and cairnfield Scheduled Monument. The Council's Historic Environment Record (HER) records three non-designated heritage assets within the Inner Study Area, which comprise of sheepfolds and the remains of a farmstead. The assessment concludes that while archaeological evidence recorded in the surrounding wider landscape would suggest high potential for unrecorded heritage assets, walkover surveys within the Inner Survey Area did not identify any additional upstanding assets and considers the potential for buried remains to be low.

2.10 Outwith the site boundaries (the Outer Study Area) the EIAR identifies 26 Scheduled Monuments within 10km of the application site, 11 of which are within 5km, including pre-historic settlement remains, cairns, chambered cairns, and hut circles, as well as six Category C Listed Buildings. Between 10 and 15km there is a further 11 Scheduled Monuments and a single Category B Listed Building, There are no Inventory Battlefields, Inventory Gardens and Designed Landscapes, Conservation Areas, or Category A Listed Buildings identified within that distance.

2.11 The key recreational interests in this area are stalking, hillwalking and hiking, and wild camping, with the Land Reform (Scotland) Act allowing for significant access rights across this countryside. The wider area including its road and path networks host cycling, mountain biking, horse riding, fishing, and canoeing. There are no Core Paths or long distance routes within the site, with the nearest Core Path being 4.5km away at Loch Shin Hide (SU16.05), while others are concentrated in and around Lairg. The Dalnessie access track is a recognised public right of way (HS29) however, as well as a designated Heritage Path and Scottish Hill Track. National Cycle Route 1 follows the large section of the A836 between Lairg and Reay and therefore passes west of the application site at a distance of over 5km. The A838, further west still, and the A839 to the south, while not designated are key access routes used by touring cyclists and motorists. In addition, the popular and promoted Inverness to Wick Far North Railway Line passes through Lairg and Strath Fleet loosely following the route of the A839.

2.12 In terms of landscape sensitivities, there are no international or regional landscape designations on the site while the boundaries of three National Scenic Areas (NSA) fall just either side of 25km from the turbines as shown below:

National Scenic Areas

- Dornoch Firth National Scenic Area (23.4km south and southeast of the site)
- Kyle of Tongue National Scenic Area (24.3km north of the site)
- Assynt - Coigach National Scenic Area (25.5km west of the site)

2.13 The turbines are also within 25km of the following local designations:

Special Landscape Areas

- Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire Special Landscape Area (3.5km north)
- Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth Special Landscape Area (18.4km east)
- Bens Griam and Loch nan Clar Special Landscape Area (18.7km northwest)

2.14 There are a number of turbine developments in proximity of the proposal, which must be taken into account by the assessment for cumulative landscape and visual impacts (LVIA). The LVIA study area is set at 45km from the outermost turbines so the list below sets out windfarm projects within 45km that are operational, approved or have been submitted but not yet determined.

Site Name	No. of Turbines	Tip Height (m)	Location and Distance from the Proposed Development
Operational Sites			
Lairg I	3	99.5m	13.9km
Achany	19	102m	16.8km
Rosehall	19	90m	18km
Kilbraur Extension	8	125m	20.4km
Kilbraur	19	115m	20.7m

Gordonbush Extension	35	110m	25.3km
Beinn nan Oighrean	2	99.5m	35.6km
Beinn Tharsuinn	17	80m	36.4km
Coire na Cloiche	13	99.5m	37.6km
Strathy North	33	107m	44.2km
Bettyhill	2	120m	44.6km
Novar Phase 1	34	55.5m	46.2km
Novar Phase 2	16	106m	46.8km
Consented / Sites Under Construction			
Strath Tirry	4	135m	4.6km
Creag Riabhach	22	125m	13.8km
Lairg II	10	150m / 190m / 200m	15.2km
Braemore*	18	125m	17.8km
Sallachy	9	149.9m	19.5km
Strathy South	39	200m	37.8km
Strathy Wood	13	180m	43.2km
Application / Appeal Sites			
Achany Extension	20	149.9m	17.5km
Garvary	37	180m	17.7km
South Kilbraur	7	149.9m	20.8km
Meall Buidhe	8	149.9m	27.3km
Kintradwell	15	149.9m	28.8km
Strathrory	7	149.9m / 160m / 180m	39.6km

2.15 In the time since the applicant finalised the submission, permission for Braemore Wind Farm has expired while the following wind farm proposals have been approved: Strath Tirry, Lairg II redesign, Sallachy, Strathy South, and Strathy Wood, which is reflected in the table above. The Highland Council has recently refused planning permission for Meall Buidhe Wind Farm however an appeal has now been submitted to the Directorate

for Planning and Environmental Appeals. Additionally, the Council has raised an objection to the Scottish Government against the Garvary Wind Farm proposal for 37 turbines as originally submitted. The applicant for Garvary is currently working on an amended proposal, which they expect to submit to the Scottish Government under the same application in December 2022. Although the details of the amended Garvary proposals are not yet finalised, a reduced scheme is expected.

3. PLANNING HISTORY

3.1 The following application relates to the same application site:

3.2	28 April 2020	20/01270/SCOP: Chleansaid wind farm - 20 turbines(to be confirmed through EIA) will be constructed on the site with a blade tip height of up to 200 m, blade length up to 75 m.	SCOPING APPLICATION DECISION ISSUED

3.3 The following off-site applications are also relevant the applications assessment:

3.4	11 April 2014	12/00890/S36: Erection of Dalnessie Wind Farm - 27 Turbines and associated infrastructure.	APPLICATION WITHDRAWN

3.5 The Highland Council raised an objection against this application to the Scottish Government following a North Planning Applications Committee decision, which went against the officer's recommendation. The application was subsequently withdrawn by the applicant in 2014 following the UK Government's decision to revise its renewable energy investment scheme 'Contracts for Difference', which the applicant maintained made Dalnessie Wind Farm unviable. The application was withdrawn after the public inquiry had been held. The closest proposed Dalnessie Wind Farm turbine was indicatively sited approximately 2.7km northwest of the nearest Chleansaid Wind Farm Turbine

3.6	10 September 2022	20/02195/FUL: Modifications to forestry road	PERMISSION GRANTED

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

4.1 Advertised: EIA Development

Date Advertised:

- Friday 29 April 2022, Edinburgh Gazette;
- Friday 29 April 2022, The Scotsman;
- Friday 29 April 2022 and Friday 06 May 2022, Northern Times.

Representation deadline: 08 June 2022

4.2 Representations received by The Highland Council: 0

4.3 Representations received by Energy Consents Unit: 3

4.4 Material considerations raised are summarised as follows:

- Adverse socio-economic impacts (including consequences of land-use change at the application site);
- Adverse impact on tourism and associated economic impact;

- Adverse Landscape impacts both individually and in combination with other wind farm developments;
- Adverse individual and cumulative visual impacts;
- Adverse impact on the qualities of designated sites, specifically the Caithness and Sutherlands Peatlands / Flow Country candidacy for World Heritage status;
- Proposal would lead to locational encirclement by wind farm development;
- Adverse impact on wildlife;
- Adverse residential and community amenity impacts;
- Adverse impact on peatland;
- Additional traffic, impact on roads, and road safety.

4.5 The following matters raised in representations are not material planning considerations:

- Energy company profits are not material to the assessment of a planning application - one representation makes reference to Highland residents suffering from 'Clearances-Effect' in relation to prioritising energy company profits from wind farm developments in the Highlands over community and individual concerns.

4.3 All letters of representation are available for inspection via the Council's eplanning portal which can be accessed through the internet www.wam.highland.gov.uk/wam.

5. CONSULTATIONS

5.1 **Rogart Community Council objects** to the application on the grounds of adverse traffic impacts on local road users, adverse impacts on road safety and the condition of the public road network. The Community Council also objects on the grounds that the wind farms may prejudice the Caithness and Sutherlands Peatlands / Flow Country candidacy for World Heritage status.

5.2 **Lairg Community Council** supports the application for reasons related to contributions towards net zero targets and socio-economic benefits.

5.3 **Golspie Community Council objects** to the application on grounds that the national grid may not have capacity to accept power generated by onshore wind farms and on the grounds that residents in Sutherland are not receiving reduced bills as compensation for living in an area of high onshore energy production.

5.4 **Access Officer** does not object to the application. It notes that the proposal is on land that the general public may reasonably exercise its access rights and that these may be disrupted during construction works and therefore requests a Recreational Access Management Plan (RAMP). The RAMP should detail how construction will minimise disruption to the Dalnessie access track (which is a public right of way, HS29). The RAMP should also detail how onsite infrastructure will allow public access through the site during the operation of the development and any other plans to improve recreational access across the site including signage and car parking provision.

5.5 **Development Plans Team** do not object to the application. It highlights the applicable Highland Council policy documents and policies relevant for the application's assessment and the potential for the Council to seek Developer Contributions in relation to the proposal, however no specific contributions have been identified or sought in respect of this scheme.

5.6 **Environmental Health** does not object to the application subject to Conditions to limit operational noise output and to ensure private water supplies are properly protected.

5.7 **Flood Risk Management Team** no objection and no specific comments.

5.8 **Forestry Officer** does not object to the application on the grounds that the development is unlikely to significantly impact on trees of forestry.

5.9 **Historic Environment Team – Archaeology** do not object to the application subject to securing the mitigation of cultural heritage assets by condition, as set out in the Cultural Heritage Chapter 7 of the EIAR, which is considered to be comprehensive and sufficient to ensure any impacts on historic resources are within acceptable limits.

5.10 **Landscape Officer** does not object to the application on landscape or visual grounds subject to the relocating or removal of Turbines 1 and 16.

5.11 **Transport Planning Team** do not object to the application subject to conditions to secure further detail and agreement on matters related to the development's impact on Council maintained roads, including: access on to and from the public road; general construction traffic; abnormal loads; a Construction Traffic Management Plan; Road Mitigation Schedule of Works; and, a Section 96 Wear and Tear Agreement. Transport Planning's response is considered in detail in the main body of this report.

Consultations Undertaken by The Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit

5.12 **British Telecom** do not object to the application. It considers the infrastructure associated with the proposal should not cause interference to BT's current and presently planned radio network.

5.13 **Crown Estates Scotland** do not object to the application and have no specific comments.

5.14 **Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO)** does not object to the application subject to conditions in respect of aviation mapping and safety lighting.

5.15 **Fisheries Management Scotland** does not object and advices that it has informed the local District Salmon Fisheries Board of the proposal (Brora DSFB), and provides guidelines for planning applications to ensure development does not impact migratory fish species and the fisheries they support.

5.16 **Highlands and Islands Airports Limited (HIAL)** do not object to the application. Its initial response requested the Line of Sight information referenced in the EIAR, and following submission of this information, HIAL is satisfied that the turbines will not interfere with its systems and therefore will not infringe the safeguarding criteria for Inverness Airport.

5.17 **Historic Environment Scotland (HES)** do not object to the application. HES have considered the proposal in relation to its impacts on the setting of the Dalnessie, Settlement North of Feith Osdail, and, the Cnoc a'Bhreac-leathaid, sheilings and cairnfield 700m NNE of (SM5300) Scheduled Monuments, and does not consider the development to likely result in significantly detrimental impacts. HES did however request clarification on the mitigation measures to be employed during construction works to

avoid direct impacts on these scheduled monuments, which has since been provided to HES' satisfaction subject to minor refinements.

5.17 **Ironside Farrar** has audited the applicant's Peat Landslide Hazard Risk Assessment (PLHRA) on behalf of the Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit. It is generally satisfied with the Desk Based Study however has requested clarifications from the applicant to conclude whether appropriate and adequate field surveys, peat sampling, and analytical methods have been employed to assess peat stability and associated landslide risks including mitigation. At the time of writing, this information appears to be outstanding.

5.18 **Joint Radio Company** do not object to the application as it does not consider the development likely to interfere with radio link infrastructure.

5.19 **Kyle of Sutherland District Salmon Fishery Board** does not object and welcomes the proposed mitigation measure with regard to water crossings and the establishment of development free buffer zones in the vicinity of watercourses, which it considers appropriate to protect the ecology of watercourses in the catchment of Kyle of Sutherland. Its response notes that pollution prevention is key to ensure that efforts to increase salmon smolt passage along the river are not undermined.

5.20 **Marine Scotland (MSS)** has not objected to the application subject to appropriate mitigation and monitoring programmes. It requested additional information and clarification that the EIAR is informed by site characterisation surveys, which should be obtained from both fish habitat and fish population/electrofishing surveys. MSS expressed concern that the EIAR does not provide a full consideration of the potential impacts from the development singularly and in combination with other developments on the water quality and salmon and trout populations of the River Brora and its tributaries. Additionally, MSS expressed disappointment that details regarding an integrated water quality (hydrochemistry and macroinvertebrate) and fish population monitoring programme are not discussed within the EIAR, and sought clarification that best practice techniques will be employed for the monitoring programme.

5.21 **Mountaineering Scotland objects** to the application on the grounds of detrimental visual impacts, although its objection also relates to detrimental landscape impacts. It considers the development to be detrimental to the wild and remote character of WLA 35 – Ben Klibreck-Armine Forest. It considers the proposal to likely result in adverse visual impacts upon hillwalkers experiencing the hills of in the region (including those of WLA 35 and related Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA) by extending wind farm development within the Shin Basin northwards and closer to Creag Riabhach and fully encircling the 'Klibreck-Armine' hills with wind farms. Its response questions the veracity of the 'generic' data used in wind farm application EIARs to assert that wind farms do not negatively impact tourism.

5.22 **National Air Traffic Services Safeguarding (NATS)** does not object to the application. It notes that the proposal does not conflict with its safeguarding criteria.

5.23 **NatureScot objects** to the proposal due to significant adverse effects on Wild Land Area (WLA) 35 Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest, a nationally important area of wild land, which, in NatureScot's view, cannot be readily mitigated. It has considered the likely impacts of the development on the Lairg and Strath Brora Lochs Special Protection Area (SPA), and the Dornoch Firth and Loch Fleet SPA, as well as Wider Countryside Birds. It has advised whether it considers if the Scottish Government as competent Authority must

carry out Appropriate Assessments in relation to several of these protected areas. Its response is given detailed consideration in the appropriate subsections in the planning assessment below.

5.24 **The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Scotland (RSPB)** does not object to the proposal and is content that the proposal would be unlikely to result in an adverse effect on the integrity of the Lairg and Strath Brora Lochs SPA, Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SPA and Ramsar site. It has significant concerns regarding survey limitations and the potential impacts of the proposal on wider-countryside species however, and considers that the mitigation hierarchy should be followed, with adverse impacts avoided where possible. Due to the high predicted collision rate for golden eagle, RSPB advises that turbines 12, 13, 14 and 15 should be removed from the scheme, and, that additional mitigation should be secured along with a robust and deliverable detailed Habitat Management Plan, which should be secured by condition.

5.25 **Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)** does not object to the application subject to conditions to secure: a finalised Peat Management Plan; that micrositing allowances do not allow construction activities on areas of peat deeper than currently shown in the submitted EIAR; enhancements to wetland and peatland to improve natural water management and carbon sequestration; protection of the water environment; that construction is carried out in accordance with the principles contained within the Schedule of Environmental Commitments; and, that reinstatement and decommission works are carried out in a way that is sensitive to the environment, including the restoration of the Borrow Pit 2 and final site decommissioning and restoration.

5.26 **Scottish Water** does not object to the application. It notes that there are no Scottish Water drinking water catchments or water abstraction sources, which are designated as Drinking Water Protected Areas under the Water Framework Directive, in the area that may be affected by the proposal. It provides advice that it would not support surface water drainage connections to the public sewer network.

5.27 **Transport Scotland** does not object subject to conditions to secure information regarding abnormal loads including route and accommodation measures along the trunk road network, and, information regarding construction traffic and traffic management including construction materials, additional signage and temporary control measures in relation to the trunk road network.

6. DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICY

The following policies are relevant to the assessment of the application

6.1 Highland Wide Local Development Plan 2012

28 - Sustainable Design
29 - Design Quality and Place-making
30 - Physical Constraints
31 - Developer Contributions
53 - Minerals
54 - Mineral Wastes
55 - Peat and Soils
56 - Travel
57 - Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage
58 - Protected Species

59 - Other important Species
60 - Other Important Habitats
61 - Landscape
63 - Water Environment
64 - Flood Risk
65 - Waste Water Treatment
66 - Surface Water Drainage
67 - Renewable Energy Developments:

- Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage
- Other Species and Habitat Interests
- Landscape and Visual Impact
- Amenity at Sensitive Locations
- Safety and Amenity of Individuals and Individual Properties
- The Water Environment
- Safety of Airport, Defence and Emergency Service Operations
- The Operational Efficiency of Other Communications
- The Quantity and Quality of Public Access
- Other Tourism and Recreation Interests
- Traffic and Transport Interests

72 - Pollution
73 - Air Quality
77 - Public Access

Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan 2018 (CaSPlan)

6.2 There are no site-specific policies covering the application site therefore the application requires to be assessed against the general policies of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan referred to above. It is noted, however, that the CaSPlan does identify Special Landscape Areas (SLA) within the plan area. In this instance, the SLAs are within the EIAR's Study Area: Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA; Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA; Fannichs, Beinn Dearg and Glencalvie SLA; Bens Griam and Loch nan Clar SLA; The Flow Country and Berriedale Coast SLA; Eriboll East and Whiten Head SLA; Ben Wyvis SLA; and, Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA, with the boundaries of the latter two SLAs amended through the preparation of CaSPlan.

Highland Council Supplementary Planning Policy Guidance

6.3 The Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance provides additional guidance on the principles set out in Policy 67 of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan for Renewable Energy Developments. The Guidance sets out the Council's agreed position on onshore wind energy matters, and reflects current Scottish Planning Policy. While the Spatial Framework is not referenced within the revised draft NPF4, the Spatial Framework is considered to reflect NPF4's requirement that 'Local Development Plans should seek to realise their area's full potential for electricity and heat from renewable, low carbon and zero emission sources by identifying a range of opportunities for energy development', as set out at Policy 11.This document is a material consideration in the determination of onshore wind energy planning applications following its adoption as part of the Local Development Plan in November 2016.

6.4 The document includes the Council's Spatial Framework, which, in line with Table 1 of SPP, identifies the areas that are likely to be most appropriate for onshore wind energy development. The current application site lies wholly within a Group 2 Area of Significant

Protection. The Group 2 feature present is Carbon Rich Soils, Deep Peat and Priority Peatland Habitat (CPP). CPP is a nationally important mapped environmental asset that indicates where the resource is likely to be found and that detailed peat assessments will be required to guide development away from the most sensitive areas and help inform potential mitigation.

6.5 The document also contains the Loch Ness Landscape Sensitivity Study, the Black Isle, Surrounding Hills and Moray Firth Coast Sensitivity Study, and, the Caithness Sensitivity Study. The site does not fall within an area covered by a Landscape Sensitivity Study at this time; however, as mentioned in paragraph 2.1, the site straddles the Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland Landscape Character Type (LCT 135) and the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT (LCT 134) as defined by NatureScot, with the majority of the site and turbines falling within the latter.

Other Supplementary Planning Policy Guidance

6.6 The following Supplementary Guidance also forms an integral and statutory part of the Local Development Plan and is considered pertinent to the determination of this application:

- Developer Contributions (November 2018)
- Flood Risk & Drainage Impact Assessment (Jan 2013)
- Highland Historic Environment Strategy (Jan 2013)
- Highland's Statutorily Protected Species (March 2013)
- Highland Renewable Energy Strategy & Planning Guidelines (May 2006)
- Managing Waste in New Developments (March 2013)
- Physical Constraints (March 2013)
- Special Landscape Area Citations (June 2011)
- Standards for Archaeological Work (March 2012)
- Sustainable Design Guide (Jan 2013)

7. OTHER MATERIAL POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The Highland Council Non-Statutory Planning Guidance

7.1 The Highland-wide Local Development Plan is currently under review and is at Main Issues Report Stage. It is anticipated the Proposed Plan will be published following publication of secondary legislation and National Planning Framework 4.

7.2 In addition to the above, The Highland Council has further advice on the delivery of major developments in a number of documents, which include the Construction Environmental Management Process for Large Scale Projects; and, The Highland Council Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments.

Scottish Government Planning Policy (SPP), the Revised Draft National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), and Guidance

7.3 Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) advances principal policies on Sustainability and Placemaking, and subject policies on A Successful, Sustainable Place; A Low Carbon Place; A Natural, Resilient Place; and A Connected Place, which relate national planning policy to the Scottish Government's National Outcomes. SPP highlights that the Development Plan is the starting point of decision making on planning applications. In that context, the content of the SPP is a material consideration that carries significant

weight, but not more than the Development Plan, although it is for the decision maker to determine the appropriate weight to be afforded to it in each case.

7.4 SPP sets out continued support for onshore wind energy developments, requiring Planning Authorities to progress, as part of the Development Plan process, a spatial framework that identifies the most appropriate areas for potential onshore wind farms as a guide for developers and communities. SPP also lists considerations in respect of the scale of proposals in relation to area characteristics, to be taken into account in the assessment of wind energy proposals (Para. 169 of SPP). In addition, paragraph 170 of SPP sets out that areas identified for windfarms should be suitable for use in perpetuity. This means that even though the consent is time limited, the use of the site for a wind farm must be considered as, to all intents and purposes, a permanent one. The implication of this is that operational effects should be considered as permanent, and their magnitude should not be diminished on the basis that the specific proposal will be subject to a time limited consent.

7.5 National Planning Framework 4 is likely to supersede Scottish Planning Policy very soon and form a fundamental part of the Development Plan. Draft National Planning Framework 4 was published in November 2021 with the subsequent revised draft laid before the Scottish Parliament on 08 November 2022. In its newest iteration, draft NPF4 comprises three parts, summarised below:

7.6

- Part 1 – sets out an overarching spatial strategy for Scotland in the future. This includes spatial principles, national and regional spatial priorities, and action areas.
- Part 2 – sets out policies for the development and use of land that are to be applied in the preparation of local development plans; local place plans; masterplans and briefs; and for determining the range of planning consents. This part of the document should be taken as a whole in that all relevant policies should be applied to each application.
- Part 3 – provides a series of annexes that provide the rationale for the strategies and policies of NPF4, which outline how the document should be used, and set out how the Scottish Government will implement the strategies and policies contained in the document.

7.7 The Spatial Strategy sets out that we are facing unprecedented challenges and that we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and embrace and deliver radical change so we can tackle and adapt to climate change, restore biodiversity loss, improve health and wellbeing, build a wellbeing economy while striving to create great places. Therefore, NPF4 sets out that choices need to be made about how we can make sustainable use of our natural assets in a way that benefits communities. The spatial strategy reflects legislation in setting out that decision making requires to reflect the long term public interest. However, in doing so, it is clear that we will need to make the right choices about where development should be located ensuring clarity is provided over the types of infrastructure that need to be provided and the assets that should be protected to ensure they continue to benefit future generations. To that end, the Spatial Priorities support the planning and delivery of sustainable places, where we reduce emissions, restore and better connect biodiversity; create liveable places, where we can all live better, healthier lives; and, create productive places, where we have a greener, fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy.

7.8 It is anticipated that national developments, which includes Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation developments of over 50MW, will assist in the delivery of the Spatial Strategy and Spatial Priorities for the north of Scotland. The Spatial Strategy considers that Highland can continue to make a strong contribution toward meeting our ambition for net zero. It considers that the strategy for Highland aims to protect environmental assets and stimulate investment in natural and engineered solutions to climate change. Specific to this proposal, draft NPF4 states that development proposals for wind farms should only be supported where they maximise net economic impact, including local and community socio-economic benefits such as employment, associated business and supply chain opportunities, as set out in Policy 11. The policy goes on to state that significant weight will be placed on the contribution of the proposal to renewable energy generation targets and on greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets, similar to the existing provisions of Scottish Planning Policy, while identifying impacts, including cumulative impacts, that must be suitably addressed and mitigated against. Furthermore, Policy 4 of draft NPF4, sets out that the principle of development within Wild Land Areas that supports meeting renewable energy targets is supported subject to demonstrating that significant impacts are appropriately mitigated.

7.9 The policies in the revised draft NPF4 most relevant to this proposal include:

Policy 1 – Tackling the climate and nature crisis
Policy 2 – Climate mitigation and adaptation
Policy 3 – Biodiversity
Policy 4 – Natural places
Policy 5 – Soils
Policy 7 – Historic assets and places
Policy 11 – Energy
Policy 22 – Flood risk and water management
Policy 23 – Health and safety
Policy 25 – Community wealth benefits
Policy 33 – Minerals

Other Relevant National Guidance and Policy

7.10 A range of other national planning and energy policy and guidance is also relevant, including but not limited to the following:

- National Planning Framework for Scotland 3, NPF3
- Scottish Energy Strategy (Dec 2017)
- Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS, 2019)
- PAN 1/2011 - Planning and Noise (Mar 2011)
- Circular 1/2017: Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations (May 2017)
- PAN 60 – Planning for Natural Heritage (Jan 2008)
- 2020 Routemap for Renewable Energy (Jun 2011)
- Onshore Wind Energy (Statement), Scottish Government (Dec 2017)
- Onshore Wind Energy (Statement) Refresh Consultation Draft, Scottish Government (October 2021)
- Siting and Designing Wind Farms in the Landscape, SNH (Aug 2017)
- Wind Farm Developments on Peat Lands, Scottish Government (Jun 2011)
- Energy Efficient Scotland Route Map, Scottish Government (May 2018)
- Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Areas, Technical Guidance, NatureScot (Sep2020)

8. PLANNING APPRAISAL

8.1 The application has been submitted to the Scottish Government for approval under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 (as amended). Should Ministers approve the development, it will receive deemed planning permission under Section 57(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended). While not a planning application, the Council processes S36 applications in the same way as planning applications, because a consent under the Electricity Act will carry with it deemed planning permission.

8.2 Schedule 9 of The Electricity Act 1989 contains tests in relation to the impact of proposals on amenity, heritage, and fisheries, requiring proposals to:

- have regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty, of conserving flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest and of protecting sites, buildings and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest; and,
- reasonably mitigate any effect which the proposals would have on the natural beauty of the countryside or on any such flora, fauna, features, sites, buildings or objects.

8.3 It should be noted that for applications under the Electricity Act 1989 that the Development Plan is just one of a number of considerations and Section 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 which requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, is not engaged.

Determining Issues

8.4 While the above is the case, the application requires to be assessed against all relevant Development Plan policies, all national and local policy guidance, and all other material considerations relevant to the application.

Planning Considerations

8.5 The key considerations in this case are:

a) compliance with the development plan and other planning policy;

b) energy and economic benefits;

c) construction;

d) transport and access;

e) hydrology, hydrogeology and peat;

f) natural heritage (including ornithology);

g) built and cultural heritage;

h) design, landscape and visual impact (including wild land areas)

i) noise and shadow flicker;

j) telecommunications;

k) aviation;

l) decommissioning, and,

m) other material considerations

Development plan/other planning policy

8.6 The Development Plan comprises the adopted Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP), Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan and all statutorily adopted supplementary guidance.

Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP)

8.7 With no site-specific allocations or policies within the CaSPlan at the application location, the proposal is principally assessed against HwLDP Policy 67 for Renewable Energy developments Policy 67 sets out that renewable energy development should be well related to the source of the primary renewable resource needed for its operation. Proposals are required to be judged according to their contribution in meeting renewable energy targets and positive/negative effects on the local and national economy as well as against all other relevant policies of the Development Plan and other relevant guidance. In that context the Council will support proposals where it is satisfied they are located, sited, and designed such as they will not be significantly detrimental overall, either individually or cumulatively with other developments, having regard to the 11 specified criteria (as listed in paragraph 6.1). Such an approach is consistent with the concept of Sustainable Design (Policy 28) and aim of Scottish Planning Policy to achieve the right development in the right place, and, the emerging NPF4 where it promotes appropriate management of development and land uses in the long-term public interest; it is not to allow development at any cost.

8.8 If the Council is satisfied that the proposal is not significantly detrimental overall, either individually or cumulatively with other developments, then the application will accord with the Development Plan and national planning policy.

Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan

8.9 The Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan does not contain any specific land allocations related to the proposed development. Paragraph 74 of the CaSPlan sets out that the Special Landscape Area boundaries have been revised for the CaSPlan to ensure 'key designated landscape features are not severed and that distinct landscapes are preserved.' The boundaries set out in the CaSPlan are supported by a background paper that includes citations for each of the Special Landscape Areas. Policies 28, 57, 61 and 67 of the HwLDP seek to safeguard these regionally important landscapes. The impact of this development on landscape is primarily assessed in the Design, Landscape and Visual Impact (including Wild Land) section of this report (paragraphs 8.82- 8.144).

Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OSWESG)

810 The Council's Supplementary Guidance for Onshore Wind Energy is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. It should be noted that the guidance does not provide additional tests to assess development proposals against over and above the Development Plan policy. Rather, the guidance compliments the policy by ensuring a consistent and robust methodology is adopted in the assessment of all applicable applications, in particular (although not exclusively) for consideration of

landscape and visual impacts. In that way, the guidance provides a clear indication of the approach the Council takes towards the assessment of proposals.

8.11 To assist with the assessment, the OSWESG contains a Spatial Framework for onshore wind energy as required by SPP. The framework applies to individual turbines of ground to tip height of 50m and above, as well as developments of two or more turbines of ground to tip height of 30m and above. The framework sets out the requirement for safeguarding areas in three groupings, 1, 2, and 3. In this instance the site falls within an area designated as Group 2 – 'Area with significant protection'. The Group 2 feature present is Carbon Rich Soil, Deep Peat and Priority Peatland Habitat (CPP). CPP is a nationally important mapped environmental asset that indicates where the resource is likely to be found with a detailed peat assessment being required to guide development away from the most sensitive areas and help inform potential mitigation. The site also contains pockets designated as Group 3 – 'Area with potential for windfarm development', but no Group 1 – 'Areas where windfarms will not be acceptable'. Group 3 areas are areas that require further consideration to demonstrate that any significant effects can be substantially overcome by design, siting, or other mitigation. Nevertheless, the Group 2 area is the majority designation, and therefore forms the basis of the assessment. The nearest Group 1 areas are the Dornoch Firth, the Kyle of Tongue, and, the Assynt - Coigach National Scenic Areas (NSA) (23.4km, 24.3km, and 25.5km distant from the site respectively – see paragraph 2.12), which are designated Group 1 by virtue of being National Scenic Areas.

8.12 The OSWESG also provides strategic considerations that identify sensitivities and potential capacity for windfarm development called the Landscape Sensitivity Appraisals (LSA). The Black Isle, Surrounding Hills and Moray Firth Coast Sensitivity Study, along with the Caithness Sensitivity Study were published in 2017, and now form an integral part of the statutorily adopted OWESG. East and Central Sutherland Study Area, which would cover the area of the site, is one of the six areas still to be examined. The Study has been prepared in draft following the methodology and format of those studies already adopted, however has not yet been published for consultation.

8.13 Nevertheless, the OWESG approach and methodology to the assessment of windfarm proposals is still applicable to the current application. Specifically, paragraphs 4.16 and 4.17 of the OWESG, which describe the 10 key design criterion that set the 'thresholds' developments should seek to achieve in order to ensure the development is appropriately sited and designed to avoid significant landscape and visual impacts, and comply with the applicable criteria of HwLDP Policy 67. The development's compliance or otherwise with the 10 criteria is discussed in the Design, Landscape and Visual Impact (including Wild Land) section of this report and described in detail in Appendix 3.

National Planning Policy

8.14 As stated, SPP sets out continued support for onshore wind, requiring planning authorities to progress, as part of the Development Plan process, a spatial framework identifying areas that are more likely to be more appropriate for onshore wind farms; indeed SPP sets out that areas identified for wind farm developments should be suitable for this land use in perpetuity. This framework, which the OWESG provides, is intended as a guide for developers and communities alike.

8.15 Notwithstanding the overarching context of support, SPP recognises that the need for energy and the need to protect and enhance Scotland's natural and historic environments must be regarded as compatible goals. The planning system has a

significant role in securing appropriate protection to the natural and historic environment without unreasonably restricting the potential for renewable energy. National policies highlight potential areas of conflict but also advise that detrimental effects can often be mitigated and that effective planning conditions can be used to overcome potential objections to development. A number of criteria are set out in SPP against which proposals for on-shore wind energy development should be assessed (paragraph 169). These criteria are primarily reflected in Policy 67 (Renewable Energy) of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan. A failure against one of these criteria does not necessarily mean that a development fails, all these criteria must be given consideration.

8.16 As a statement of the Government's approach to spatial planning in Scotland, National Planning Framework 3 (NPF3) is a material consideration that should be afforded significant weight in the planning balance. NPF3 considers that onshore wind has a role in meeting the Scottish Government's targets to achieve at least an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, and to meet at least 30% overall energy demand from renewables by 2020, including generating the equivalent of at least 100% of gross electricity consumption from renewables. However, it should be noted that the targets set out in NPF3 have now been superseded by legislation which sets the legally binding target of net zero by 2045.

8.17 As set out above, National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) was published in draft form in November 2021 with a revised draft laid before the Scottish Parliament on 08 November 2022. As such, the document is going through the final parliamentary process and is no longer open to consultation, and, following a period for consideration by Scottish Ministers, it is anticipated that the revised draft will be adopted, subject to any changes made by Ministers agreed through parliamentary processes, as the new principal planning policy and spatial strategy for Scotland. Therefore, significantly more weight can be attached to NPF4 than to previous revisions. However, for the time being at least, National Planning Framework 3, Scottish Planning Policy, and the adopted Development Plan are the extant adopted documents. It will be up to Scottish Ministers to determine the weight to be afforded to it in reaching their decision depending on the status of the document at the time of reaching their determination on this application. It is anticipated that the Planning Authority may wish to make further representation to the application if it is not determined at the time of adoption of NPF4 or if substantive changes are made to NPF4 prior to adoption by Scottish Ministers.

8.18 The development subject to this application is identified as a national development as "Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation" given it has the capacity to generate and store more than 50MW. There is in principle support for national scale developments as they have been identified of national importance in the delivery of Scotland's Spatial Strategy. However, any project identified as a national development requires to be considered at a project level to ensure all statutory tests are met. This includes consideration against the provisions of the Development Plan, of which National Planning Framework 4 is a part.

8.19 Specific to this proposal, draft NPF4 states that development proposals for wind farms should only be supported where they maximise net economic impact, including local and community socio-economic benefits such as employment, associated business and supply chain opportunities, as set out in Policy 11. The policy goes on to state that significant weight will be placed on the contribution of the proposal to renewable energy generation targets and on greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets, similar to the existing provisions of Scottish Planning Policy, while identifying impacts, including

cumulative impacts, that must be suitably addressed and mitigated against. These considerations relate to matters of: impacts on communities and individual dwellings in relation to amenity; landscape and visual impact; public access; aviation and defence interests; telecommunications; traffic; historic environment; biodiversity (including birds); impacts on trees; decommissioning; site restoration; and cumulative effects. In relation to landscape and visual impacts it advises that where impacts are localised and / or appropriate design mitigation has been applied such effects will generally be considered acceptable .

8.20 However NPF4 must be read as a whole and detailed consideration given to linked policies. Relevant to this proposal are the following policy matters:

- Policy 4 (Natural Places) – this policy sets out that development proposals that by virtue of type, location or scale will have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment will not be supported. The policy also is clear that development proposals that affect a site designated as a landscape area in the LDP (Special Landscape Area for Highland Council) will only be supported where it will not have a significant adverse effect on the integrity of the area as assessed against the special qualities for which it has been identified. This effect on integrity can effectively be set aside where significant adverse effects on the integrity of the area are clearly outweighed by social, economic or environmental benefits of at least local importance. This is relevant due to the impact on the Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire Special Landscape Area. However, Policy 4 also reduces the weight to be afforded to impacts on Wild Land Areas where development is located outwith a Wild Land Area.

The other policies relevant to this proposal are set out in para 7.9 of this report, the provisions of which are considered throughout the report where any conflicts or compliance are highlighted.

8.21 Indeed, the Scottish and UK Governments have published a number of reports in recent years relating to national energy policy and climate change. In short, none indicate a distinct policy change but rather indicate a direction of travel in terms of future policy. Most relevant to this application are as follows:

- Scottish Energy Strategy: The future of energy in Scotland (December 2017);
- Onshore Wind Policy Statement (December 2017);
- Scottish Government, Securing a Green Recovery on a Path to Net Zero: Climate Change Plan 2018–2032 (updated December 2020);
- Committee on Climate Change, The Sixth Carbon Budget, The UK's Path to Net Zero (including Policy and Methodology) (December 2020);
- National Audit Office, Net Zero Report (December 2020);
- HM Government, Energy White Paper, Powering our Net Zero Future (December 2020); and,
- Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy 'Enabling a High Renewable, Net Zero Electricity System: Call for Evidence'

8.22 Further to the above, in late 2019 the Scottish Government's targets for reduction in greenhouse gases were amended by The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019. This sets targets to reduce Scotland's emissions of all greenhouse gases to net-zero by 2045 at the latest, with interim targets for reductions of at least 56% by 2020, 75% by 2030, 90% by 2040.

8.23 The statements of continued strong support relating to onshore wind energy contained within these documents are acknowledged. Support for onshore wind is anticipated to meet with the continued aspiration to decarbonise the electricity network, enable communities to benefit more directly in their deployment and to support the renewables industry and wider supply chain.

8.24 However, it is also recognised that such support should only be given where justified. In the context that larger, more optimal turbines are anticipated the Onshore Wind Policy Statement sets out the need for a more strategic approach to new development that acknowledges the capacity that landscapes have to absorb development before landscape and visual impacts become unacceptable. With regard to planning policy, these statements largely reflect the existing position outlined within the National Planning Framework 3 and Scottish Planning Policy, a policy framework that supports development in justified locations where there is an expectation that landscapes already hosting wind energy schemes will continue to do so beyond the lifetime of current consents, a policy line echoed in Policy 11 of the emerging NPF4. In addition, it must be recognised that the greenhouse gas reduction targets and the targets in the Energy Strategy are related not just to production of green energy but also related to de-carbonisation of heat and transport.

8.25 The Scottish Government published Onshore Wind Policy Statement Refresh 2021: Consultative Draft in October 2021. This document set out that onshore wind remains vital to Scotland's future energy mix and that we will need additional onshore wind energy toward the target of net zero. However, in doing so it was clear that additional capacity is not at any cost and it needs to be balanced and aligned with protection of natural heritage, native flora and fauna. The document also highlights the challenges and opportunities faced by the deployment of additional onshore wind energy capacity as well as consulting on a target of an additional 8-12GW of onshore wind energy capacity being delivered. Importantly it notes that the matter of landscape and visual impacts of onshore wind development remains an evolving area. As part of this evolution, it considers that while decisive action to tackle climate change will change how Scotland looks, Scotland's most cherished landscapes are a key part of natural and cultural heritage and must be afforded the necessary protection.

8.26 The Highland Council recognises the Scottish Government's declaration of the climate emergency and related biodiversity crisis and has indeed also declared a climate and ecological emergency, the response to this and manner in which policy will be modified has been indicated through the Bute House Agreement, draft NPF4 and the consultative draft of the Onshore Wind Energy Statement.

<u>Energy, Carbon Saving, and Socio-Economic Benefits</u>

8.27 The Council continues to respond positively to the Government's renewable energy agenda. The government's recent Onshore Wind Energy Statement Consultation Draft states that there is currently 8.4GW of installed capacity in Scotland, with a further 4.69GW in the planning/consenting process, 4.64 GW are awaiting construction and 0.43GW under construction. Highland wind energy projects currently have an installed capacity of 2.53GW, there is a further 1.42GW of generation permitted but not yet built and 1.3GW currently under construction. Installed onshore wind energy developments in Highland therefore accounts for around 30.12% of the national installed onshore wind energy capacity. There is also a further 2.1GW of onshore wind farm proposals currently in planning pending consideration in Highland.

8.28 While Highland Council has effectively met its own target, as previously set out in the Highland Renewable Energy Strategy, it is acknowledged that such targets are not a cap and may be exceeded. Equally, however, the Council recognises the balance that is called for in both national and local policy and it remains the case that there are areas of Highland capable of absorbing renewable developments without significant effects.

8.29 It is in this context that the Chleansaid development's indicative maximum capacity of 96MW (equivalent to 212GWh per year) would make a significant contribution to Scottish and UK Government policy targets and international commitments for renewable energy and electricity generation. Volume 1 Chapter 16: Climate Change Mitigation, and its supporting Appendix (16.2: Carbon Calculator Output) states that annual net CO_2 emissions are expected to be 173,833tons, which represents a saving of 132,451tons per year when offset against a fossil fuel mix of electricity generation, equating to almost 4.7m tons over its 35 year lifetime. Over that period, the project is expected to generate 10,301,760 MWh of electricity. The EIAR projects that the development is anticipated to 'pay back' the carbon emissions associated with its construction, operation, and decommissioning within 1.3 years of its anticipated grid connection in 2027 thus contributing to the Scottish Government's 2030 targets. While there will be other carbon losses, particularly during the construction phase of development, this should be offset by peatland restoration which will occur as part of the Habitat Management Plan (HMP).

8.30 In terms of economic benefits, the proposed development anticipates a construction period of 21 months and 35 years of operation prior to decommissioning or repowering. Such a project can offer significant investment/opportunities to the local, Highland, and Scottish economy including for businesses ranging across construction, haulage, electrical and service sectors through the supply chain, with opportunities in research and development, design, project management, civil engineering, component fabrication / manufacture, installation, and maintenance. The application is accompanied by a socio-economic, land use, recreation, and tourism assessment (EIAR, Vol 1, Chapter 14: Socio-Economics, Land Use, Recreation and Tourism) that looks at both the construction and operational phases for the development. The economic impact of the proposed development has been assessed using a model that has been developed by BiGGAR Economics on behalf of RenewablesUK (2015) specifically to estimate the economic impacts of wind farm developments and capital estimates by the developer. This approach is generally considered industry best practice in assessing the economic impact of the onshore wind sector.

8.31 The applicant estimates a capital expenditure of £146.9m (excluding battery storage and assuming the installed capacity will be the 96MW) with the largest spending proportion of 70% spent on turbine procurement, transport, and installation related contracts, followed by balance of plant 20%, grid connection 5.1%, and pre-construction 4.4%. These figures amend the aforementioned 2015 BiGGAR study to take account of changes in turbine manufacture. The study is cited in its original however to predict that up to 59% of planning and development costs for the proposed development could be spent in Scotland, £3.7m, 13% of which, £0.8m, would likely be spent in Lairg and the Highlands. The research also anticipates that up to 12% of the overall value of construction contracts for the proposed development could be realised in Lairg the Highlands (up to £16.8m), and 36% of the value in Scotland (£50.5m).

8.32 The construction phase is predicted to support up to 158 jobs in Scotland with 52 jobs in Lairg and Highlands for the period up to grid connection. The EIAR also advises that a further 126.4 indirect and indirect/induced jobs would be created across Scotland during

this period with 41.6 of those jobs being within Lairg and Highland. Investment and employment figures would however sharply decline and level off following construction while the windfarm is operational. Using the RenewableUK model, the applicant predicts annual operation and maintenance costs of the wind farm alone, figures do not include the battery storage facility, to reach approximately £6m at today's money, with £3.5m (58%) anticipated to be spent in Scotland, of which £2.5m (42%) is anticipated to be spent in Lairg and Highland. The applicant translates this expenditure to the equivalent of 28 jobs in Scotland, 21 of which are expected to be in Lairg and Highland. The assessment then goes on to predict 11 indirect and indirect/induced jobs in Scotland, 8.4 of which would be local.

8.33 Given the temporary nature of construction phase job creation, the EIAR concludes the direct economic benefits during the construction phase to be of a Negligible (Beneficial) magnitude of impact at the regional level of Lairg and the Highlands, leading to a level of effect of Negligible (Beneficial). For Scotland as a whole, the EIAR predicts a Negligible (Beneficial) magnitude of impact leading to a level of effect of Minor (Beneficial). There are also likely to be some adverse impacts caused by construction traffic and disruption, which are most likely to be experienced within the service sector particularly during the construction phase when abnormal loads are being delivered to site. However, overall, economic benefits are expected to be beneficial although not significant at either local or national level, which is the EIAR's conclusion for both the construction and operational phases of the development.

8.34 The Planning Statement also expresses a commitment by the applicant to implement shared ownership in line with Scottish Government guidance. Community ownership can deliver a consistent stream of funding to the communities in the area to deliver projects of benefit to the community. In addition, the applicant states the development will contribute £5,000 per megawatt installed capacity to a Community Benefit Fund. Based on an assumed installed capacity of 96MW, this will result in an annual value of approximately £500,000 per year, which will provide approximately £17.5m in community benefit during the 35 year operational lifetime of the proposal. Proposals for Community Renewable Energy Developments are assessed against Policy 68 of the HwLDP. The policy states that the same level of assessment will apply initially to community schemes as is applied to commercial schemes, although the policy allows for a greater level of impact provided the specific community is the only community significantly impacted by the development. In this instance however, it is considered that the proposed development has wider impacts beyond a single community, while no community has come forward to partner with the developer for Chleansaid and as such Policy 68 does not apply to the application's assessment. The applicant therefore correctly points out that community benefits are not a material consideration of the planning assessment.

Impact on Tourism

8.35 Scenery and the natural environment within the Highlands are important factors for many visitors when choosing the area as a holiday destination. Any detrimental impact of the proposed development on tourism, whether visually, environmentally, or economically should be identified and considered in full. Indeed, representations, including the consultation response from Mountaineering Scotland, have raised the economic impact that turbines may have on tourism.

8.36 In response to this concern, the EIAR considers potential impacts on tourism by referencing a 2008 Caledonian University / Moffat Centre study, a 2011 Visit Scotland

study and a Visit Scotland Position Statement of 2017, a 2017 BiGGAR Economics study on the impact of wind farms on tourism, as well as the findings of the Scottish Government's Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee in 2012. The EIAR notes the general consensus in the studies that there is no compelling evidence as a whole to suggest that the visitor economy is materially undermined by windfarm development, and therefore the assessment overall concludes that the development will not negatively impact the tourist economy.

8.37 The EIAR also provides an assessment of the development's likely impacts on specific tourist attractions within 15km of the turbines (listed at EIAR Vol. 1, Chapter 14, paragraph 14.5.13), which it considers most likely to be affected by impacts on visual amenity. The assessment concludes that any visual impacts are unlikely to affect the main features of any attraction, that the presence of wind farms does not deter users from using routes with visibility of wind energy developments, or deter visitors from revisiting an area citing a survey undertaken for Clashindarroch Wind Farm in Aberdeenshire (Gilmorton Rural Development, 2009). The assessment goes on to state that users who find the presence of a wind farm detract from their experience may move on to areas with no clear view of the wind farm, although there is no cited study for this conclusion, and that recreational path users will unlikely be affected due to limited visibility of the development.

8.38 While the Council's own experience has not shown significantly adverse effects from windfarm development on tourism so far, there is little in the literature regarding the potential for a critical mass of development and to conclude whether there is indeed a tipping point where windfarm development will ultimately discourage tourism in Highland. Indeed, the consultation response from Mountaineering Scotland maintains there are no studies of the impact of wind farm developments on non-mountaineering landscapes, except its own analysis of the data used for the 2017 BiGGAR Economics study, which it states shows negative impacts on locally designated landscapes. Similarly, Mountaineering Scotland states that there are no major studies of the impact of wind farm developments upon different segments of the tourism and recreation market, other than its own survey of members that suggested a significant minority of hillwalkers were choosing to avoid areas with wind farms. It is in that context that Mountaineering Scotland's objection on the grounds that the development will result in cumulative negative visual impacts by virtue of significantly increasing the influence of wind energy development within the Ben Klibreck – Armine hills and the Loch Shin Basin is understood. This is because, in Mountaineering Scotland's view, these negative visual impacts are likely to undermine its interest in promoting the area to visitors for hillwalking, and simultaneously undermine its members' interest in returning to the area. The development's visual impact on recreational resources is considered in more detail under the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment section later in this report (Paragraphs 8.82 – 8.144).

Construction Impacts

8.39 It is anticipated that the construction period for the development would take 21 months. Working hours on site would usually be restricted to be 07.00 – 19.00 Monday to Friday, 08.00 – 13.00 on Saturday with no Sunday of Bank Holiday working. Some flexibility is normally granted at turbine erection stage and electrical fit out. Such activities involve specialist labour and are weather dependent and generally do not involve activities that generate impacts beyond the site boundary.

8.40 The EIAR states that the project would deploy a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) although there is no draft CEMP included in the EIAR the applicant has provided a Schedule of Environmental Commitments that will inform the final CEMP. The document would be developed in association with the successful contractor(s) engaged in the project. CEMPs should include site specific environmental management procedures and, as is standard, are finalised and agreed through appropriate planning conditions with the Planning Authority and relevant statutory consultees. Such submissions are expected to be "plan based" highlighting the measures being deployed to safeguard specific local environmental resources and not simply restate best practice manuals. SEPA has not raised any concerns in relation with the pollution prevention and environmental management proposals outlined in the Schedule of Environmental Commitments, which it requires to be included in the CEMP to be secured by condition, although they would control pollution prevention measures relating to surface water run off via a CAR construction site licence due to the scale of the development. In addition, the applicant has stated it will utilise a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) that will be used in conjunction with the finalised CEMP.

8.31 Developers must also comply with reasonable operational practices with regard to construction noise so as not to cause nuisance. Section 60 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 sets restrictions in terms of hours of operation, plant and equipment used and noise levels, amongst other factors, which is enforceable via Environmental Health. The applicant has submitted a construction noise assessment that indicates predicted construction noise levels will be well below maximum permitted levels. It is also expected that the developer and contractors would employ the best practicable means to reduce the impact of noise from construction activities at all times.

8.42 The applicant has sought a lateral micrositing allowance of 50m. Micrositing is acceptable within reason to address unforeseen onsite constraints, anything in excess of 50m may have a significant effect on the composition of a development. Similarly, turbines installed on ground more than 3m AOD above the ground level shown in the information submitted in the EIAR could also have significant landscape and visual impacts and should be avoided. In the event that matters are identified during the application stage that require movement of infrastructure, the Council considers that this is best addressed during the application stage rather than relying on micrositing. In the event the application is granted permission, micrositing of no more than 50m laterally and no more than 3m AOD above the ground level as shown within the EIAR should be secured by condition. The condition should include the caveat that micrositing allowances do not allow construction activities on areas of peat deeper than currently shown in the submitted EIAR, as requested by SEPA. Any requirements to move infrastructure beyond that limit during the construction phase of development would likely require a separate application.

8.43 Additionally, the Council would require the applicant to enter into legal agreements and provide financial bonds with regard to the developer's use of the local road network (Wear and Tear Agreement) and final site restoration (Restoration Bond). In this manner the site can be best protected from the impacts of construction and for disturbed ground to be effectively restored post construction and operational phases. Whether restoration would include the full restoration of new access tracks would be considered when the development is due to be decommissioned however all other associated infrastructure is expected to be restored.

8.44 Finally, should the development be granted consent, a Community Liaison Group should be set up to ensure that Community Councils and other stakeholders are kept up to date and consulted before and during the construction period.

Transport, Roads, and Access

8.45 The Port of Entry of the turbines is likely to be Invergordon, they would then travel from the port of entry via the Council maintained B817 coastal road before turning left into the U4242 unnamed industrial estate distributor road (after Woodside Gardens in Invergordon). From the U4242, the turbines would join the C1063 Academy Road before joining the A9 trunk road at Tomich junction to travel north. From the A9(T), the turbines would join the A839 at The Mound south of Golspie, and proceed to Lairg where loads will turn right on to the A836 and approach the site from the south, before accessing the site at a proposed site entrance on the Dalnessie Estate track.

8.46 Chapter 12: Traffic and Transport of the EIAR provides an assessment of the development's impact on the surrounding road network during the construction, operation, and decommissioning phases, as well as an Abnormal Indivisible Load (AIL) Route Assessment from the Port of Entry to the site. The Study Area for the Traffic Assessment includes the routes between the Port of Cromarty Firth and the A9(T), the A9(T) from Tomich to The Mound, as well as the A839 from The Mound through Lairg, and the A836 from Lairg to the stie access.

8.47 The Port of Cromarty Firth has successfully accommodated turbine deliveries in the past. Temporary mitigation to the load road network out of this area may be required due to the size of the components being transported. A detailed up-to-date structural assessment of bridges, culverts and any other affected structures along the route would be required, in consultation with the Council's Structures Section, along with an unladen AIL run. Following on, a programme of Road Mitigation Schedule of Works should be agreed and carried out by the developer in consultation with the roads authorities. Full details can be included within the Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) should the development be granted consent, while provisions for a review of the route and details agreement details should be secured by condition in the event of a significant time delay between the initial route review and actual transport AIL components.

8.48 In terms of construction traffic, the EIAR assesses potential impact of general construction traffic has been assessed using two scenarios. The first scenario assumes that all construction materials will be sourced from off-site locations, while the second assumes that aggregates for formation, capping, and sub-base materials will be sourced from the two proposed on-site borrow pits, with additional materials sourced from off-site locations. The assessment calculates that the maximum number of daily two-way trips of Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGV) generated during the construction period will be 336 in the first scenario and 50 in the second, while the maximum number of daily two-way trips made by Light Goods Vehicles (LGV) is calculated as 35 in both scenarios. The daily maximum and average HGV trip generation is significantly increased, albeit traffic flow levels are considered to remain within the practical working capacity for the respective road links; that is, the A9(T), A836 (east of Ardgay for scenario 1), and A839. It is assumed that all construction and workforce related traffic will approach the site from the south, while the use of the B917 Struie Road by construction traffic should be prohibited, which should be secured by condition.

8.49 In view of the type and volume of construction traffic that will be generated by the development, Transport Planning expect significant impacts on sections of the local road network. There are likely to be cumulative transport impacts that occur due to the construction of other wind farms including (potentially) Creag Riabhach Wind Farm, currently underway, as well as with the recently consented Lairg 2, Braemore, Sallachy, and Strath Tirry Wind Farms, which also intend to utilise Invergordon Harbour as a landing port. There are other windfarm applications in the wider area currently pending consideration including Garvary Wind Farm adjacent to Lairg II (see Paragraph 4.14), which would require a co-ordinated delivery schedule to reduce any potential significant effects should planning permission be granted.

8.50 Due to the large number of projects impacting on the same areas of the local road network, it is anticipated that a contribution will be required from the developer to deliver upgrades to the road network commensurate with the impact of the development. The emerging Lairg & Central Sutherland – Road Improvement Strategy will guide the scale, scope and extent of road works needed to mitigate the impacts of development traffic in that area. The main routes covered by the draft Strategy will be the A836, A837, A838, A839, A949 and B9176. These roads are vital to the economic stability and growth of the local area and benefit the interests of the local communities, businesses, and developers alike. The Strategy will outline proposed methods of improving the network to address impact on structural integrity and safety standards. It is recognised that no single development can reasonably be expected to upgrade the full length of a particular route to mitigate development impact. It is also considered unreasonable to restrict development until improvements to a route have been completed in full. Roads mitigation to a reasonable and commensurate scale will, therefore, be sought through any development deemed to have a significant impact on the road network. The level of contribution would be identified and agreed with the applicant prior to commencement of development and a mechanism to secure the scheme of improvements can be secured by condition.

8.51 Chapter 12 of the EIAR and the associated Technical Appendix (Volume 3) 12.2: Outline Construction Traffic Management Plan includes details of mitigation measures that would be put in place during the development through a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP), with the aim of reducing conflict between general construction and abnormal load traffic with other road users, as well coordinating with other windfarm developers. Final details of the CTMP, as well as a requirement for a legal agreement to address 'wear and tear' provisions, would be agreed with the Council and Transport Scotland prior to construction starting on site and should also satisfy the requirements of the Police. Any conditions would be consistent with current 'best practice' and seek to secure:

- A risk assessment for transport of abnormal loads during daylight hours and hours of darkness.
- Proposed traffic management and mitigation measures on the abnormal load access route. Measures such as temporary speed limits, suitable temporary signage, road markings and the use of speed activated signs should be considered.
- A contingency plan prepared by the abnormal load haulier. The plan should be adopted only after consultation and agreement with the Police and the respective roads authorities. It should include measures to deal with any haulage incidents that may result in public roads becoming temporarily closed or restricted.
- A detailed protocol for abnormal load movements, prepared in consultation and agreement with interested parties. The protocol should identify any requirement for

convoy working and/or escorting of vehicles and include arrangements to provide advance notice of abnormal load movements in the local media. Temporary signage, in the form of demountable signs or similar approved, should be established, when required. All such movements on Council maintained roads should take place outwith peak times on the network, including school travel times, and should avoid local community events.

- A procedure for the regular monitoring of road conditions and the implementation of any remedial works required during the construction period.
- Details of appropriate traffic management should be established and maintained at the site access for the duration of the construction period. Full details should be submitted for the prior approval of Highland Council, as Roads Authority.
- Measures to ensure that all affected public roads are kept free of mud and debris arising from the development.

8.52 In terms of site access, the site would be accessed from the A836 via the existing Dalnessie Estate track that has recently been upgraded for use during the construction of Creag Riabhach wind farm. The estate track's access junction is located just south of the Feith Osdail Bridge, which does not have capacity to accommodate AIL or heavy loads. The access junction and track will be required to serve all construction traffic including turbine components and, as stated in Chapter 12 of the EIAR, will have to undergo further works to comply with the turbine manufacturer's requirements given the difference in turbine heights (maximum tip height of 200m for the current application compared to Creag Riabhach's 125m). Transport Planning have requested details of appropriate upgrading works at the junction and the public road. Such works may include suitable drainage measures, improved geometry and construction, measures to protect the public road, and the provision and maintenance of appropriate visibility splays. These details can be secured by condition.

8.53 Within the site, 5.9km of existing access track would be used, which will require upgrading and widening works, in addition to 11.12km of new track to turbines, compounds, borrow pits, etc. The running width of the track would be 5.5m on straight sections although up to 7m wide on bends, passing places, and junctions, while shoulders of 1m on either side of the track are also proposed. The tracks will generally be excavated to bedrock with topsoil and peat removed and stored adjacent to the construction area for reinstatement, and the track constructed of layered course and crushed stone. Sections of 'floating roads' would be required where tracks cross appreciable areas of deep peat, otherwise tracks will be laid over the subsoil. The track's layout is designed to take account of the site's topography and other identified constraints in order to minimise environmental disturbance, on areas of deep peat for example, and the need for water crossings.

Recreational Access

8.54 The Dalnessie Estate track is a catalogued Public Right of Way (HS29) and although there are no other Rights of Way or Core Paths within the site, there are multiple opportunities to access the outdoors both within the site and in the wider area including the adjacent WLA 35 Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest. The site and surrounds are subject to the provisions of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, which provides for wider access rights to most land in Scotland.

8.55 There will be a need to restrict public access to certain areas during construction works at key times, including the track upgrade works. However, the applicant has advised that stalking and other recreational activities should still be possible in the vicinity of the site

throughout the construction period. The EIAR does not include a provisional Recreational Access Management Plan, however where and when feasible wider access should be made available for public use during the construction phase for a wide variety of users.

8.56 To ensure access is provided throughout the construction period and that enhanced recreational access opportunities are provided during the operational phase, a Recreational Access Management Plan will be required. The RAMP should show that large pedestrian gates and by-pass gates adjacent to cattle grids should all be "easy open" accesses. All other gates within the application boundary should similarly be unlocked to responsible access takers. The RAMP will be required to include details of signage to be included on the site to warn users of the paths within the wind farm of any hazards such as maintenance or potential ice throw during winter, however the wording should not deter the public. How new track crossings will be constructed in order to minimise disruption while existing tracks are crossed, and how the public will be permitted to use tracks unhindered after this time should also be specified in the RAMP. The visual impact of the development from recreational routes is considered in Paragraphs 8.141 – 8.142 of this report.

Water, Flood Risk, and Drainage,

8.57 As stated, the application site is within the catchments of two rivers; a small portion to the north of the site drains to the River Tirry whereby the more substantial portion of the site drains to the Allt nan Con-uisge, which discharges to the River Brora just to the east of the site boundary. The overall water quality of the River Tirry was assessed as poor in 2014 and 2018, whereas the River Brora was found to be of overall good water quality in both those years. The EIAR has used SEPA's flood mapping to identify the Allt nan Con-uisge and the River Brora as fluvial flood risk sources, although the minor watercourses within the site would likely be too small to be mapped by SEPA's flood mapping. Additionally, areas of peat within the site hold some groundwater known to be slow flowing, while ground and surface water flows generally follow the topography of the site south and west. The groundwater within the site has been assigned as 'Vulnerability Class 4b', which is defined as low permeability soil more likely to have clay present in superficial deposits that is 'vulnerable to those pollutants not readily adsorbed or transformed'. Additionally, Scottish Water has noted in its response that the proposed development site does not fall within any Drinking Water Protected Areas, i.e., a drinking water catchment where a Scottish Water abstractions are located, while the Dalnessie Estate buildings draw their water supply via an abstraction borehole located 1km downstream from the turbine area.

8.58 The EIAR has identified risks, assessed impacts, and offered mitigation measures on hydrology and hydrogeology. The results of the applicant's assessment are outlined in the EIAR, Volume 1, Chapter 10: Geology, Hydrogeology, Hydrology and Peat with a summary of the mitigation measures detailed in the Mitigation segment of the same chapter. Mitigation through design and layout has been used as far as practical, for instance the use of buffers from watercourses, track layout to minimise water crossings, and turbine locations avoiding the deepest peat and wetland habitat. In addition, the EIAR is clear that a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) will be in place. The document would ensure that potential sources of pollution on site can be effectively managed throughout construction and in turn during operation; albeit there will be fewer sources of pollution during operation. The CEMP should be secured by planning condition to ensure the agreement of construction methodologies with statutory agencies following appointment of the windfarm balance of plant contractor and prior to

the start of development or works. During the operational phase, water quality mitigation measures will be included as part of the permanent drainage design as part site's operation.

8.59 To safeguard the water environment in and around the site the applicant has committed to undertake a water quality monitoring programme prior to the construction period and implement an Ecological Management Plan to protect and enhance the ecology and hydrology during the construction phase, including conducting pre-construction surveys, water quality and biodiversity enhancements. It also proposes 50m buffer zones between water sources and development infrastructure; the use of floating roads where peat deposits exceed 1m in areas of deep peat (identified at five potential locations within the site); drainage management including SUDs principles; the appointment of an Ecological Clerk of Works; adhering to pollution prevention measures; and the adoption of good practice construction techniques, which will ensure that the development will not have an effect on local groundwater abstractions. The conclusions of the EIAR are supported subject to conditions.

8.60 The EIAR has identified three potential groundwater-dependent NVC communities within the site: M15 wet heath, M23 rush-pasture and M25 mire. M15 and M25 have potentially moderate groundwater dependency and M23 has potentially high groundwater dependency in certain hydrogeological conditions. Onsite investigations have shown these NVC communities to be sustained by rainfall and surface water runoff rather than ground water. The EIAR advises that impacts to wetland habitats and watercourses should be kept to a practical minimum through use of specific mitigation to avoid changes to the watercourse hydrochemistry through 'flushing' of excavated material in surface runoff, and construction techniques to ensure suitable continuity of flow across site tracks to minimise potential impacts to wetland habitats present. The OHMP also proposes delivery of restoration of wetland habitat, which SEPA considers satisfactory to form the basis of the finalised HMP.

8.61 In terms of flood risk, with the exception of a section of track the development generally avoids the areas highlighted as at risk of flooding by the SEPA mapping. Notwithstanding however, the development would still entail works in connection with watercourses and the water environment and as such a number of measures to mitigate localised flood risks as well as protect the water environment have been highlighted by the applicant following pre-application consultation with SEPA. Mitigation measures include:

- the adoption of sustainable drainage principles to control the rate, volume, and quality of run off from the development, in particular in relation to maintaining flow paths to specific habitats sustained by rainfall and surface water runoff;
- 50m development free buffer zones to be maintained around all water bodies (unless development within the buffer zone provides the best environmental outcome);
- new and replacement watercourse crossings to be constructed of oversized bottomless arched culverts or traditional style bridges to accommodate 1:200 year flood event flows. The EIAR advises that six new watercourse crossings are required, while five regulated crossings have been identified, four of which cross minor watercourses with one crossing the mainstem of the Allt nan Con-uisge; and,
- pollution prevention measures including silt traps, to mitigate against effects of potential chemical contamination, and sediment release.

8.62 In addition, the development proposes the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SDS) to attenuate run off and to filter out any potential pollutants with the SDS designed to withstand rainfall intensity of 1:200 storm event plus climate change, and to achieve post development runoff rates at pre-development standards. For drainage related to permanent infrastructure areas, this would include systems designed to minimise flow concentrations by use of- cut-off drains to divert runoff around 'hard' surfaces, regular cross-drains underneath access tracks, and cambered hard surfaces to encourage drainage into a filter drain or swale for example. Temporary water control measures would also be implemented in relation to larger areas of excavation such as borrow pits, turbine base and hardstanding excavation areas. Such areas, would have settlement ponds to attenuate flow until vegetation can be re-established at the end of the construction period. Long-term drainage infrastructure would be subject to a monitoring and maintenance programme, while works in or in the vicinity of inland surface waters and wetlands, as well as well as management of surface water runoff (including access tracks) will require authorisation under The Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2011 (CAR). Details of the SDS plan can be secured by condition to allow final assessment by SEPA.

8.63 Foul waste from welfare facilities will be removed by tanker for disposal at a licensed facility.

Habitat and Peat

8.64 The application site is made up of Class 1 and Class 2 nationally important carbon-rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat'. These areas form part of the nationally important resource referred to as 'areas of significant protection'. The Phase 1 and NVC survey information provided within the EIA report confirms that the application site consists of nationally important blanket bog and mosaic blanket bog habitat. Table 8.10 within the ecology chapter indicates that the proposal will result in total loss of 59.93ha of this nationally important habitat.

8.65 The NVC survey work shows that some areas of blanket bog are more degraded than others and the majority of the turbines are proposed to be located on either the more degraded M15 blanket bog or better condition M17 blanket bog. Due to the extent of blanket bog habitat on site, there does not appear to be scope for micrositing the infrastructure away from this sensitive habitat. NatureScot therefore advises the applicant to explore whether there is potential to microsite infrastructure away from areas of the better condition M17 blanket bog provided micrositing does not result in turbines moving into areas of deep peat.

8.66 The submission also includes a draft Habitat Management Plan intended to ensure the appropriate and timeous restoration of peatland habitats temporarily removed during construction, at construction compounds and borrow pits for example. NatureScot welcomes the applicant's proposal for blanket bog restoration to compensate for the losses to construction, within the context of an Outline Habitat Management Plan (OHMP). The EIAR states that the blanket bog restoration area is expected to be in the region of 78.7ha however NatureScot does not consider this scale of restoration sufficient to provide adequate compensation for the nature and value of the habitat that will be lost (almost 60ha through direct, 17.62ha, and indirect, 43.19ha, habitat loss) and therefore advises that a much larger restoration area is more appropriate, which is reinforced in RSPB's response. This is because restored habitat will likely take several

decades to reach the quality and function of the habitat lost. NatureScot therefore advises that the additional points below should also be considered within the OHMP:

- proposals for significantly larger restoration area;
- restoration measures should include, but not be confined to: drain blocking, gully blocking, gully reprofiling and revegetation; and,
- the OHMP should include specific measures designed to safeguard the restored area not only from any future wind farm or associated renewables development, but also from sporting management activities such as muirburn and drainage. Details on how impacts will be managed as a result of overgrazing (deer and sheep) should also be included.

8.67 Both NatureScot and RSPB welcome the proposed planting of native woodland within the riparian buffer of the Allt nan Con-uisge provided there is no planting in areas of peat, shallow or deep, while RSPB advises that planting should avoid breeding wader habitats.

8.68 A Peat Landslide Hazard and Risk Assessment and draft Peat Management Plan (PMP) are submitted as part of the EIAR, which have also helped to inform the design of the proposal. The applicant's risk assessment identifies negligible to low risk of peat instability over the majority of the site, with some areas of medium and high risk identified to be avoided or mitigated during construction to reduce the risk to insignificant. This assessment has been audited, with the auditors being generally satisfied with the Desk Based Study however they have requested clarifications from the applicant to conclude whether appropriate and adequate field surveys, peat sampling, and analytical methods have been employed to assess peat stability and associated landslide risks including mitigation. At the time of writing, this information appears to be outstanding.

8.69 With regard the PMP, in its initial response, SEPA sought clarification that the proposed large volume of excavated peat, 81,000CUM, could indeed be reused for restoration in the manner initially proposed by the applicant. Following the submission of the applicant's clarification in relation to use of floating tracks and the resulting reduction in peat and carbon disturbance, and proposed changes for borrow pit restoration, SEPA has withdrawn its holding objection subject to restored peat depths matching surrounding depths and being suitable for the target habitat. This is because the amended OPMP now shows that the volume of peat for peatland restoration has significantly decreased along with additional information that demonstrates onsite peat restoration opportunities and opportunities on the wider estate. SEPA has requested that a finalised Peat Management Plan is secured by condition prior to works commencing on site. The Peat Management Plan should specify how micrositing and other mitigation measures are deployed to minimise peat disturbance (taking account of other environmental sensitivities), including prioritising the use of pre-disturbed land for cable trenches.

Natural Heritage including Ornithology

8.70 The EIAR has identified and assessed the development's likely impacts on designated sites, ornithology, protected species, and ecology. The development is not situated within any sites designated for ecological interests but is close to, and has potential connectivity with, a number of sites that are designated at national and international level. As there is potential for the proposal to impact connected sites designated at a European level (Lairg and Strath Brora, as well as Dornoch Firth and Loch Fleet Lochs SPAs), the application falls within the requirements of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 as amended (the "Habitats Regulations") apply or, for reserved matters, The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Consequently, the Scottish

Government as the competent Authority is potentially required to consider the impact of the proposal on Natura2000 sites through Habitats Regulations Appraisals (Appropriate Assessment), however only where an appraisal is deemed necessary. NatureScot has provided advice in relation to each of the Natura2000 sites including the likelihood of significant effects and subsequent mitigations that may be required, which is summarised below.

8.71 Lairg and Strath Brora SPA is approximately 3km from the application site at Loch Beannach, with the qualifying feature being breeding black-throated divers. However, NatureScot does not consider the proposal likely to have a significant effect on the qualifying interest due to there being no evidence of breeding black-throated divers recorded during the surveys undertaken by the applicant, and only one 'at risk' black-throated diver flight recorded during the 2021 survey. Also, the proposal is approximately 3km from the SPA and therefore will not affect the supporting habitats of black-throated divers. Given the distance from the proposal to the SPA, NatureScot does not consider it likely that the development will result in significant disturbance to black-throated divers during its construction and operational phases.

8.72 Dornoch Firth and Loch Fleet Lochs SPA is approximately 20km north of the application site, with wintering greylag geese being one of its qualifying features. Again, NatureScot does not consider the proposal likely to have a significant effect on the qualifying interest due to there being only six 'at risk' greylag geese flights recorded during the 2020/2021 surveys. NatureScot agrees with the EIAR that the flights recorded are likely to have been of resident birds rather than birds from the SPA population. Additionally, NatureScot does not consider it likely that the development will result in disturbance or displacement of greylag geese due to there being no known feeding sites close to the application site and given its distance from the SPA.

8.73 NatureScot advises that Appropriate Assessments are not required in relation to either Natura2000 site.

8.74 In relation to wider countryside birds (i.e. those not connected to a protected area), NatureScot advises that significant flight activity of golden eagle and hen harrier is likely to have been missed in 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions, as evidenced by the high flight activity recoded for both species during the 2021 surveys, and particularly in March 2021. NatureScot recommends that the Collision Risk Mortality (CRM) calculations for both species are therefore unreliable and should be recalculated by extrapolating data from 2021 onto 2020 with cumulative assessments updated to reflect these figures. This position is reinforced in the response from the RSPB, who consider that the gaps in the 2020 survey, i.e., data for April and May 2020, have missed the most important months to survey as this is the breeding season of most bird species. Its response also consider other gaps in the assessment such as the likelihood of a golden eagle nest closer to the turbine area (within 2-3km) than the report acknowledges, and that therefore further survey work should be undertake in partnership with the Highland Raptor Study Group. Additionally, RSPB's concerns regarding the high predicted collision rate for golden eagle leads it to request the removal of turbines 12, 13, 14 and 15 from the scheme, and that deer carcasses should be removed from the turbine area as a matter of good practice in areas with higher golden eagle activity. Notwithstanding RSPB's response, NatureScot is content that the development is unlikely to result in significant displacement of either golden eagle or hen harrier based on the information submitted. NatureScot also notes the relatively high numbers of snipe and golden plover territories identified in the surveys and queries the lack of an assessment of potential displacement

in relation to these species within the report, which it considers would also inform an assessment of other waders. RSPB's analysis states that the survey suggests that up to 11 golden plover territories (an Annex 1 species) could be displaced by the development representing 0.3% of the NHZ population and that cumulatively with other developments, this figure will be much higher. It therefore recommends that further areas for bog restoration are identified and secured a minimum of 500m from turbine infrastructure, which corresponds with NatureScot's response to the PMP. RSPB also considers the applicant's cumulative assessment to be incomplete as the data from several windfarm applications is not included in the report, but that would be available to the developer. It therefore considers that a revised cumulative assessment should be undertaken with this data. It is also noted however that NatureScot is satisfied with the conclusions drawn for all other bird species within the EIAR and welcomes the mitigation measures outlined in section 9.11 of the EIAR but adds that additional measures may be required pending the updated collision risk modelling results for golden eagle and hen harrier. RSPB have also requested that blasting should not occur during the breeding season.

8.75 Ecological surveys for Badger, Bats, Fish, Freshwater Pearl Mussel, Otter, Pine Marten, Red Squirrel, Water Vole, and Wild Cat. No baseline surveys were carried out for Amphibians, invertebrates, or reptiles, while deer are actively managed by the Dalnessie Estate and so were also excluded from survey work. The surveys report evidence of water vole using the site but no evidence of badger, pine marten, otter, red squirrel, or wild cat. Bat Activity Surveys identified the calls of five species of bats, Common and Soprano Pipistrelles, Noctule, Brown Long-eared, bat, and Myotis bat, although activity was generally low across the site with no favoured roosting or foraging locations identified. Common and Soprano Pipistrelles, as well as Noctule species are considered to be species of higher collision risk however due to the lack of features favoured for roosting, foraging, and commuting along with embedded mitigation by design such as distances between turbines and from favoured features, the overall impact on bat species is considered not significant. NatureScot has welcomed the assessment in relation to protected species and are in agreement with the conclusions reached in the EIAR. The applicant has committed to undertaking further protected species surveys prior to construction activities starting on site as well as securing an Ecological Clerk of Works to supervise ecological impacts of construction activities, and who would have powers to stop works in the event that protected species are impacted by works.

8.76 Due to the Dalnessie Estate's having its own deer management protocols, the applicant has scoped a deer assessment out of the EIAR. However NatureScot advises that the assessment should be undertaken in collaboration with the Dalnessie Estate and the East Sutherland Deer Management Group as any significant impacts may require a Deer Management Strategy to comply with best practice guidance.

Built and Cultural Heritage

8.77 Historic Environment Scotland (HES) advise of likely direct impacts on, as well as impacts on the settings of, the nearby Scheduled Monuments of the Fèith Osdail Valley adjacent to the proposal as a result of construction activities and access tracks. Specifically, the Dalnessie, Settlement N of Feith Osdail (SM4563) and the Cnoc a'Bhreac-leathaid, sheilings and cairnfield 700m NNE of (SM5300) scheduled monuments. The Dalnessie settlement monument comprises settlement features dating from prehistoric to the post-medieval periods, which HES advise maintains its visual relationship to the wider landform despite nearby commercial forestry, while the time depth represented by the monument provides its cultural significance. HES' analysis of

the submitted information considers that turbines will likely be visible in outward views from the monument looking north, and prominent in inward views towards the monument looking north from the valley of the Feith Osdail. As such, there would be an adverse impact on the open and rural character of the monument's setting. However, the proposed turbines would not significantly detract from the ability to understand and appreciate the relationship between the monument and the valley of the Feith Osdail. HES has considered the impact of the access track, which passes approximately 50m south of the monument and will require widening and upgrading, which it considers will have an adverse impact on the setting of the monument as it would interrupt the visual relationship between the monument and the valley of Feith Osdail. Notwithstanding, HES advises that it considers that these effects would have an overall impact on the cultural significance of the monument, it does not consider such impacts to raise concerns of a national level.

8.78 The Cnoc a'Bhreac-leathaid, sheilings and cairnfield monument is of the prehistoric period that also retains its visual relationship with the wider landform despite commercial forestry. HES advises that the monument's relationship with other contemporary monuments in the wider landscape provides it with cultural significance, while its relationship with the valley and its open rural setting provides its sense of place. In consideration of the development's likely impacts on the monument, HES notes the lack of visualisations but advises that the ZTVs shows full visibility of the turbines from the monument, which it considers will be visually dominant in outward views looking northeast towards the Feith Osdail River, views that are currently devoid of forestry. HES considers these views allow for an appreciation and understanding of the monument's relationship to the wider landform and moorland setting of the Feith Osdail Valley. The assessment goes on to state that while the setting of the monument takes in the wider landscape including the moor on which the proposed turbines would be located, the focus of the relationship is with the river rather than the high ground, and as such the ability to understand and appreciate this relationship will be retained. HES also notes that the proposal to widen the access track will likely result in an adverse impact on the setting of the monument as it would further degrade the upland rural character that forms part of the cultural significance of the monument. However, HES does not consider these impacts to raise concerns of a national level.

8.79 HES did request further detail from the applicant with regard mitigation measures to avoid direct impacts such as accidental damage on the scheduled monuments given that no mitigation measures were initially identified for the Dalnessie, Settlement monument and given that HES was unclear that the proposal to fence off the Cnoc a'Bhreac-leathaid asset will avoid the scheduled area and whether Scheduled Monument Consent would be required. This information has since been provided to HES' satisfaction subject to minor qualifications and refinements.

8.80 HES also advises that the development would result in some adverse impacts on the setting of The Ord, chambered cairns, cairns, settlements, and field systems (Scheduled Monument, SM1812) and the Sallachy, broch 425m NNE of Fruchan Cottage (Scheduled Monument, SM1883), but agree that these impacts would not be significant.

8.81 In terms of archaeology, The Council's Historic Environment Team (HET) considers the EIAR Cultural Heritage Chapter 7 to be comprehensive with the proposed mitigation expected to limit the direct impacts to historic assets to within an acceptable limits. The document proposes to record enclosure walls and sheepfolds prior to development activities in those areas, along with monitoring and recording of groundworks for Turbine

16. HES advises that care must be taken in regard to the scheduled monument, SM5300, with mitigation measures to include demarcation of the monument area to ensure its avoidance, as well as site inductions including information on it and other historic assets. Provided the mitigation described in Section 7.7 of the EIAR is secured by condition, HES and HET have confirmed they have no objections to the application.

Design, Landscape and Visual Impact (including Wild Land)

8.82 The applicant has presented a number of submissions to illustrate the landscape and visual impact of the development both singularly and cumulatively with existing and consented windfarm developments. To this end, the EIAR includes a description of the design process, along with assessments against Landscape Character Areas, Special Landscape Area Citations, and Descriptions of Areas of Wild Land. A total of 12 viewpoints across a study area of 45km have also been assessed. These viewpoints are representative of a range of receptors including communities, recreational users of the outdoors, and road users. The viewpoints are considered sufficient to enable an assessment of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) and for the Planning Authority to come to a conclusion of the likely landscape and visual impacts.

8.83 The methodology for the LVIA follows that set out in Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third Edition (GLVIA3). As set out in para 3.32 of GLVIA 3 the "LVIA should always clearly distinguish between what are considered to be significant and non-significant effects." Technical Appendix 6 sets out the methodology of assessing significance of effect following judgements of the: Sensitivity of the Receptor, which includes a judgement of the susceptibility of the receptor against the value of the host landscape / view; Magnitude of Change, which includes a judgement of the size and scale of the development's effect as experienced by the receptor, the geographical extent of the effect, the duration of the effect within the landscape / view, and, the reversibility of the effect of the development; and finally, the Level of Effect, based on a combination of judgements based on the Sensitivity of the Receptor against the Magnitude of Change. The Level of Effect is attributed as either negligible, minor, moderate, or major, according to the definitions provided in the Technical Appendix 6 of the EIAR based on a final professional judgement rather than utilising a matrix to divulge the final result. Following on, significant effects are ascribed to moderate and major levels of effect. The methodology for the LVIA as described is sufficiently clear to follow the applicant's logic, whereby any discrepancies of the applicant's final assessment of significance of effect between viewpoints where the sensitivity of the receptor and magnitude of change are otherwise the same is explained within the text of the viewpoint analyses, which are provided in Tables 6.8 - 6.13 for Landscape Character Types (LCT), 6.14 for Designated Landscapes (Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA), and 6.15 – 6.26 for Viewpoint Assessments, of Chapter 6 of the EIA Main Report and summarised in Table 6.29. THC's visual impact assessments at each viewpoint are provided in Appendix 2 below.

8.84 By way of additional notes on the EIAR assessment parameters, the following should also be noted. For the applicant, high susceptibility of visual receptors corresponds to local residents and recreational users focussed on an appreciation of the landscape qualities such as hillwalkers, visitors to heritage assets and other attractions, other formal stopping places on scenic routes for example. Medium Sensitivity corresponds with users engaged in outdoor activities with some appreciation of landscape qualities such as cyclists, users of footpaths / rights of way, and golfers for example. In contrast however, the Council considers recreational users moving through the landscape at

slower speeds, such as cyclists, as having a high susceptibility to wind energy development. Low Susceptibility corresponds with visual receptors where appreciation of the landscape is incidental to the activity such as those engaged in work or using fast moving transport such as commuter trains or trunk roads, however the Council considers that passengers of faster moving vehicles may also be susceptible to changes in the view and visual amenity.

8.85 The Council considers landscape and visual impact using the Criterion set out in Section 4 of the Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance, with the Council's assessment against the criterion and view as to whether the threshold set out in the guidance is met or not, is contained in Appendix 3 to this report. Furthermore, landscape and visual impacts of the proposed development may be reversible as the scheme would be capable of being decommissioned as stated within the EIAR. However, as set out in Scottish Planning Policy (Paragraph 170) and Policy 11 of the revised draft NPF4 at clause (f), windfarm sites should be suitable in perpetuity. Therefore, it is considered reasonable to assess the duration of all landscape and visual effects as non-reversible in that context.

Siting, Layout, and Design

8.86 Chapter 2 of the EIAR sets out the criteria used for site selection, as well as the design evolution from the initial iteration of 20 turbines at the Scoping stage in 2020, through the pre-planning application request for 16 turbines also in 2020, and subsequent gate check request, to the current submission.

8.87 The applicant was advised at the pre-application stage that the key considerations for the design process would be to mitigate the development's impacts on Natural, Built, and Cultural Heritage resources, peat, the water environment, residential, and visual amenity. In addition, the applicant was advised to ensure that landscape and visual impacts are within acceptable limits including on landscape designations and during the hours of darkness from aviation lights, and that the development should respect local distinctiveness and the pattern of wind energy in Sutherland.

8.88 The EIAR sets out that a constraints-based approach was applied to site selection, which included criteria such as avoidance of SPP Group 1 and 2 areas with national and international landscape and natural heritage designations, landscape character, distance from residential properties, feasibility of grid connection amongst others. Ultimately the EIAR does not state the specific reasons for the application site's selection however does advise that the landowner was interested in accommodating a development on the estate. Section 2.7 of Chapter 2 of the EIAR sets out how the applicant has sought to navigate sensitive natural, heritage, peat, and amenity constraints through the placement of turbines, access tracks, and other infrastructure. Changes to the proposal include the reduction from a wind optimised 20 turbines of maximum 200m height to tip, to 16 turbines, four of which have been reduced to 180m ground to tip height (T12, T13, T14, and T15), along with the repositioning of turbines, access track, and infrastructure as a result of onsite surveys and feedback from the Council, NatureScot, and SEPA, during the Scoping, pre-application, and gatechecking stages of development. However, as the applicant was advised at the pre-application stage, the site's location, elevation, size, and topography present challenges for the scheme's design in terms of landscape character, and visual impact effects, when considered against landscape designations, susceptible receptors, and views within the wider area. Consequently, the residual

effects of the final design iteration on key landscape and visual impact issues require further consideration.

8.89 To that end it has become increasingly important to consider the context in which wind farm development is seen and subsequent cumulative effects. Of particular importance is how developments relate to each other in design and relationship to their surroundings; their frequency when moving through the landscape; and their visual separation to allow experience of the character of the landscape in between. Care and attention are therefore required regarding design, siting and location to avoid detrimental impacts. NatureScot's Siting and Designing Wind Farms in the Landscape Guidance notes that it can be particularly challenging to accommodate multiple wind farms in an area, and so advances windfarm design objectives of limiting visual confusion and reinforcing the appropriateness of each development for its location.

8.90 In this instance, the proposal site is located in an area north of Lairg and east of Strath Tirry that has remained relatively free of wind farm development in comparison to Glen Cassley, Achany Glen, and East Sutherland; landscapes in the wider area that host their own clusters of wind energy developments. Beginning with the approval of Creag Riabhach in 2016 (HC ref. 14/00004/S36) by Scottish Ministers and the recent approval of Strath Tirry by the Highland Council's North Planning Application's Committee, the A836 corridor of Central Sutherland between Lairg and Altnaharra is now potentially viewed as having been opened up to appropriately sited and designed wind energy developments. Until the approval of the Strath Tirry Wind Farm, this would not have been the case as development in this area would have not accorded with the established pattern of development to the southwest, west and southeast of Loch Shin. Indeed, Dalnessie Wind Farm, who's nearest turbine was sited less than 3km to the northwest of the nearest Chleansaid turbine, was objected to by NPAC Members due to its impacts on the local landscape, scenic, WLA resources, reflecting the value elected Members placed on keeping that area turbine free at that time.

8.91 Nevertheless, while the application site is some 14km southeast of Creag Riabhach, it is 4.6km from Strath Tirry Wind Farm (between turbines), which is located within the commercial forestry that forms the application site's western boundary. While the separation distance from Creag Riabhach, and that development's relative isolation, ensure that those schemes maintain their respective landscape settings, the distinction is less clear cut with Strath Tirry given their proximity, the connecting forestry, and their shared backdrop of the Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire Special Landscape Area (SLA) as viewed by a range of receptors. The location of the development between the aforementioned commercial forestry and the adjacent Wild Land Area (WLA) 35 – Ben Klibreck-Armine Forest, the boundary of which borders that of the application site may affect the qualities of the wild land area. While the relative set-back of the development from the public A836 road would generally be a positive factor of site selection in other circumstances, in this instance it may cause conflict with the qualities of the WLA.

8.92 The selected location for the turbines is both the northeast and southwest facing banks of the Allt nan Con-uisge with the turbines laid out in an irregular arrowhead formation with the tip pointing towards the northwest and an inconsistent plan of one, two, and three loose rows. The northwest perimeter turbines (Turbines 12-16) respond to the the ridgetop of Leathad Chleansaid beyond which the landform slopes down again forming a depression before rising to the summit of Sròn Leathad Chleansaid north of the turbines. The topography of the site is to the scheme's advantage however as the large turbines are relatively contained by the localised landform, which means that the scheme

does not appear to spread on, over, or around multiple summits. Similarly, the applicant has used the different turbine heights of 180m and 200m, responding to the topography of the site providing a relatively consistent turbine elevation across the development from mid-distant to distant views (e.g., Viewpoints 2, 3, and 5), in line with NatureScot guidance. Similarly, subject to the relocating and/or removal of outlier turbines to 'tidy-up' the scheme by reducing its perceptible spread (Turbines 1 and 16), the composition of the scheme is generally considered acceptable from most viewpoints with relatively consistent turbine groupings giving the array a consistent rhythm and overall cohesiveness, while there are relatively few instances of stacking from the more public views. The compositional success of the array is despite the inconsistency of the plan form.

8.93 However, while the irregular layout would correspond with the settlement pattern of wind energy development in the wider area around Lairg such as the approved Lairg II Wind Farm, until the approval of Strath Tirry Wind Farm, there was no wind farm development associated with the specific receiving upland Landscape Character Area (LCA) north of Lairg, which lies between Strath Tirry to the west and Strath Brora to the east. The Chleansaid proposal will essentially dwarf the four turbines of the Strath Tirry Wind Farm, its nearest scheme, in terms of turbine numbers (sixteen compared to four), turbine spread, tip heights (up to 200m compared to 135m), hub heights (up to 118.5m compared to 77.8m), and rotor diameters (up to 163m compared to 117m). Given the proximity of the two sites, Chleansaid would be viewed in combination with Strath Tirry Wind Farm from many locations where the development would be visible. However, the contrast in scales is not so discordant that it would be considered unacceptable with the generally proportions of the turbines being consistent. Additionally, the proposed turbine heights would so far only be consistent with the approved Lairg II and Strathy South Wind Farm schemes in the wider area, with the proposed development assessed for cumulative impacts against the first but generally not the latter due to distance and intervening topography. It is noted that the three turbines of Lairg I have tip and hub heights of 100m and 60m respectively, and rotor diameters of 80m. The Council has not raised an objection against the proposed Achany Extension Wind Farm (HC reference 21/03695/S36, 17.5km southwest of the Chleansaid site) subject to securing an amendment to reduce the number of turbines from 20 to 18. These turbines would be 149.9m ground to tip height, consistent with the tip heights of the approved Sallachy Wind Farm to the west of Loch Shin. The development would be broadly in keeping with the majority of developments within the area, allowing for the changes of scale that have come with development technology. Creag Riabhach shares similar siting in terms of landscape character, as do the schemes at Gordonbush and Kilbraur further east, all being at locations on the transition between Sweeping Moorland and Flows and Rounded Hills have become characteristic.

8.94 The positives to the siting, layout, and design of the scheme, are acknowledged in the following sections, which generally set out that the site is considered suitable for the development of a wind farm in landscape and visual terms, with exception of matters related to Wild Land Area impacts. Overall, it is considered that the design of the proposal has sought to respond to the topography of its location. However, it is noted that the scheme's relationship with Strath Tirry Wind Farm is poor, with that scheme amplifying any locational constraints in terms of negative landscape and visual impacts. However, the assessment generally considers that these impacts on landscape and visual resources could be significantly reduced if the design were to be further refined, specifically with regard to the appearances of Turbines 1 and 16 in a number of views.

Landscape Impacts

8.95 Landscape character is the distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occurs consistently in a particular type of landscape, and the way that this pattern is perceived. Effects on landscape character occur both on the site, where the pattern of elements that characterise the landscape will be directly altered by the addition of the proposed development to the landscape; and off-site, where visibility of the proposed development may alter the way in which this pattern of elements is perceived. With that in mind, there are several aspects to consider in determining whether a development represents an acceptable degree of impact on landscape character, including:

- impacts on the local landscape composition closer to the development;
- impacts on the Landscape Character Area (LCA) as a whole and on neighbouring LCAs; and,
- compliance with THC Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance as it relates to Landscape Sensitivity.

8.96 The development site sits at the boundary of two Landscape Character Areas. The first LCA is characterised of sloping forestry, undulating plateau, and high interior hills above Strath Tirry in the west, Strath Vagastie / Loch Naver to the north, Strath Skinsdale to the east, and Strath Brora to the south. The hills in the area range from 375m AOD in the south to the higher mountain summits of Ben Klibreck (962m AOD), Creag na h-Iolaire (694m AOD), Meall nan Aighean (695m AOD), Ben Armine (705m AOD), and Creag Mhor (713m AOD) that sweep around the north, northwest, and west of the LCA, which is an exposed upland moorland area. This LCA forms a western part of a much larger LCA of interior upland moorland and sweeping strath that rises above the coastal towns of East Sutherland and extends to Strath Fleet in the south, and Strath Kildonan or Strath Ullie (River Helmsdale) to the northeast. The larger LCA plays host to the Kilbraur and Gordonbush wind farm clusters of Southeast Sutherland located some distance east of the application site. The current scheme would be located within the sloping open moorland to the southwest of the localised LCA adjacent to the sloping forestry that defines its western edge, and at the western edge of the larger LCA as described.

8.97 The neighbouring LCA is an expansive, open, and low lying strath landscape of agricultural fields, forestry, and moorland that runs northwest along the eastern banks of Loch Shin through Strath Tirry. This LCA is encircled by higher ground including the upland moorland and higher summits described above, as well as the rough and rugged high terrain of distant mountains and massifs, which the Rounded Hills form the foothills of, to the northwest of the application site. While the LCAs each contain distinct, recognisable, and consistent landscape elements, the forested slopes to the east of Strath Tirry would define their shared and overlapping boundary.

8.98 The LCA contexts as described above contain a number of different patterns of landscape elements that define several Landscape Character Types as identified by NatureScot's National Mapping: 1) Sweeping Moorland and Flows (LCT134), in which the majority of turbines are located (Ts 1-11); 2) Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland (LCT135), in which the northern-most turbines are located (Ts 12-13); and, 3) Strath – Caithness and Sutherland (LCT142), which, together with the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT, forms the single LCA unit described in the previous paragraph that provides the setting that the development will be experienced from western views, either against or from within, whereby this LCA foregrounds the proposed turbines. Ben

Klibreck to the north of the application site falls into LCT138 Lone Mountains, while the higher ground to the northwest described above falls into LCT139 Rugged Mountain Massif - Caithness & Sutherland, which includes Ben Hee (873m AOD) and Ben More Assynt (998m AOD). Additionally, the LCT that contains Lairg is LCT145 Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting. The applicant's assessment has scoped out assessments of the development's landscape impacts on LCT139 Rugged Mountain Massif - Caithness & Sutherland due to distances of over 20km to the proposal site.

8.99 LCT134 – Sweeping Moorland and Flows is described as a low lying landform (generally below 350m AOD) that is gently sloping or undulating with occasional isolated low hills and where, in some parts including the application's adjacent LCA, coniferous forest forms a dominant characteristic of the landscape, particularly at the more modified outer fringes. These outer fringes are also the location of farms, field boundaries, and improved agricultural grazing that denote settlement within the LCT. The lower lying turbines of Creag Riabhach, as well as turbines of Gordonbush, Gordonbush, Gordonbush Extension, Kilbraur, Kilbraur Extension and Strathy North Wind Farms are be located in this LCT. The applicant has judged the susceptibility of the LCT as Medium, the LCT's value as Medium-high, and overall sensitivity as Medium-high in large part due to the presence of highly valued landscape designations and conflicting degrading elements such as commercial forestry as well as wind farm development at the LCT's margins, a pattern of development that Chleansaid will repeat. The applicant has judged the development's overall landscape impacts to reduce over distance, and therefore of a Large scale at the development site, reducing to small scale beyond 5km, with the turbines being of a Medium geographical extent and therefore representing a High Magnitude of Change on the LCT at the application site, reducing to Medium within 5km, and Medium-low beyond 5km. The Level of Effect is therefore judged to be Major and Significant at the site, Moderate and Significant within 5km, dropping to Minor and Not significant beyond. This assessment of (singular) significance is accepted by the Council's Landscape Officer.

8.100 LCT135 Rounded Hills - Caithness and Sutherland describes the site's specific LCA as *'…more subtly rolling hills and moorland..*[with] [o]*ccasional pockets of flatter wet peatland and more gently sloping ground occur within these areas. Some of the hills fringing these more subdued areas are often prominent in views from adjoining settled Straths…despite being relatively low.*' The LCT hosts some of the under construction turbines of Creag Riabhach Wind Farm and turbines within Gordonbush, Gordonbush Extension, Rosehall, Achany, Lairg, Kilbraur and Kilbraur Extension Wind Farms. The applicant has judged the susceptibility of the LCT to windfarm development as Medium due to its strong sense of wildness, as reflected by the presence of WLAs, and presence of regionally valued SLAs, but that however, the simplicity of the landscape reduces its susceptibility to wind farm development while the LCT's fringes are also degraded by forestry and host wind energy development. Given that the development will have direct impacts on the LCT at the site, these are judged to be of a Large scale, reducing to a Medium scale within 5km outside of the site due to containment and separation provided by topography. The development's scale on the LCT is judged to reduce to Small beyond 5km by virtue of being visible on higher Chleansaid facing slopes in combination with other turbine development. The geographic extent is judged as Medium with Magnitude of Change for the LCT judged to be High, Medium, and Low relative to the application site, between the site and 5km, and beyond 5km respectively. Consequently the singular Level of Effect is assessed as Major and Significant, Moderate and Significant, and, Minor and Not significant for the same distances. The singular assessment of significance and that Chleansaid will be 'in keeping with the broader strategic existing

pattern of wind farm development across this LCT, situated on lower rolling hills and avoiding designated landscapes' are accepted. However, it is noted that area of the proposal site within LCT135 does not currently host wind farm development.

8.101 The applicant has included an assessment of LCT138 – Lone Mountains based largely on the impact of the development on Ben Klibreck (Viewpoint 8). This is a rare and occasional LCT with NatureScot describing some of the character elements of Lone Mountains as, '*Largely uninhabited, creating a distinct sense of remoteness, although some of its peaks attract significant numbers of hill walkers, especially during the summer months'* and, *'Peaks offer extensive views of the surrounding area including the distinctive watery landscapes of the Flows.*' The applicant's assessment acknowledges that while the strong qualities of remoteness and isolation are reduced by long distance views towards human influence, Chleansaid will extend the influence of wind farm development and would likely therefore alter the sense of remoteness. In this instance, however, Creag Riabhach Wind Farm will be the closer wind farm exerting the greater influence on the LCT. Consequently the applicant judges the Level of Effect of the development on the LCT to be Minor and Not Significant following its conclusion that the proposal will result in a Small scale of landscape change, over a Medium geographical extent and a Low Magnitude of Change, despite the LCT's High Value, and High Susceptibility and Sensitivity to wind farm development.

8.102 The nearer area of LCT142 – Strath – Caithness and Sutherland is the pocket previously noted to the north of Lairg on the eastern shore of Loch Shin, which, based on the ZTV, would be the only Strath LCT that the development would be visible from. Straths have different characteristics as noted in NatureScot's description as, '*Straths range from fairly straight deeply incised troughs to more winding valleys with a number of minor side glens.*' Whereby, '*the degree of enclosure of the strath is dependent on the height and steepness of containing hill slopes*…[or] *are more open where they border the lower and more gently undulating Seeping Moorland and Flows or are associated with larger loch basins.*' The nearer Strath would fall into the latter descriptor. The applicant's assessment notes that there are no designations within this fragment of the LCT although other units are covered by SLA so concludes that the value of the LCT is Medium to Low, with the Low value likely ascribed to the nearer unit, although this is not explicitly stated. The susceptibility to wind farm development is increased because the of the LCT playing host to different landcovers and land uses including agriculture, forestry, and moorland within a relatively small area. Consequently the Sensitivity is assessed to be Medium-high. Given that the development has no direct impacts on the LCT, the scale of impact is considered Medium-small to Small, with a Small geographical extent. The Magnitude of Change is considered to be Medium-low for areas of the Strath LCT with open views towards the Development, and Low for forested areas. The Level of Effect overall therefore is judged to be Minor and Not significant, with the Council's Landscape officer agreeing with this significance of effect.

8.103 Due to relative distances, the applicant has judged the scale of the development's impact as Small over a Small geographic extent with a Low Magnitude of change for LCT 145 – Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting, for which the Level of Effect is judged to me Minor and Not significant. The Council's Landscape Officer is broadly in agreement with the LVIA's analysis with regard Landscape Character and the significance of the development's effects on the Landscape Character Types described above, however notes that the development's principle Cumulative Landscape impacts arise in association with the consented Strath Tirry wind farm. This is because the of anomalous relationship of Strath Tirry Wind Farm to the landscape whereby other the tendency for

wind farm developments in the Study Area is to be associated with the margin between Sweeping Moorland and Flows and Rounded Hills, as is the proposed Development, or sit entirely within the Rounded Hills landscape Character Type. Strath Tirry, by contrast, is sited more centrally in the wide shallow bowl of the Sweeping Moorland and Flows and Strath Landscapes, which is bounded at its edges by the rising ground of the Rounded Hills LCT. This positioning means that Strath Tirry is seen from more developed areas in association with a wilder backdrop, but from the wilder and more remote hill landscapes looking back the development can seem more closely associated with the more domestic scale elements of the landscape. Chleansaid, by virtue of being located at the transition between the Rounded Hills and Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCTs, presents a more consistent relationship with the landscape.

8.104 It is noted that the LVIA places some reliance for mitigation of cumulative effects on the 'gap' between Strath Tirry and the Development however, there are locations from where the relationship between Strath Tirry and the Proposed development will increase the prominence of wind energy in the landscape largely as a result of the location of Strath Tirry rather than this proposal. For example, as viewed from Viewpoint 4 (Dalchork Bird Hide), the development would be seen partially screened by the slopes that rise in front of the turbines, which form a bounding edge to this part of the Sweeping Moorland and Flows Landscape Character type in its transitional zone with the Rounded Hills. This relationship with these slopes allows the turbines to be mostly read as being seen from within a space that they are physically located outwith. Cumulatively, the presence of T16 emerging from this fold in the landscape greatly increases the visual connection with Strath Tirry Wind Farm, linking the otherwise separate spaces and landscape character areas they sit within. Whereas Strath Tirry Straddles the junction between Strath, and, Sweeping Moorland and Flows, Chleansaid straddles the boundary between Sweeping Moorland and Flows and Rounded Hills, between them they create an impression of a continuum of development connecting all three landscape character types. This effect could be noticeably weakened if T16 were removed or relocated.

8.105 From Viewpoint 10 (Reay - Cassley WLA Ben Sgeireach), Strath Tirry Wind Farm presents poorly in the cumulative composition in landscape terms by virtue of emphasising the relationship of Chleansaid to the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT rather than the Rounded Hills LCT. From this Viewpoint, the relationship of Chleansaid with Strath Tirry WF would be improved by increasing the clear ground between them, which could be achieved by repositioning T1 to render the array more compact and contained. Drawing back T16 would also improve the relationship of the array to the landscape as the development would be associated more with the less differentiated Rounded Hills in its background than those which rise towards Ben Armine and Ben Klibreck.

8.106 Proposal relates well to the existing landscape setting but does, to a degree, increase the perceived visual prominence of consented wind turbines at Strath Tirry, otherwise it is considered that the landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is respected and the proposal achieves the threshold of Criterion 9. Similarly, the integrity and variety of landscape character areas are considered to be maintained by the proposal, such that the distinctiveness of landscape character is respected, as required by Criterion 10.

Wild Land

8.107 No element of the proposed development is within a Wild Land Area; however it shares its eastern boundary with WLA 35 Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest (as represented by VPs

8 & 9, and WLA Dusk VP1) with the closest turbine being approximately 0.5km this boundary. WLA37 – Foinaven – Ben Hee (represented by VP11, and WLA Dusk VP3) is less than 10km northwest of the site, and WLA34 – Reay – Cassley (represented by VPs 10 & 12, and WLA Dusk VP2) 10km west. It is considered that Paragraph 215 of Scottish Planning Policy '*development* [in Wild Land] *may be appropriate in some circumstances*' does not apply, but that the general test considering the effects on Wild Land as set out in Paragraph 169 of SPP and reflected in Policy 67 of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan and the Onshore-Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance, does. The policy requires a consideration of the impacts from the introduction of turbines and other infrastructure on views from the Wild Land Area, as well as a consideration of the impact of a dominant contemporary land use on the perceptual qualities of 'wildness'. The draft NPF4 submitted to Scottish Ministers on 08 November 2022 appears to reduce the status of Wild Land Areas however by providing for a general presumption in favour of developments that will support meeting renewable energy targets within Wild Land Areas, while there will be no consideration of buffer zones around WLAs and the impact from development outwith a WLA on the qualities of a WLA will not be given significant consideration. There are no further qualifications within draft NPF4 other than a requirement for applications to be accompanied by WLA assessments demonstrating that significant impacts are minimised, which reads as contradictory given the scale of development that contributes to meeting renewable energy targets such as wind and solar farm developments.

8.108 Notwithstanding the draft NPF4 however, it remains appropriate to consider the proposal against NatureScot's published descriptors for the relevant Wild Land Areas (WLA), which were published in January 2017 and describe the Wild Land qualities for each of the WLAs based on the particular combinations of the Wild Land attributes and qualities when experienced by receptors within each WLA. The applicant has undertaken an assessment of the development's likely impacts on Wild Land for the three WLAs listed above based on the descriptors of each as well as other NatureScot guidance documents, which is included in the LVIA Technical Appendix 6 of the EIAR. Figure 6.1.5b provides the predicted Zone of Theoretical Visibility overlayed over the WLA boundaries, with the applicant's study area for each WLA also shown on the plan. NatureScot's response to the ECU advises that it considers the applicant's WLA assessments to be thorough and to appropriately follow its guidance, but that the WLA Dusk visualisations under-represent the intensity of the predicted aviation lighting proposed. NatureScot's own assessment is solely focused on the development's impacts on WLA35 – Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest however due to the proposal's location adjacent to it, which has subsequently led to NatureScot objecting to the application on the grounds of the development's likely significant effects on the WLA, which in NatureScot's opinion, cannot be readily mitigated. NatureScot's assessment is summarised below while the assessments of WLAs 37 and 34 are the Council's.

8.109 The Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest (WLA 35) consists of an area of land that extends across central Sutherland between the settlements of Lairg, Altnaharra and Kinbrace. It comprises of a series of round-topped hills and plateaus as well as an extensive area of undulating peatland and lochans that reflect the effects of glaciation. The Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SPA is located within the WLA recognising its scenic value. The WLA is represented by VPs 8 (Ben Klibreck, Meall nan Con) & 9 (Ben Armine), and WLA Dusk VP1 (Ben Klibreck WLA Track to Loch Choire) in the EIAR. The citation for the WLA lists the following Wild Land Qualities (WLQ):

- WLQ1 - An awe-inspiring simplicity of landform and landcover and a perception of 'emptiness', so that the extent of the peatland often seems greater than it is.

- WLQ2 - Arresting, isolated mountains rise up in stark contrast to surrounding peatland and glens, amplifying the awe-inspiring qualities of each.
- WLQ3 - A remote interior where access involves long distances and lengthy time via penetrating glens or crossing over and around rugged landforms and waterbodies.
- WLQ4 - An extensive area of peatland with a prevailing strong sense of naturalness.
- WLQ5 - A secluded, elevated and remote interior plateau shielded by an outer rim of hills, in which there is a strong sense of solitude, sanctuary and risk.

8.110 In its response, NatureScot concludes that '*the Chleansaid proposal along the south west margins of WLA35 would introduce a substantial degree of new visibility into areas that do not currently experience wind farm development at close proximity (the nearest visible turbines being Lairg at 13km and Achany & Rosehall at 17km from the WLA). These new areas affected by the proposal are largely within the interior plateau of the WLA where currently there is a sense of openness and resulting strong sense of awe and perception of naturalness, which are key physical and perceptual responses that underpin WLQ1. The turbines would appear as prominent human artefacts which would greatly impose on the high sense of remoteness and resulting sanctuary, solitude and risk all key physical and perceptual responses that underpin WLQ5. We therefore advise that there would be significant effects on two of the five wild land qualities (WLQ 1 & WLQ 5) identified for this WLA primarily as a result of daytime visibility due to the location and height of the turbines. In our view these effects cannot be readily mitigated and we therefore object to the proposal.*' The response goes on to conclude that these impacts would be compounded by aviation lighting, particularly in relation to WLQ5. The proposal is not considered significantly detrimental to WLQs 2-4 however. The full assessment is provided in NatureScot's response to the Energy Consents Unit and is available online. The assessment is not disputed by the Council.

8.111 The Foinaven – Bee Hee (WLA 37) consists of an area of land that extends across north west Sutherland, extending from the peatlands of Crask in the southeast to the mountain of Foinaven in the north west. The WLA scenic qualities are recognised by its inclusion in part within the North-West Sutherland NSA. The corresponding visualisations are VP 11 (Ben Hee) and WLA Dusk VP3 (Track to Loch Sgeireach).

- WLQ1 - Towering, rugged mountains, highlighted by their prominent rock covering, that appear awe-inspiring and contribute to a strong sense of naturalness.
- WLQ2 - A remote, secluded interior with very few human elements and a strong perception of sanctuary and solitude.
- WLQ3 - A variety of shelves, corries and basins carved into the mountain landforms that harbour a strong sense of sanctuary and solitude- some with lochs, rivers and waterfalls.
- WLQ4 - A complex mix of towering and arresting crags, cliffs and knolls with a predominance of bare rock, conveying a strong sense of naturalness.
- WLQ5 - Long straths and glens that penetrate far into the interior – some with tracks or paths, that provide access through the landscape.
- WLQ6 - Extensive peatland slopes that appear awe-inspiring in their simplicity and contrast to neighbouring mountains, and allow wide open views of the surrounding area.

8.112 WLQs 3 and 5 are scoped out of the applicant's assessment. The assessment summarises that proposal will introduce new visibility of wind energy development to very limited areas, with Creag Riabhach exerting the most influence within the WLA due to its proximity, while the Zone Of Theoretical Visibility shows the visibility of Chleansaid is limited to east facing slopes and summits in the southern part of the WLA. Consequently it is not considered that any of the qualities will be significantly impacted by the development, which is in agreement with the applicant's assessment.

8.113 Reay - Cassley WLA 34 consists of an area of land that extends across the north west Sutherland from Scourie in the north to Rosehall in the south. The area comprises moorland to the north, a high and irregular mountain range within the central section, and simpler peatland slopes in the south. WLA 37 It is noted that the recently approved Sallachy Wind Farm of nine turbines is within the WLA, located in an elevated position on the western slopes of Loch Shin. The ZTV (Figure 6.1.2b) shows Chleansaid will be visible from the east facing slopes above the western shore of Loch Shin, which forms the southeast limb of the WLA. Visibility within Glencassley to the west is intermittent and limited to higher ground of east facing slopes. The visibility within this largely corresponds to that of Sallachy Wind Farm. This WLA is represented by VPs 10 (Reay - Cassley WLA Ben Sgeireach), 12 (Ben More Assynt), and WLA Dusk VP2. NatureScot has not provided an assessment of effects for this WLA.

- WLQ1 - A range of large, irregular, rocky mountains with steep, arresting slopes and a variety of lochs and lochans, possessing a strong sense of naturalness, remoteness and sanctuary.
- WLQ2 - An awe-inspiring, broad scale expanse of cnocan in which there is a complex pattern of features at a local level that contribute to the sense of naturalness and sanctuary.
- WLQ3 - A variety of spaces created by irregular landform in which there is a perceived naturalness, as well as a strong sense of sanctuary and solitude.
- WLQ4 - Extensive, elevated peatland slopes whose simplicity and openness contribute to a perception of awe, whilst highlighting the qualities of adjacent mountains.

8.114 Officers consider that Chleansaid would extend the influence of turbines north of Lairg in views looking out from the WLA eastward over the basin of Loch Shin, particularly from the WLA's south eastern limb on the east side of the ridge that separates Loch Shin from Glen Cassley. Chleansaid would be experienced in tandem with the settled landscape in these views, as well as more distant turbine developments, so in and of itself it would not lead to a loss of the qualities of a sense of naturalness, remoteness, solitude, or sanctuary. Consequently, Chleansaid is not considered to result in significant effects on WLQs 1-3, and indeed the applicant has scoped out an assessment of WLQ2 from the EIAR. With regard WLQ4, the turbines will further deteriorate enjoyment from the WLA of the qualities of the receiving LCA as described in paragraph 8.96 above, which includes the Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland LCT135, and the Lone Mountains LCT138 that form it, and which also form WLA35 Ben Klibreck – Amine Forest, and, SLA8 Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA. This is because the turbines are of a much larger scale and prominence from these views than even the closer turbines of Strath Tirry Wind Farm, with which the scheme will interact to disrupt views of not only Ben Klibreck, but also Creag na h-Iolaire, Meall nan Aighean, Ben Armine, and Creag Mhor. Indeed the scheme is likely to compete with these summits for prominence from many outward views from within the WLA. As such this assessment questions the applicant's assessment of the magnitude of change on the perceptual quality of WLAQ4,

which is considered to be Medium taking into account the scale of the change. The development will deteriorate WLQ4 both alone and in combination with other developments, however given that the quality is already deteriorated, Chleansaid would not be responsible for deteriorating the quality to such an extent that it alone affects the integrity of the site and therefore its impacts on this quality, and the WLA overall, are considered within acceptable limits. It is noted here that the decision of the Council to approve Sallachy Wind Farm was an 'on balance' decision based on the specifics of that application and in no way sets a precedent to the assessment of applications for other wind energy proposals.

National Scenic Areas

8.115 The nearest National Scenic Area (NSA) is Dornoch Firth NSA a little under 25km south of the application site and extending southeast beyond 45km from the turbines. The development's impact on the NSA has been scoped out of the applicant's assessment due to limited visibility of the scheme in offshore areas to the east of the firth at distances of over 30km away, and which was agreed to by NatureScot and the Council prior to the application's submission. Similarly, the Assynt – Coigach NSA is a little over 25km west of the application site with theoretical visibility limited to elevated areas where Chleansaid Wind Farm will be viewed in combination with existing turbine developments (see VP12). As such, the development is not, of itself, considered likely to result in significant impacts on the qualities of the NSA, and an assessment has been scoped out of the EIAR. Finally, with limited visibility of Chleansaid beyond 25km and 30km respectively, assessments of the proposal's impacts on the qualities of both the Kyle of Tongue NSA, and, North-West Sutherland NSA, have also been scoped out of the EIAR in agreement with NatureScot.

Special Landscape Areas

8.116 Table 6.3 of EIAR Chapter 6 sets out that the proposal's impact on several Special Landscape Areas (SLA) has been scoped out of the EIAR due to several factors including distance, limited visibility, and intervening wind farms having likely larger impacts on the special qualities of the SLAs than Chleansaid otherwise would. Consequently, the EIAR has focused on the development's likely impacts on Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA, which is approximately 4km north of the nearest turbine.

8.117 Ben Klibreck Loch Choire SLA encompasses not only the features the SLA is named for, but also the containing summits to the south of the loch including Meall na Caillich (454m AOD), Meall á Bhata, and Creag na h-Iolaire (694m AOD), before the SLA boundary sweeps southward to encompass Meall nan Aighean (695m AOD), Ben Armine (705m AOD), and Creag Mhor (713m AOD). The SLA, which is represented by VPS 8 (Ben Klibreck, Meall nan Con) and 9 (Ben Armine) is one of the several prominent lone mountains and mountain groups that rise dramatically from open moorland in Central Sutherland. The SLA's Special Qualities include its distinctive mountains, the secluded glen of Loch a Choire, extensive views from its peaks and summits, as well as its historic landscape including remains of a cleared township a several shielings. Consequently the SLA is very sensitive to development that would interrupt the relationship between open moorland and the isolated mountains, impinge on the secluded character and wildness qualities of the central glen, as well as development that would contrast with the undifferentiated pattern of vegetation within the SLA.

8.118 The development is outwith the application site and away from physical connectors such as watercourses so the development will not have any direct impacts on the physical

attributes of the SLA. As such any impacts are considered in relation to changes to the perceptual qualities of the SLA, both as experienced from within its boundaries and as the designation is experienced when viewed from without. From within, the proposal would be visible from several summits and the higher south facing slopes and would bring the influence of turbines significantly closer in south facing views with turbines of a much larger scale than the consented Strath Tirry scheme, which, if constructed, brings wind farm development to the near side of Loch Shin. However, the under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm is much closer and already dominates west facing views, and as such, the sense of remoteness at the location is already much reduced. Chleansaid is viewed behind summits with the turbines well below the horizon and backdropped by sweeping moorland and simple landcover. Consequently, the proposal will not reduce extensive panoramic views even if it will reduce the sense of scale of the landscape within those views. From outwith, the proposal is generally of a suitable setback from Ben Klibreck that it does not interfere with the overall enjoyment of that landform with visibility of the scheme generally limited to within 5km to the south and southeast in those areas where the turbines would be seen in front of the mountain. Taken together then, the scheme is not considered significantly detrimental to the Special Qualities of the SLA, it will, however, have significant visual impacts from within and in combination with Strath Tirry from without, which are appropriately assessed in the Visual Impacts section below.

Visual Impacts

8.119 The Zone of Theoretical Visibility (Figure 6.1.2b: Blade Tip Height ZTV) indicates that the development would be visible beyond the 45km study area however visibility will predominantly be concentrated within 5km in all directions, with visibility to the north, east, and south of the development beyond that distance intermittently limited to higher Chleansaid facing slopes and summits, or along valleys such as Strath Brora. It is the mountains of Ben Klibreck, Ben Armine, and Creag Mhòr that restrict visibility to the north and east. Visibility of the turbines is more consistent to the northwest, west and southwest within 25km of the development, in particular along the northwest facing southern slopes above Loch Shin. Beyond this landform from Glen Cassley onwards, visibility is limited to the higher ground such as at Ben More Assynt and Beinn an Eòin. The main transport route impacted by visibility of the development is the A836 that runs loosely north-south to the west of the development, and which is a part of National Cycle Route 1.

8.120 Unsurprisingly, there is a difference between the applicant's assessment and the appraisal of the Planning Authority, which is to be expected because a visual impact assessment is largely dependent on the application of professional judgement. The information in Appendices 2 and 3 combined with matters as set out below, explain the difference between the outcomes of the assessments.

8.121 The EIAR includes a visual impact assessment from each of the 12 viewpoints, with each viewpoint considered to be used by receptors of Medium, through Medium-high, and High Sensitivity and susceptibility to wind energy development, although it is acknowledged that not all receptors experiencing the development from all of the viewpoints would have a high sensitivity to the development. With the exception of Viewpoints 6 and 9 where the Council considers the susceptibility and sensitivity of receptors to be higher than that of the applicant, the assessment of sensitivity otherwise concurs with the EIAR. The applicant's assessment of the significance of the visual impact of the proposal as a standalone development concludes that the Chleansaid will

result in significant visual impacts at Viewpoints, 1 (Right of Way near Dalnessie), 2 (A836 Rhian Bridge), 3 (Saval, Lairg), 5 (The Ord above Ferrycroft Visitors Centre), and 8 (Ben Klibreck, Meall nan Con), which the Council agrees with.

8.122 However, for reasons set out below, the Council also considers the development likely to result in significant visual impacts from Viewpoints 4 (Dalchork Bird Hide), 9 (Ben Armine), and 10 (Reay - Cassley WLA Ben Sgeireach), which therefore leads the Council to conclude that the proposal will generally have significant visual impacts on receptors within 17km of the turbines, although it is acknowledged that Viewpoints 6 (A836 south of Lairg (Torroble)),and 7 (Rhilochan) are exceptions.

8.123 For Viewpoint 4, the Council's assessment considers that the perceptual width of the array is wide due to being viewed in relation to several different landform features, which, in the Council's view, increases the Level of Effect to Moderate and therefore Significant as opposed to the applicant's conclusion of a Minor Level of Effect and not significant. Turbine 16 appears unduly prominent from this viewpoint by virtue of being the only turbine that the base is visible, its removal from the scheme would therefore improve the composition of the proposal from this location and reduce the significance of the singular effect.

8.124 For Viewpoints 9 and 10 however, the Council's opinion differs most markedly from the applicant's whereby the Council considers that the development will result in a highly notable and unavoidable change in the baseline views at remote locations. Ben Armine, within the SLA, for example, is difficult to access and therefore reaching its summit comes with an expectation of higher rewards. From this location the angle of view means that the development does not relate as strongly to intervening landforms as in Viewpoint 8 by comparison, and the array appears less compact. T16 appears detached from the whole and the slight separation of the group formed by T1, T5, and T6 is emphasised by their being most remote from the anchoring forms of Creag Riabhach na Ghreige in the middle ground. There would also be some effects on perception of scale and distance in the landscape, with the turbines adding prominence to the mid-horizon between the Rounded Hills and Sweeping Moorland and Flows. As such the Level of Effect of the proposal is considered Moderate-major and Significant at Viewpoint 9.

8.125 Similarly, the effect at Ben Sgeireach is that the array appears perceptibly very wide in the landscape relative to landform features while the full scale of the turbines is revealed as they compete with the WLA and SLA summits for visual prominence. The resultant Level of Effect is therefore Moderate-major, Significant and adverse. The visual impacts from more distant summits, as represented by Viewpoints 11 (Ben Hee), and 12 (Ben More Assynt), are not considered significant by either the applicant or the Council despite the elevated positions, although it is noted that NatureScot's response implies that it considers the visual impact to be significant at these locations. The Council's assessment does however consider the Magnitude of Change and Level of Effect for Viewpoint 12, to be slightly larger than is considered in the EIAR. In general terms, the conscious siting and design of the scheme ensures that the development sits within its own layer of the landscape when experienced from these elevated viewpoints resulting in a reasonably contained development that sits well within its hosting landscape without disrupting a sense of the landscape's vastness.

8.126 In addition to the above, it is important to consider the context of the development in combination with other wind farm developments and assess the likely cumulative effects. Of particular importance is how wind energy developments relate to each other in design

and relationship to their surroundings; their frequency when moving through the landscape, and, their visual separation to allow experience of the character of the landscape in between. It is generally considered that once turbines are viewed and experienced in the landscape, they increase the prominence of existing turbines in the view as experienced by receptors. In this instance, cumulative impacts of the proposed development are assessed in combination with the approved Strath Tirry, and the under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farms. While Strath Tirry and Creag Riabhach Wind Farms are key elements in the assessment of the proposal given their relative proximity, the in combination effects of the proposal with wind energy developments in the wider area are also important such as those listed in the table in paragraph 2.14 above, as these are experienced by sensitive receptors from important sites, and, as they travel through the area.

8.127 The EIAR distinguishes between two scenarios, the first being the baseline at the time of the application's submission corresponding with constructed, under construction, and approved proposals (Scenario 1), and, a potential future baseline scenario that additionally includes undetermined valid wind farm applications at the time of the application's submission (Scenario 2). Additionally, cumulative impacts are considered in terms of 'additional', and, 'total' cumulative effects, whereby 'additional' cumulative effects refers to impacts resulting from the introduction of the wind farm relative to other wind energy developments, i.e., the change, as experienced by the viewer. Although not specified, it is inferred that 'total' cumulative effects refers to a consideration of how wind farm development is experienced as a whole by the receptor, i.e., the long-term or 'permanent' cumulative impact.

8.128 As set out in paragraph 2.15 above, in the time since the EIAR was finalised, Strath Tirry, Lairg II redesign, Sallachy, Strathy South, and Strathy Wood Wind Farms have been approved and are therefore classed as Scenario 1 developments in this assessment. The Highland Council has recently refused planning permission for Meall Buidhe and an appeal is now lodged so that development remains a Scenario 2 development. Additionally, details of the amended Garvary proposals are not yet know at this stage however a reduced scheme is expected. For the cumulative impact assessment, the applicant has considered in combination impacts with Strath Tirry, Creag Riabhach, and Sallachy Wind Farms individually, and other wider area wind farms according to their respective cluster, with the south-east group corresponding to the Kilbraur, Kilbraur Extension, and South Kilbraur Wind Farms, while the south-west group corresponds to the Achany Extension, Achany, Rosehall, Braemore, Lairg, Lairg II, and Garvary Wind Farms. It is acknowledged that the planning permission for Braemore Wind Farm has expired but continues to be included in the assessment.

8.129 For Chleansaid, there are no viewpoints from which the development would be, at least theoretically, experienced singularly, and therefore there is a cumulative visual impact of some sort from all of the viewpoints. The EIAR has concluded that the proposal's cumulative visual impacts at all viewpoints excepting Viewpoints 5 (The Ord above Ferrycroft Visitor Centre) and 10 (Reay – Cassley WLA Ben Sgeireach) will be not significant with the appraisals falling short of providing an assessment of the Magnitude of Change and Level of Effect so the applicant's logic is not obvious in that regard. However, the applicant's assessment of Level of Effect can only be Negligible or Minor in accordance with the applicant's own methodology. The table in Appendix 2 has assumed the applicant has therefore assessed the cumulative Magnitude of Change as Low, and Level of Effect as Minor for each of the viewpoints however it is a moot point as, with the exception of Viewpoints 6 (A836 south of Lairg (Torroble)) 11 (Reay -

Cassley WLA Ben Sgeireach) where the Council concludes the cumulative visual impact to be not significant in agreement with the applicant, the Council judges the cumulative impact to be significant from all other viewpoints. This difference in opinion is largely explained with the approval of Strath Tirry Wind Farm, which has now become a Scenario 1 development in the assessment, whereby any negative and detrimental visual impacts of Strath Tirry scheme are considered to be amplified by the candidate scheme.

8.130 The first in combination effect to note, given that the Chleansaid and Strath Tirry schemes will be experienced in combination with each other from multiple views, is the highly notable differences in the scope, extent, and turbine scales between the two developments (see e.g., Viewpoints 5, 11 and 12). These differences create visual dissonance and is a jarring adverse effect, that further amplifies the effect that Strath Tirry Wind Farm detracts from the visual appeal of the SLA and its surrounding context by its presence, its diminishing of the prominence of Ben Klibreck and disrupting the Lone Mountain's relationship to its setting, in particular when viewed from the strath landscape and Loch Shin Basin (e.g., Viewpoints 4 and 5), and from higher ground to the west of Loch Shin (Viewpoints 11 and 12), where receptors enjoy open views of a complex scenic landscape containing open moorland, flows, rounded hills, lone mountains, and rugged mountain massif, and where wildness and settlement are juxtaposed. The turbines of Strath Tirry WF will draw the focus of the view away from the SLA summits and WLA, and lead the eye to Chleansaid, which will become the main focus of views eastward. It is noted here however, that this cumulative impact is a direct result of Strath Tirry WF rather than Chleansaid WF and therefore cannot be specifically attributed to Chleansaid WF, which itself is generally of an appropriate separation from the summits of Armine and Klibreck in many important views. Consequently, removing Turbine 16 from the group is considered a reasonable requirement as this would increase the scheme's separation from Strath Tirry WF and reduce the degree to which the two schemes interact by ensuring they do not visually amalgamate, and therefore reduce the degree to which the schemes, in combination, detract from external views over the SLA and WLA.

8.131 A further cumulative effect of the scheme is its contribution to the reduction and erosion of the sense of remoteness felt within the interior of the LCA and experienced from certain views where the wilder areas on higher ground visually connect. It is acknowledged that a sense of remoteness is the reward for hill walkers visiting remote and difficult areas and would otherwise be experienced from Ben Klibreck and Ben Armine within the SLA and WLA (Viewpoints 8 and 9), as well as from more distant views to the west such as the distant views of Ben Hee (Viewpoint 11) and Ben More Assynt (. In the case of Ben Klibreck, it is Creag Riabhach Wind Farm that has the largest effect in reducing the sense of remoteness at the location by virtue of its proximity, which Chleansaid will be experienced sequentially within panoramic views. However, in south facing views, Chleansaid will bring the influence and visual prominence of wind energy development significantly closer to visitors to the summit, increasing the visual prominence of the more distant turbines of the south-east and south-west groups and beyond. Although wind farms will be theoretically visible in the majority of 360° views, Chleansaid will not be responsible for contributing to a sense of encirclement by turbine development at the summits given distances to the Strathy developments and intervening landform in views towards the north coastline.

8.132 These effects are repeated to a lesser, but still significant, extent from Ben Armine due to the larger distances between the respective wind farms. From this location, the proposal will increase the vertical spread of turbines within the viewer's vision, also with

some vertical turbine stacking noted in combination with Strath Tirry, Achany, Rosehall, and potentially Meal Buidhe (if an appeal is allowed). This stacking effect is repeated from Ben More Assynt (Viewpoint 12), but in combination with Sallachy, Gordonbush, Gordonbush Extension, and potentially Kintradwell, although the scheme is generally viewed within the same horizontal envelop as these developments in a manner that reduces the overall magnitude of change occasioned by Chleansaid when experience from western views. In this instance, the overall cumulative effect of stacking is considered Significant in relation to Strath Tirry WF by virtue of the aforementioned poor positioning of that scheme and the subsequent visual dissonance brought about the jarring difference in turbine scales. In combination with more distant wind farm schemes however, the scalar differences are more appropriate as turbines appear smaller as they recede in the distance. It is noted that Chleansaid Wind Farm contributes to a loss of the perception of scale and distance in the landscape, particularly when experienced from higher ground, as more folds and features in the landscape are occupied by turbines. The scheme, therefore, contributes to the impression that turbine development is a common feature of the rural landscape, while the scale of the 180m & 200m turbines themselves will visually obscure the landscape features that would otherwise provide a backdrop to the scheme; although it is recognised that this is not itself a cumulative impact (Viewpoints 10). At Viewpoints 1 and 7, the proposal interacts with the south-east group to bookend Strath Brora with turbines, which is also judged to be a significant and adverse cumulative impact, although this effect at this less prominent location is unlikely to be a determining issue in this instance.

8.134 As described above, the proposal will significantly increase the influence of wind energy development within the Loch Shin basin north of Lairg, an area that is now increasingly becoming associated with wind energy development. The effect of the proposal infilling some of the gap between the south-west group and Creag Riabhach Wind Farm is particularly experienced from Viewpoints 3, 4, 5, and 6, all elevated viewpoints on the north and south fringes of the Lairg Settlement. From these locations, Creag Riabhach, Strath Tirry, and Chleansaid Wind Farms appear to run the length of the eastern shores of Loch Shin, with the presence of Strath Tirry Wind Farm expected to be made more notable in these views as its prominence is increased by the presence of Chleansaid. In combination with Sallachy and the large south-west group, turbines appear to encircle both Loch Shin and the settlement of Lairg, which means that Chleansaid as a cumulative development is potentially not meeting the threshold of Criterion 1, although in the case of Lairg, this encircling effect is experienced from without looking over the town rather than from within Lairg itself. However, given the openness and expansiveness of the neighbouring LCA to the west of the application site as described in paragraph 8.97 above, and the separation between the constructed and consented schemes at this point, which will be improved by the removal of T16 to reinforce the gap between Chleansaid and Strath Tirry WFs, it is considered that Chleansaid's contribution to the encirclement of the Loch Shin basin is not so critical that it should tip the planning balance against it when considering the considerable weight afforded sustainable development by the new NPF4.

8.135 The turbines will require to be lit for aviation safety on account of being over 150 metres in height so an assessment of the development's visual impact in the hours of darkness is required. The applicant has specified that visible peripheral lighting of medium intensity 2000 candela, dropping to 200 candela when viewed from distances of 5km or more in clear conditions, will be installed on Turbines 1, 6, 11, 14, and 16 with a secondary light fitted to each of the turbines in case of failure. Consequently, any lighting scheme will extend the development's impacts into the hours of darkness. There are currently no

operational wind farms with aviation lighting in the LVIA study area however the consented Lairg II scheme will require to be lit during the hours of darkness.

8.136 Discounting landcover, the ZTV demonstrates that the aviation lighting will be visible from all viewpoints with lighting experienced most intensely from summits and higher ground corresponding to Viewpoints 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12, as well as WLA Dusk Viewpoint 1 (Ben Klibreck WLA track to Loch Choire). Lighting will be consistently visible along the western slopes above Loch Shin although of at a slightly lesser intensity than at higher ground. Similar intensities would be experienced, although more intermittently, to the east of the loch along Strath Tirry to the west and north of the development as well as intermittently along Strath Brora to the east of the development (Viewpoint 7). Areas of lower ground along the southern shores of Loch Shin as well as within the Achany Glen, both settled landscapes with existing light sources, the aviation lighting would be experienced at lesser intensity again, with the least intensity experienced from locations within and just without the site area.

8.137 There are no areas specifically designated for dark skies however aviation lighting may have significant visual impact effects when viewed from areas where there is a reasonable expectation of darker skies, particularly within Wild Land Areas for example (having a significant and adverse impact on WLQ5 as described in paragraphs 8.109 – 8.110 above), while darker skies also describes the baseline condition of much of the wider and connected LCAs. Aviation lighting will therefore disrupt the sense of remoteness experienced during hours of darkness from many locations across the area. While during the day one's eye would be drawn to the moving blades of the turbines, in hours of darkness ones eye would be drawn toward the red aviation lighting, which can flatten a sense of distance in the darker landscape, particularly if experienced in combination with the lighting of other schemes. Depending on the position of the receptor to the lighting, the lights may appear to flash as a result of the turning of the turbine blades, passing between the light and the viewer. This may be a visually confusing effect for the receptor unless they were aware of the reason for the lights, while in hours of darkness one does not have the benefit of being able to relate the lighting to a landform. These effects would be significant within Sweeping Moorland and Flows, Rounded Hills, and Lone Mountain LCTs. Notwithstanding these effects however, the Council is broadly in agreement with NatureScot's assessment of the visual impact of aviation lighting, which notes that while the full brightness of the lighting is experienced on summits and higher ground, effects on receptors in elevated and more remote areas will also be significant for example from WLA Viewpoint 02, Figure 6A.2.2g. However, NatureScot's response also recognises that these instances of full brightness will be very limited in duration due to seasonality and weather conditions, and, that whilst there will be some significant visual effects from remote areas, NatureScot considers that the overall visual effect associated with visible aviation lighting will be not significant, .

8.138 The EIAR has provided an assessment of the development's effect on the amenity of transport routes, which in turn enlightens the assessment of the in combination effects in terms of how the development is experienced sequentially through the landscape. This analysis is important because it provides a deeper understanding of how Chleansaid would be experienced in relation to other schemes when travelling along routes given that the amenity of transport routes is directly linked to the receptors' enjoyment and appreciation of the qualities of the landscape and natural, cultural, and built environments. In reality, such an appreciation requires respite from the experience of turbine development and in locations of high wind energy development pressure and windfarm densities, those sections of views along routes that provide respite from

turbines become increasingly important for the viewer. The EIAR's assessment combines the findings of the ZTV with findings from their Viewpoint Analyses as well as 'in the field' observations and aerial photography, in order to take account of the local physical features that may impede the receptor's experience of the development, not otherwise accounted for in the ZTV. The EIAR has considered the impact of the proposal's amenity on the A836 (NCR1) and the Dalnessie Estate Track which forms a part of the HS29 Right of Way, Hill Track, and Heritage Path that continues past the estate building and in to the Wild Land Area to east of the turbine area, within the assessment. All other core paths along with the A838, A839, B873, and the Far North Railway Line, area scoped out due to distance from the turbines and limited visibility.

8.139 Along the A836, the proposal will introduce 16 turbines into the view when travelling in both directions of the A836. Although the development will be visible in forward views in a section of the road between Dalchork and Dalnessie Estate track approximately 8km from the development, and approximately 15km to the south within the Achany Glen, visibility is mostly contained to the section where the road is within 6km of the development. From this nearby section, the turbines will largely be experienced in side views and therefore more keenly experienced by passengers in vehicles. As stated, the Council considers passengers in moving vehicles as well as cyclists along routes to be of high susceptibility and sensitivity to turbine development, contrary to the applicant, as there is more opportunity for an appreciation of the landscape in both scenarios. Nevertheless, the Council would agree with the applicant's conclusion that the visual effect of the proposed development as a singular development on views from the A836 and NCN Route 1 will be significant within approximately 5 km of the turbine area, reducing to not significant (Minor) beyond this distance given the highly notable change in the baseline view due to the scale and spread of the array along with the duration of turbines will be in view.

8.140 The Council would agree with the assessment that Chleansaid will not result in a significant sequential cumulative impact, largely because the degree to which travellers along this route enjoy a respite from wind farm development has already been reduced by the approval of Strath Tirry. However, the Council does not agree with the assessment's conclusion that Chleansaid will not result in additional total cumulative effects because the development's interaction with the markedly smaller and closer turbines of Strath Tirry as one moves through the landscape is likely to result in significant and adverse visual dissonance and jarring effects, although it is acknowledged that the most jarring effects would be experienced as one moves past Strath Tirry and so in front and rear views. Overall however, while there are significant singular and cumulative effects on this important route due to the scheme's prominence in places, these effects are not considered to be unacceptable or a determining factor that would sway the planning balance by virtue that the turbines are not considered to overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of key routes and ways.

8.141 The applicant considers the proposal to result in a Significant (Major) singular impact on Right of Way HS29 within 5km of the turbines given the proximity of the development to the route, falling to not significant beyond this distance, which the Council agrees with. The applicant has judged that both 'additional' and 'total' cumulative impact will not be significant. However, similar to the above, the Council considers the interaction with Strath Tirry to be significant and adverse due to the jarring and dissonant difference in turbine scale as well as the extent of the array while moving along the route, but that this effect is not a determining factor.

8.142 The recreational user likely to be most impacted by the developer is the hillwalker, which is reflected in the objection to the development by Mountaineering Scotland. It's objection advises that the concentration of wind farm development at the south-west cluster is not problematic for hillwalkers visiting the area due to relative distances from the Special and Wild Land Areas from where those schemes are experienced as a legible pattern of development, which, in its view, limits negative visual impacts. Whereas in Mountaineering Scotland's view, Chleansaid would introduce wind farm development to an area currently free of turbines (Strath Tirry excepting) and, cumulatively with developments to the west of Loch Shin (Achany Extension and Sallachy), result in diminishing of appreciation of the of views of the Loch Shin Basin, while, cumulatively with Creag Riabhach, reduce an appreciation of the visual and special qualities of both the SLA and WLA to the detriment of hillwalkers visiting the area.

8.143 The applicant's EIAR has also considered the visual effects on residential receptors. In line with Reporters' findings for similar schemes, such as the consented Limekiln Wind Farm for example, the development is not considered to have an overbearing effect at residential properties such that they would make the property unattractive to live in located outwith 2km distance from the development. Beyond that threshold, effects are assessed as general visual impacts. There are only two residential properties within the 2km threshold of Chleansaid, both of which belong to the Dalnessie Estate, which has a financial interest in the development. The EIAR has judged the development's impacts on the residential visual amenity experienced at these properties as significant but not such that they are overbearing and breach the amenity threshold. Impacts on residential amenity are not therefore considered sufficient that they would weigh the planning balance against the development

8.144 The above sets out that, with the exception of impacts on the WLA, there are many positives to the siting, design, and layout of the proposal including that it has resulted in a scheme with a limited influence over a relatively contained geographical area, given the scale of the turbines. Consequently the landscape impacts are not considered significantly detrimental overall, with impacts on the local landscape composition including the hosting and adjacent Landscape Character Areas, as well as the hosting and neighbouring Landscape Character Type receptors, judged to be within acceptable limits. Similarly, with the turbines being relatively contained by the localised landform, the scheme has a good composition overall as demonstrated by consistent turbine groupings giving the array a consistent rhythm and overall cohesiveness, while there are relatively few instances of stacking and overlapping from more public views, which otherwise cause dissonant and jarring visual effects. While the site's location means that the larger part of any detrimental impacts are expected to be experienced by recreational users of the countryside, and in particular hillwalkers, the scheme will not have unacceptable impacts on key transport routes or residential receptors. It should also be noted that residential amenity is impacted by other factors such as noise and shadow flicker, which are also assessed within this report.

<u>Noise and Shadow Flicker</u>

8.145 In terms of Operational Noise, the applicant has submitted a noise impact assessment which demonstrates that predicted noise levels from the turbines will meet ETSU-R-97 noise limits of 35dB LA90 daytime; 38dB LA90 night time or up to 5 dB above background. It is noted that the levels are right on the limit for daytime noise at wind speeds of 6m/s. At other wind speeds the predicted levels are well below the maximum limits that may be permitted under ETSU due to high background noise levels. In the

past, consenting wind turbine developments at the maximum permissible limits has resulted in difficulties for any subsequent development therefore, I would advise that a 2dB cap be placed on any predicted noise limits subject to it still complying with other criteria. The assessment has also demonstrated that there are no other developments that are likely to have a cumulative impact on noise levels. The separation distance between the sub-station and battery storage and the nearest noise sensitive receptor is such that noise from these sources is unlikely to be an issue.

8.146 As for Construction Noise, the separation distance between the turbine locations and the nearest noise sensitive receptor at Dalnessie are such that construction noise at these sites is unlikely to be significant. There will be work undertaken to the access track closer to Dalnessie which will result in some noise but this will be for a relatively short term as the works progress along the track. There will be continuous noise from construction traffic however predicted noise levels are within acceptable limits.

8.147 It should be noted that planning conditions are not used to control the impact of construction noise as similar powers are available to the Local Authority under Section 60 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974. Generally, people are tolerant of construction noise during typical working hours which are taken to be 8am to 7pm Monday to Friday and 8am to 1pm on Saturdays. Works for which noise is inaudible at the curtilage of any noise sensitive property could still be carried out out-with these times. Nevertheless, it is expected that the developer/contractor will employ the best practicable means to reduce the impact of noise from construction activities. Section 6.1 of the noise assessment has identified proposed construction noise mitigation measures and it is expected that these will be implemented in full.

8.149 Based on the above analysis, the Council has no objection to the proposed development on noise impact grounds subject to a wind farm condition being attached to any consent that restricts noise limits to the predicted levels identified in Table 10 of the EIA plus a margin of 2dB. Where these levels may exceed the limits identified in Table 3 (daytime) and/or Table 4 (night time THC preferred) the lower of the figures should be applied

8.150 The EIAR sets out that the study area in respect of the shadow flicker analysis was applied equating to 11 x rotor diameter, which adheres to guidance set out in the OSWEG to take account of the northerly latitudes, while the applicant's modelling is based on a worst case scenario in line with published best practice. The analysis shows that 2no properties within the Dalnessie Estate (the same properties as discussed in paragraph 8.143 above) would exceed the 30minutes a day and 30 hours a year of shadow flicker limit in the works case scenario, which is a significant and adverse effect. In the applicant's analysis of the 'Realistic Scenario', these shadow flicker impacts would reduce to less than 30minutes a day and 30 hours a year limits, which for both scenarios would be caused by Turbines 1 and 2. The EIAR advises that mitigation is already in place at the estate in the form of a barn and a small grove of mixed deciduous and conifer trees in place between the properties and the turbines, which will further reduce impacts on these properties from shadow flicker. In this instance, given the financial interest of the estate in the scheme, it is considered that any further mitigation should be negotiated between the estate and the developer and the correct permissions sought where required.

Telecommunications

8.151 The potential for the development to adversely impact telecommunication signals has been considered by consultees. British Telecom has confirmed that it has no concerns

the development will interfere with its current and planned radio network while the Joint Radio Company is satisfied the development has cleared with respect to its radio link infrastructure. A condition should nonetheless be sought to secure a scheme of mitigation should an issue arise.

Aviation

8.152 The application has raised no concerns with regard to aviation interests in relation to the Highlands and Islands Airports Limited, Ministry of Defence, National Air Traffic Control, or, local Airports. Should the proposal be granted consent, a condition can be applied to secure suitable mitigation in terms of aviation lighting and notification to the appropriate bodies of the final turbine positions. Given the proposed height of the turbines, infrared lighting would only be permitted on perimeter turbines in combination with aviation lighting of 2000 Candela being installed on cardinal turbines (Turbines 1, 6, 11, 14, and 16). The EIAR indicates that the applicant's Lighting Strategy includes a reduced lighting scheme with the intensity dropping to 10% of the peak intensity (200 Candela) when visibility exceeds 5km when measured at the wind farm. This strategy has, according to the EIAR, been agreed with the Civil Aviation Authority. An assessment of the development's impact during the hours of darkness has been included in this report (Paragraphs 8.135 – 8.137), and it is considered that a condition can be applied to secure suitable mitigation in terms of aviation lighting.

Other material considerations

8.153 Given the complexity of major developments, and to assist in the discharge of conditions, the Planning Authority would seek that the developer employs a Planning Monitoring Officer (PMO). The role of the PMO, amongst other things, will include the monitoring of, and enforcement of compliance with, all conditions, agreements and obligations related to a permission (or any superseding or related permissions) and shall include the provision of a bi-monthly compliance report to the Planning Authority.

8.154 In line with SPP and draft NPF4, Highland Council policy and practice, community benefit considerations are undertaken as a separate exercise and generally parallel to the planning process. There are no other relevant material factors highlighted within representations for consideration of this application.

Non-material considerations

8.155 The Planning Authority may only deal with matters that are relevant to the application that is under consideration as is presented and address matters within the control of the planning system. As set out in paragraph 4.5 above, energy company profits are not material to the assessment of a planning application, and as has been laid clear within this report, the proposal has been assessed in terms of its benefits and disbenefits in relation to those matters specified in national and Highland Council planning policy, which do not prioritise energy company profits over the concerns of communities or private individuals.

Matters to be secured by Legal Agreement / Upfront Payment

8.156 A wear and tear agreement for the impact on the local road network and a decommissioning and restoration financial guarantee can be secured by condition therefore no further legal agreements are required should consent be granted.

9. CONCLUSION

9.1 Both the Scottish Government and the Highland Council have declared a climate emergency and biodiversity crisis. Consequently, the Scottish Government gives considerable commitment to renewable energy and encourages planning authorities to support the development of wind farms at appropriate locations where they can operate successfully. With a maximum output capacity of 96MW, this scheme is identified as a national development in the emerging NPF4, by virtue of having potential to make a large contribution to addressing the climate emergency through significant additional renewable energy production, which it describes as "Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation". The project is also expected to offset carbon losses and contribute to biodiversity net gains through habitat and peatland restoration in support of current and future national and local planning policies. In addition, the development is expected to contribute to the local, regional, and national economy by supporting up to 52 jobs in Lairg and Highlands and 158 jobs in Scotland for the period up to grid connection, and 21 full time equivalent local jobs during its operational phase. However, as also required by national and local policy, these benefits must be weighed against potential drawbacks giving due consideration to the level and significance of its effects.

9.2 Along with Mountaineering Scotland's objection to the proposal on the grounds that it is detrimental to hillwalking interests in the area, and perhaps more significantly, NatureScot has objected to the application specifically with regard to the development's impacts on Wild Land Area WLA 35 – Ben Klibreck-Armine Forest, which it considers to be to the detriment of the wild and remote character of the WLA as set out in Paragraph 8.110 of the main report. While noting that the revised draft of NPF4, which was laid to the Scottish Parliament on 08 November 2022, which sets out that impacts of development outwith Wild Land Areas on qualities of wild land areas will not be a significant consideration in decision making, NatureScot's assessment and conclusion are not disputed in this assessment. Rather, the assessment acknowledges that it will be for the decision maker, which in this instance is not the Highland Council, to decide how much weight to attribute to NatureScot's objection and concerns regarding WLA impacts when weighted against the proposal's stated benefits and Scotland's current and proposed planning policy and framework's continued support for onshore wind energy.

9.3 Notwithstanding the above matters related to impacts on wild land, officers have appraised the landscape and visual impact of the proposal and considered consultee and public comments on these issues. The assessment takes account of recent planning decisions in the area, specifically the approval of Strath Tirry Wind Farm by the North Planning Applications Committee, which has introduced a wind farm into an area that we had previously resisted up to that point. Consequently, the proposal can no longer be considered counter to the pattern of wind farm development in the area, which would otherwise have potentially been a determining factor when considering the appropriateness of the development's siting as reflected in the Council's 2020 PREAPP advice response. On that basis, the assessment has concluded that, with the exception of impacts on the WLA, there are acceptable elements to the siting, design, and layout of the scheme. Accordingly the turbines are relatively contained by the localised landform resulting in an acceptable overall composition as demonstrated by consistent turbine groupings giving the array a consistent rhythm and overall cohesiveness, while there are relatively few instances of stacking and overlapping from more public views, which otherwise cause dissonant and jarring visual effects. In landscape terms, the proposal is assessed to be not significantly detrimental overall, with impacts on the local landscape composition including the hosting and adjacent Landscape Character Areas, as well as

the hosting and neighbouring Landscape Character Type receptors, judged to be within acceptable limits. Furthermore, the larger part of the development's visual influence will be contained to a relatively small geographical area, as indicated by the submitted ZTVs and supported by the visualisations. This limited visibility is somewhat unexpected for a development of this scale. While significant landscape and visual impacts are expected and while the larger part of any detrimental impacts are expected to be experienced by recreational users of the countryside, and in particular hillwalkers, these impacts are generally considered to be amplified by the in combination effects with the approved Strath Tirry Wind Farm. Overall the siting, design and scale of the development results in a scheme which will not have unacceptable impacts on key transport routes or residential receptors. It is in this instance acknowledged that the proposal's cumulative impacts on landscape and visual resources would be reduced with the relocation or deletion of Turbine 1 and deletion of Turbine 16, however, on balance, given the disruption this would have to the scheme's composition, and given the contribution these turbines make to the viability of the project, it is not considered judicious to pursue this matter.

9.4 Subject to conditions, any further impacts on natural, built and cultural heritage, species including birds and habitat interests, the water environment, peat, roads, community and private amenity concerns, recreation and tourism interests, safeguarding aviation interests, are considered to be capable of being satisfactorily mitigated against. Indeed, there are no outstanding objections from remaining consultees including SEPA, Transport Scotland, or internal Council departments against the development

9.5 The assessing officer has determined its response to this application against the policies set out in the Development Plan, principally Policy 67 of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan with its eleven tests as expanded upon within the Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance. This policy also reflects policy tests of the Local Development Plan, for example Policy 28 and those considerations within Scottish Planning Policy and the revised draft NPF4. The weight to be afforded to the climate and ecological crises is heightened by the revised draft NPF4 and must be given significant weight. Given the above analysis, the application is, on balance, considered likely to result in greater benefits in the form of its contributions towards Scottish and UK Government policy targets and international commitments for renewable energy and electricity generation than disbenefits.

9.6 Officers are satisfied that the environmental effects of the development can be addressed by way of mitigation, and have incorporated the requirement for a schedule of mitigation within the conditions of this response. For example, monitoring of operational compliance would be secured through Conditions included with this response. It is also noted that the application has not attracted a large number of representations, with only three objections from members of the public submitted to the Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit, although it is recognised that both Rogart, and Golspie, Community Councils have objected for reasons set out in the report, in contrast to the support expressed for the development by Lairg Community Council. The outstanding objections from NatureScot and Mountaineering Scotland have been noted.

9.7 All relevant matters have been taken into account when appraising this application. It is considered that the proposal accords with the principles and policies contained within the Development Plan, national planning policy, and energy policy, and, is acceptable in terms of all other applicable material considerations. Consequently, it is recommended that the Council raises no objection to the application.

10. IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Resource: Not applicable

10.2 Legal: If an objection is raised to the proposal, the application will likely be subject to a Public Local Inquiry. Further if the Scottish Ministers chose not to give effect to the conditional raise no objection, then it would also likely be subject to a Public Local Inquiry.

10.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural): Not applicable

10.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever: The proposal has the ability to make a meaningful contribution toward the production of renewable energy.

10.5 Risk: Not applicable

10.6 Gaelic: Not applicable

11. RECOMMENDATION

Action required before decision issued N

Subject to the above actions, it is recommended to **RAISE NO OBJECTION** to the application subject to the following conditions and reasons:

Part A

Section 36 Consent and Deemed Planning Permission

The Scottish Ministers, in exercise of the powers conferred by section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 and section 57(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 hereby:

i. consent, subject to conditions set out in paragraphs 1 to 4 of Annex 1 Part C below, to the construction and operation of the Chleansaid Wind Farm wind powered electricity generating station, as described in Annex 1 Part B below; and

ii. direct, subject to the conditions set out in paragraphs [6 – 38] of Annex 1 Part C below, that planning permission for the development shall be deemed to be granted.

The consent hereby granted will last for a period of five years from the earlier of:

i. the date when electricity is first exported to the electricity grid network on a commercial basis from the last of the wind turbines constructed as part of the development; or

ii. the date falling 18months after the date electricity is exported to the grid on a commercial basis from any of the wind turbines constructed as part of the development.

The Scottish Ministers direct that section 58(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 is not to apply with regard to the deemed planning permission, and that planning permission is to lapse on the expiry of a period of five years from the date of this direction, unless the development to which the permission relates is begun before the expiry of that period.

Part B

Description of the Development

The Development shall comprise of a wind power powered electricity generating station known as Chleansaid Wind Farm, located on Land 2375m NW Of Keepers Cottage, Dalnessie, Lairg, in the planning jurisdiction of the Highland Council.

The Chleansaid Wind Farm and related ancillary development shall be comprised of:

- 12no turbines not exceeding 200m ground to tip height and foundations.
- 4no turbines not exceeding 180m ground to tip height and foundations.
- Waterproof housing for external transformer and switching gear not exceeding 5m x 3m x 3m.
- Permanent crane hardstanding areas.
- 1no meteorological mast not exceeding 125m and hardstanding area.
- 2no permanent Lidar facilities and associated compounds not exceeding 30m x 20m.
- Access tracks.
- Control building and substation compound.
- Battery energy storage compound.
- Temporary site construction compounds and laydown areas.
- 2no borrow bits.
- Underground cabling.
- Telecommunications equipment.

All as more particularly shown on Plan 2 – Proposed Site Layout Plan – Figure 2.2.

1. **Notification of Date of First Commissioning and Final Commissioning**

    1. Written confirmation of the Date of First Commissioning shall be provided to the Planning Authority and Scottish Ministers no later than one calendar month after that date.

    2. Written confirmation of the Date of Final Commissioning shall be provided to the Planning Authority and Scottish Ministers no later than one calendar month after that date.

    Reason: In order to allow the Planning Authority and Scottish Ministers to calculate the date of expiry of the consent.

2. **Commencement of Development**

(1) The Commencement of the Development shall be no later than five years from the date of this consent, or in substitution, such other period as the Scottish Ministers may hereafter direct in writing.

(2) Written confirmation of the intended date of Commencement of Development shall be provided to the planning authority and Scottish Ministers no later than three weeks before that date.

Reason: To ensure that the consent is implemented within a reasonable period and to allow the Planning Authority and Scottish Ministers to monitor compliance with obligations attached to this consent and deemed planning permission as appropriate.

3. **Non Assignation**

1. This consent shall not be assigned, alienated or transferred without the prior written authorisation of the Scottish Ministers. The Scottish Ministers may authorise the assignation (with or without conditions), or refuse the assignation.
2. In the event that the assignation is authorised, the Company shall notify the Planning Authority and Scottish Ministers in writing of principal named contact at the assignee and contact details within fourteen days of the consent being assigned.
3. The consent shall not be capable of being assigned, alienated or transferred otherwise than in accordance with this condition.

Reason: To safeguard the obligations of the consent if transferred to another company.

4. **Serious Incident Reporting**

In the event of any breach of health and safety or environmental obligations relating to the Development during the period of this consent, the Company will provide written notification of the nature and timing of the incident to the Scottish Ministers, including confirmation of remedial measures taken and/or to be taken to rectify the breach, within 24 hours of the incident occurring.

Reason: To keep the Scottish Ministers informed of any such incidents that may be in the public interest.

5. **Energy Storage Technology**

1. There shall be no commencement of development on the energy storage facility unless and until details of the type of energy storage technology to be implemented have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Scottish Ministers.
2. Thereafter, the type of energy storage technology shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details, unless otherwise agreed in writing with the Scottish Ministers.

3. Written confirmation of when the energy storage facility is installed and commissioned shall be provided to the Scottish Ministers and the Planning Authority no later than one month after those dates.

Reason: To allow Scottish Ministers and the Planning Authority to consider all elements of the development in order to ensure they are acceptable in terms of visual, landscape, noise, and environmental impact considerations.
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Conditions to be attached to deemed planning permission:

6. **Turbine Design and Operation**

1. There shall be no Commencement of Development unless and until full details of the proposed wind turbines (including, but not limited to, the make, model, size, external finish and colour which should be non-reflective pale grey semi-matt), any anemometry masts and all associated apparatus have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority.
2. The wind turbines, any anemometry masts and all associated apparatus shall be constructed and operated in accordance with the approved details.
3. All wind turbine blades shall rotate in the same direction.

Reason: To ensure that the environmental impacts of the turbines forming part of the Development conform to the impacts assessed in the EIA Report and in the interests of the visual amenity of the area.

7. **Substation and Ancillary Development Design and Operation**

1. There shall be no Commencement of Development[9] unless and until final details of the external appearance, dimensions, and surface materials of the substation building, associated compounds, construction compound boundary fencing, external lighting and parking areas have been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority.
2. The substation building, associated compounds, fencing, external lighting and parking areas shall be constructed in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure the Planning Authority is aware of the wind turbine details and to protect the visual amenity of the area.

8. **Design of energy storage facility**

1. There shall be no commencement of development on the energy storage facility unless and until details of the location, layout, external finishes and appearance, dimensions and surface materials of the energy storage facility have been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority.
2. The energy storage facility shall be constructed in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: in the interests of the visual amenity of the area.

9. **Signage**

No wind turbine, anemometer mast, power performance mast, switching station, transformer building or enclosure, ancillary building or above ground fixed plant shall display any name, logo, sign or advertisement (other than health and safety signage) unless and until otherwise approved in writing by the Planning Authority.

Reason: To safeguard the visual amenity of the area.

10. **Micrositing**

(1) All wind turbines, buildings, masts, areas of hardstanding and tracks shall be constructed in the location shown on the Proposed Site Layout Plan (Figure 2.2).
(2) Wind turbines, buildings, masts, areas of hardstanding and tracks may be adjusted by micrositing within the approved redline boundary shown on Proposed Site Layout Plan (Figure 2.2). However, unless otherwise approved in advance in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with NatureScot, SEPA, and the ECoW, micrositing is subject to the following restrictions:
    (a) the wind turbines and other infrastructure hereby permitted may be microsited within 50 metres;
    (b) No wind turbine foundation shall be positioned higher than 3 meters when measured in metres Above Ordinance Datum (AOD) (Newlyn), than the position for that turbine shown on Proposed Site Layout Plan (Figure 2.2);
    (c) No micro-siting shall take place within areas of peat deeper than currently shown for the relevant infrastructure on Figure 10.3;
    (d) no micro-siting shall take place within areas hosting ground water dependent terrestrial ecosystems.
(3) All micro-siting permissible under this condition must be approved in advance in writing by the Environmental Clerk of Works (ECoW).
(4) No later than one month after the Date of First Commissioning, an updated plan showing the final position of all wind turbines buildings, masts, areas of hardstanding, tracks and associated infrastructure forming part of the Development shall be submitted to the Planning Authority. The plan shall specify areas where micrositing has taken place and, for each instance, be accompanied by copies of the Environmental Clerk of Works ("ECoW") or Planning Authority's approval, as applicable.

Reason: To control environmental impacts while taking account of local ground conditions.

11. **Planning Monitoring Officer**

No development shall commence unless and until unless and until the terms of appointment by the Company of an independent and suitably qualified environmental consultant as Planning Monitoring Officer (“PMO”) have been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority in consultation with the Scottish Ministers. The terms of appointment shall:

(a) Impose a duty to monitor compliance with the terms of the deemed planning permission and conditions attached to it;
(b) Require the PMO to submit a monthly report to the Planning Authority summarising works undertaken on site; and,
(c) Require the PMO to report to the Planning Authority any incidences of noncompliance with the terms of the terms of the deemed planning permission and conditions attached to this consent at the earliest practical opportunity.

The PMO shall be appointed on the approved terms throughout the period from Commencement of Development to completion of post construction restoration works.

Reason: To enable the development to be suitably monitored to ensure compliance with the consent issued.

12. **ECoW Ecological Clerk of Works**

(1) No development shall commence unless and until the terms of appointment of an independent Ecological Clerk of Works ("ECoW") by the Company have been submitted to, and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. The terms of appointment shall:

a. Impose a duty to monitor compliance with the ecological, ornithological, and hydrological commitments provided in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report, the Construction Environmental Management Plan as required under Condition 13, Peat Management Plan as required under Condition 21, Habitat Management Plan as required under Condition 22, Deer Management Plan as required under Condition 23, Species Protection Plan as required under Condition 24, Bird Protection Plan as required under Condition 25, Water Quality Management Plan as required under Condition 26, and other plans approved in terms of the conditions of this permission ("the ECoW Works");
b. Advise on micrositing proposals issued pursuant to Condition 10;
c. Require the ECoW to report to the nominated construction project manager any incidences of non-compliance with the ECoW Works at the earliest practical opportunity and stop the job where any breach has been identified until the time that it has been reviewed by the construction project manager; and,
d. Require the ECoW to report to the Planning Authority any incidences of non-compliance with the ECoW Works at the earliest practical opportunity

(2) The ECoW shall be appointed on the approved terms during the establishment of the Habitat Management Plan and throughout the period from Commencement of Development to completion of post construction restoration works.

(3) No later than eighteen months prior to decommissioning of the Development or the expiry of the section 36 consent (whichever is the earlier), details of the terms of appointment of an ECoW by the Company throughout the decommissioning, restoration and aftercare phases of the Development shall be submitted for the written approval of the Planning Authority.

(4) The ECoW shall be appointed on the approved terms throughout the construction, decommissioning, restoration and aftercare phases of the Development.

Reason: To secure effective monitoring of and compliance with the environmental mitigation and management measures associated with the Development during the decommissioning, restoration and aftercare phases.

13. **Construction Environment Management Plan**

(1) There shall be no Commencement of Development unless and until a Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) containing site specific details of all on-site construction works, post-construction reinstatement, drainage and mitigation, together with details of their timetabling, has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority.

(2) The CEMP shall include (but is not limited to):

a. a site waste management plan (dealing with all aspects of waste produced during the construction period other than peat), including details of contingency planning in the event of accidental release of materials which could cause harm to the environment;

b. details of the formation of the construction compound, welfare facilities, any areas of hardstanding, turning areas, internal access tracks, car parking, material stockpiles, oil storage, lighting columns, and any construction compound boundary fencing;

c. a dust management plan;

d. site specific details for management and operation of any concrete batching plant (including disposal of pH rich waste water and substances);

e. details of measures to be taken to prevent loose or deleterious material being deposited on the local road network including wheel cleaning and lorry sheeting facilities, and measures to clean the site entrances and the adjacent local road network;

f. a pollution prevention and control method statement, including arrangements for the storage and management of oil and fuel on the site;

g. details of soil storage and management;

h. a drainage management strategy, demonstrating how all surface and waste water arising during and after development is to be managed and prevented from polluting any watercourses or sources;

i. a surface water and groundwater management and treatment plan, including details of the separation of clean and dirty water drains, and location of settlement lagoons for silt laden water;

j. details of temporary site illumination;

k. details of the construction of the access into the site and the creation and maintenance of associated visibility splays;

l. a Construction Method Statement for the following:

i. crane pads;

ii. turbine foundations;

iii. working cable trenches;

iv. erection of the wind turbines and meteorological masts;

v. watercourse crossings.

m. details of post-construction restoration/reinstatement of the working areas not required during the operation of the Development; and,

n. a wetland ecosystems survey and mitigation plan;

(3) The approved CEMP shall be implemented throughout the construction, post-construction site reinstatement and operational phases in full unless otherwise approved in advance in writing by the Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that all construction operations are carried out in a manner that minimises their impact on road safety, amenity and the environment, and that the mitigation measures contained in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report which accompanied the application, or as otherwise agreed, are fully implemented.

14. **Borrow Pits – Scheme of Works**

(1) There shall be no Commencement of Development unless and until a scheme for the working and restoration of [the/each] borrow pit forming part of the Development has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority. The scheme shall include:

a. a detailed working method statement based on site survey information and ground investigations;

b. details of the handling of any overburden (including peat, soil and rock);

c. drainage measures, including measures to prevent surrounding areas of peatland, water dependant sensitive habitats and ground water dependent terrestrial ecosystems from drying out;

d. a programme of implementation of the works described in the scheme; and,

e. details of the reinstatement, restoration and aftercare of the borrow pit[s] to be undertaken at the end of the construction period, including topographic surveys of pre-construction profiles and details of topographical surveys to be undertaken of the restored borrow pit profiles.

(2) The approved scheme shall thereafter be implemented in full.

Reason: To ensure that excavation of materials from the borrow pit(s) is carried out in a manner that minimises the impact on road safety, amenity and the environment, and to secure the restoration of borrow pit(s) at the end of the construction period.

15. **Borrow Pits – Blasting**

(1) No blasting shall take place unless and until a scheme of blasting monitoring locations is submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. Ground vibration from blasting shall not exceed a peak particle velocity of 6mm/second at the blasting monitoring locations approved in the scheme. The measurement is to be the maximum of three mutually perpendicular directions taken at the ground surface.

(2) Subject to paragraph (3), blasting shall only take place on the site between the hours of 10.00 to 16.00 on Monday to Friday inclusive and 10.00 to 12.00 on Saturdays, with no blasting taking place on a Sunday or on a Public Holiday.

(3) [Blasting may take place at other times if approved in advance in writing by the Planning Authority].

Reason: To ensure that blasting activity is carried out within defined timescales to control impact on amenity.

16. **Construction Hours**

(1) Construction work which is audible from any noise-sensitive receptor shall only take place between the hours of 07.00 to 19.00 on Monday to Friday inclusive and 07.00 to 16.00 on Saturdays, with no construction work taking place on a Sunday or Public Holiday. Outwith these specified hours, construction works on the site are to be limited to wind turbine erection, maintenance, emergency works, dust suppression, and the testing of plant and equipment (unless otherwise approved in advance in writing by the Planning Authority).

(2) HGV movements to access and leave the site (excluding abnormal loads) during construction of the wind farm shall be limited to 07.00 to 19.00 Monday to Friday, and 07.00 to 16.00 on Saturdays, with no HGV movements to or from site taking place on a Sunday or Public Holiday [(unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Planning Authority prior to the HGV movement).

Reason: In the interests of local amenity.

17. **Construction Traffic Management Plan**

(1) There shall be no Commencement of Development unless and until a Traffic Management Plan has been submitted to, and approved in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with the relevant Roads Authorities. The Traffic Management Plan shall include (but is not limited to):

(a) the routeing of all traffic associated with the Development on the local road network;

(b) measures to ensure that the specified routes are adhered to, including monitoring procedures;

(c) details of all signage and lining arrangements to be put in place;

(d) provisions for emergency vehicle access;

(e) identification of a nominated person to whom any road safety issues can be referred; and,

(f) a plan for access by vehicles carrying abnormal loads, including but not limited to the number and timing of deliveries and the length, width and axle configuration of all extraordinary traffic associated with the Development.

(2) The approved Traffic Management Plan shall be implemented in full, unless and until otherwise agreed in advance in writing with the Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of road safety and to ensure that abnormal loads access the site in a safe manner.

18. **Abnormal Loads Route Assessment**

(1) At least three months prior to the first delivery of an abnormal load, the Company shall undertake an Abnormal Load Route Assessment (ALRA), including trial runs, and submit a report describing the outcome of the ALRA for the written approval of the Planning Authority in consultation with Transport Scotland. The report shall include:

(a) Details of a public relations strategy to inform the relevant communities of the programme of abnormal load deliveries;

(b) Details of any accommodation measures required for the local road network including the removal of street furniture, junction widening and traffic management;

(c) Details of the route for abnormal loads on the local and trunk road networks and any recommendations for delivery of abnormal loads; and

(d) An assessment of the capacity of any bridge crossings on the route to cater for abnormal loads, and details of proposed upgrades and mitigation measures required for any bridge crossings.

(2) Prior to the first delivery of an abnormal load, a programme for abnormal load deliveries shall be submitted to and approved in writing by Planning Authority in consultation with Transport Scotland.

(3) The details in the approved report shall thereafter be implemented in full in line with the approved programme for abnormal load deliveries.

Reason: To ensure that the construction of the windfarm is carried out appropriately and does not have an adverse effect on the environment, and to protect road safety and the amenity of other users of the public road and rights of way

19. **Roads Authority Consents**

Any works required within or alongside Council maintained roads will require the prior written consent of The Highland Council, as roads authority. This includes those works required to the start of any related grid connection works that could impact on Council maintained roads. The majority of the foregoing requirements are linked to the construction phase of the Proposed

Development; however, similar issues will arise during decommissioning. Further consultation and agreement with interested parties will be required at this stage and a condition to this effect should be attached to any permission granted.

Ongoing maintenance of turbines will be required throughout the lifetime of the development. This may give rise to significant transport issues, which will require further consultation with interested parties. As such, notification and approval of the planning authority in consultation with the respective roads authority, and community councils, should be undertaken, for any significant HGV or abnormal load movement required during this period.

Reason: To protect road safety and the amenity of other users of the public road and rights of way

20. **Floating Access Tracks**

Floating roads shall be installed in areas where peat depths are in excess of 1 metre. Prior to the installation of any floating road, the detailed location and cross section of the floating road to be installed shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with SEPA. The floating roads shall then be implemented as approved.

Reason: To ensure peat is not unnecessarily disturbed or destroyed.

21. **Finalised Peat Management Plan**

No development shall commence until a finalised Peat Management Plan has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with NatureScot, and SEPA. The details shall:

a) include the mitigation measures described within the Environmental Impact Assessment Report and Outline Peat Management Plan (EIAR Technical Appendix 10.2);
b) demonstrate how micrositing and other measures including the use of floating tracks in the areas identified on Figure 1 of the letter from WRC dated 13 September 2022, have been used to further minimise peat disturbance.

Thereafter, the development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that a plan is in place to deal with the storage and reuse of peat within the application site, including peat stability and slide risks.

22. **Habitat Management Plan**

(1) No development shall commence until a Finalised Habitat Management Plan ("HMP"), has been submitted to, and approved in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with NatureScot, and SEPA. The information shall include:
    a. the mitigation measures described within the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) received March 2022 and be based upon the Outline Habitat Management Plan provided (EIAR Volume

3, Appendix 8.5) with the minimum restoration works areas as shown on Figure 1 of the Appendix of the draft Habitat Management Plan and Figure 2 of the of the letter from WRC dated 13 September 2022;

b. the proposed habitat management of the site during the period of construction, operation, decommissioning, restoration and aftercare, and shall provide for the maintenance, monitoring, and reporting of habitat on site;
c. measures to ensure that planting of riparian native woodland is not located on peat including shallow as well as deep peat;
d. measures to ensure that riparian areas of blanket or mosaic blanket bog habitat undergo peatland restoration rather than native woodland planting;
e. the provision for regular monitoring and review to be undertaken to consider whether amendments are needed to better meet the habitat plan objectives and measures for securing amendments or additions to the HMP in the event that the HMP objectives are not being met. In particular, the approved habitat management plan shall be updated to reflect ground condition surveys undertaken following construction and prior to the date of Final Commissioning and submitted for the written approval of the Planning Authority in consultation with NatureScot and SEPA.

(2) Unless and until otherwise agreed in advance in writing with the Planning Authority, the approved HMP (as amended from time to time) shall be implemented in full.

Reason: In the interests of habitat management and protection.

23. **Deer Management Plan**

(1) No development shall commence until a Deer Management Plan ("DMP") has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with NatureScot.
(2) The deer management statement shall set out proposed long term management of deer using the wind farm site and shall provide for the monitoring of deer numbers on site from the period from Commencement of Development until the date of completion of restoration.
(3) The approved deer management statement shall thereafter be implemented in full.

Reason: To protect ecological interests of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Area of Conservation.

24. **Species Protection Plan**

(1) There shall be no Commencement of Development unless and until protected species surveys have been carried out by a suitably qualified person. The surveys shall inform the mitigation measures required for the protection of such species which shall be incorporated into a Species Protection Plan.

(2) The Species Protection Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with NatureScot prior to the Commencement of Development.

(3) The approved Species Protection Plan shall be implemented in full.

Reason: In the interests of nature conservation.

25. **Bird Protection Plan**

(1) There shall be no Commencement of Development unless and until a Bird Protection Plan has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with NatureScot. The Bird Protection Plan shall set out measures to protect bird interests including post construction ornithology surveys.

(2) The approved Bird Protection Plan shall be implemented in full.

Reason: In the interests of protecting birds through the life time of the wind farm.

26. **Water Quality and Fish Monitoring Plan**

(1) There shall be no Commencement of Development unless and until an integrated Water Quality and Fish Monitoring Plan (WQFMP) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with Marine Scotland Science.

(2) The WQFMP must take account of Marine Scotland Science's guidance and shall include:

a. provision that water quality sampling should be carried out for at least 12 months prior to construction commencing, during construction and for at least 12 months after construction is complete;

b. key hydrochemical parameters (including turbidity and flow data), the identification of sampling locations (including control sites), frequency of sampling, sampling methodology, data analysis and reporting;

c. fully quantitative electrofishing surveys at sites potentially impacted and at control sites for at least 12 months before construction commences, during construction and for at least 12 months after construction is completed to detect any changes in fish populations; and

d. appropriate site specific mitigation measures including those detailed in the EIA Report.

(3) Thereafter, the WQFMP shall be implemented in full within the timescales set out in the WQFMP.

Reason: To ensure no deterioration of water quality and to protect fish populations within and downstream of the development area.

27. **Archaeology**

(1) There shall be no Commencement of Development unless and until a programme of archaeological works to be carried out during construction of the Development has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority.

(2) The programme of archaeological works shall include measures to be taken to protect and preserve any features of archaeological interest in situ and the recording and recovery of archaeological features which cannot be protected or preserved.

(3) The approved programme of archaeological works (as amended from time to time with written approval of the Planning Authority) shall be implemented in full.

Reason: To protect and/or record historic resources and features of archaeological importance on and adjacent to the development site

28. **Radio and Television Reception**

(1) There shall be no Commencement of Development unless and until a Radio [and Television] Reception Mitigation Plan has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority. The Radio [and Television] Reception Mitigation Plan shall provide for a baseline radio [and television] reception survey to be carried out prior to the installation of any turbine forming part of the Development. The results of the baseline radio [and television] reception survey shall be submitted to the Planning Authority prior to the installation of any turbine forming part of the Development.

(2) The approved Radio [and Television] Reception Mitigation Plan shall be implemented in full.

(3) Any claim by any person regarding radio [or television] interference at their house, business premises or other building, made during the period from installation of any turbine forming part of the Development to the date falling twelve months after the Date of Final Commissioning shall be investigated by a qualified engineer and the results of the investigation shall be submitted to the Planning Authority.

(4) Should any impairment to the radio [or television] signal be attributable to the Development, the impairment shall be remedied so that the standard of reception at the affected property is equivalent to the baseline radio or television reception.

Reason: To ensure local television services are sustained during the construction and operation of this development.

29. **Shadow Flicker**

(1) There shall be no Commencement of Development unless and until a scheme for the avoidance or mitigation of shadow flicker at residential and commercial properties situated at a distance which is within the equivalent to ten rotor diameters of any wind turbine forming part of the Development and which lawfully exist or for which planning permission has been granted as at the date of the section 36 consent, has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority.

(2) The approved mitigation scheme (as amended from time to time with written approval of the Planning Authority) shall be implemented in full.

Reason: To offset any impacts of shadow flicker on residential and commercial property amenity.

30. **Redundant Turbines**

(1) If one or more wind turbines fails to generate electricity for a continuous period of 12 months, then unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Planning Authority, the Company shall:

i. Within one month of the expiration of the 12 month period, submit a scheme to the Planning Authority setting out how the relevant wind turbine(s) and associated infrastructure will be removed from the site and the ground restored; and

ii. Implement the approved scheme within six months of the date of its approval, all to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that any redundant wind turbine is removed from Site, in the interests of safety, amenity and environmental protection.

31. **Aviation Safety**

No turbine shall be erected until a scheme for aviation lighting for the wind farm consisting of Ministry of Defence accredited infra-red aviation lighting has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with the MoD. The turbines shall be erected with the approved lighting installed and the lighting shall remain operational throughout the duration of the permission.

Reason: In the interests of aviation safety.

32. **Aviation Safety**

At least 14 days prior to the commencement of the erection of the turbines the Company has provided the Planning Authority, Ministry of Defence, Defence Geographic Centre and National Air Traffic Services ("NATS") with the following information and has provided evidence to the Planning Authority of having done so:

a. the date of the commencement of the erection of wind turbine generators;
b. the maximum height of any construction equipment to be used in the erection of the wind turbines;
c. the date any wind turbine generators are brought into use;
d. the latitude and longitude and maximum heights of each wind turbine generator, and any anemometer mast(s).

Reason: In the interests of aviation safety.

33. **Failure of Development to Generate Electricity**

In the event of the Development, not generating electricity on a commercial basis to the grid network for a continuous period of 12 months from 50% or more turbines installed and commissioned from time to time, the Company must immediately notify the Planning Authority in writing of that situation and

shall, if the Planning Authority, in consultation with the Scottish Ministers, direct, decommission the Development and reinstate the site to the specification and satisfaction of the Planning Authority . The Planning Authority shall have due regard to the circumstances surrounding the failure to generate and shall take the decision on decommissioning following discussions with the Scottish Ministers and other such parties as the Planning Authority consider appropriate.

Reason: To ensure the decommissioning and removal of the development in an appropriate and environmentally acceptable manner and the restoration of the site. In the interests of safety, amenity and environmental protection.

34. **Site Decommissioning, Restoration and Aftercare**

(1) The Development shall cease to generate electricity to the grid network by no later than the date falling 25 years from the Date of Final Commissioning.

(2) No later than one year prior to the Date of Final Generation or the expiry of the section 36 consent (whichever is earlier) a detailed decommissioning, restoration and aftercare plan, based upon the principles of the approved decommissioning, restoration and aftercare strategy, shall be submitted for the written approval of the Planning Authority. The detailed decommissioning, restoration and aftercare plan shall provide updated and detailed proposals, in accordance with relevant guidance at that time, for the removal of the Development, the treatment of ground surfaces, the management and timing of the works and environment management provisions which shall include (but is not limited to):

(a) a site waste management plan (dealing with all aspects of waste produced during the decommissioning, restoration and aftercare phases and, including details of measures to be taken to minimise waste associated with the Development and promote the recycling of materials and infrastructure components);

(b) details of the formation of the construction compound, welfare facilities, any areas of hardstanding, turning areas, internal access tracks, car parking, material stockpiles, oil storage, lighting columns, and any construction compound boundary fencing;

(c) a dust management plan;

(d) details of measures to be taken to prevent loose or deleterious material being deposited on the local road network, including wheel cleaning and lorry sheeting facilities, and measures to clean the site entrances and the adjacent local road network;

(e) a pollution prevention and control method statement, including arrangements for the storage and management of oil and fuel on the site;

(f) details of measures for soil storage and management;

(g) a surface water and groundwater management and treatment plan, including details of the separation of clean and dirty water drains, and location of settlement lagoons for silt laden water;

(h) details of measures for sewage disposal and treatment;

(i) temporary site illumination;

(j) the construction of any temporary access into the site and the creation and maintenance of associated visibility splays;

(k) details of watercourse crossings; and

(l) [a species protection plan based on surveys for protected species (including birds) carried out no longer than eighteen months prior to submission of the plan].

(3) The Development shall be decommissioned, the site restored and aftercare undertaken prior to the date falling three years after the Date of Final Generation and in accordance with the approved detailed decommissioning, restoration and aftercare plan.

Reason: To ensure the decommissioning and removal of the Development in an appropriate and environmentally acceptable manner and the restoration and aftercare of the site, in the interests of safety, amenity and environmental protection.

35. **Financial Guarantee**

(1) No development shall take place unless and until a bond or other form of financial guarantee in terms reasonably acceptable to the Planning Authority which secures the cost of performance of all decommissioning, restoration and aftercare obligation s referred to in condition 34 is submitted to the Planning Authority.

(2) The value of the financial guarantee shall be agreed between the Company and the Planning Authority or, failing agreement, determined (on application by either party) by a suitably qualified independent professional as being sufficient to meet the costs of all decommissioning, restoration and aftercare obligations referred to in condition 34.

(3) The financial guarantee shall be maintained in favour of the Planning Authority until the date of completion of all decommissioning, restoration and aftercare obligations referred to in condition 34.

(4) The value of the financial guarantee shall be reviewed by agreement between the Company and the Planning Authority or, failing agreement, determined (on application by either party) by a suitably qualified independent professional no less than every five years and increased or decreased to take account of any variation in costs of compliance with decommissioning, restoration and aftercare obligations and best practice prevailing at the time of each review.

Reason: In order to ensure that there are sufficient funds to secure performance of the decommissioning, restoration and aftercare conditions attached to this deemed planning permission in the event of default by the Company.

36. **Biodiversity Enhancement**

No development shall commence until a scheme for the delivery of biodiversity enhancement has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. This shall include a suitable financial mechanism for the delivery of the scheme. Thereafter the scheme shall be implemented prior to first export of electricity from the site and maintained throughout the operation and decommissioning of the development.

Reason: To ensure that the development secures positive effects for biodiversity.

37. **Outdoor Access**

No development shall commence until a detailed Outdoor Access Plan of public access across the site (as existing, during construction and following completion) has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the planning authority. The Outdoor Access Plan shall include details showing:

1. All existing access points, paths, core paths, tracks, rights of way and other routes (whether on land or inland water), and any areas currently outwith or excluded from statutory access rights under Part One of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, within and adjacent to the application site.
2. Any areas proposed for exclusion from statutory access rights, for reasons of privacy, disturbance or effect on curtilage related to buildings or structures.
3. All proposed paths, tracks and other alternative routes for use by walkers, riders, cyclists, canoeists, all-abilities users, etc. and any other relevant outdoor access enhancement (including construction specifications, signage, information leaflets, proposals for on-going maintenance etc.).
4. Any diversion of paths, tracks or other routes (whether on land or inland water), temporary or permanent, proposed as part of the Development (including details of mitigation measures, diversion works, duration and signage).

The approved Outdoor Access Plan, and any associated works, shall be implemented in full prior to the commencement of development or as otherwise may be agreed within the approved plan.

Reason: In the interests of securing public access rights.

38. (1) The rating level of noise immissions from the combined effects of the wind turbines forming part of the Development (including the application of any tonal penalty) when determined in accordance with the Guidance Notes for this condition shall not exceed the values for the relevant integer wind speed set out in, or derived from, Tables 1 and 2 at any dwelling which is lawfully existing or has planning permission at the date of this consent.

Table 1 – Between 07:00 and 23:00 – Noise limits expressed in dB LA90,10 minute as a function of the standardised wind speed (m/s) at 10

metre height as determined within the site averaged over 10 minute periods.

Location (easting, northing grid coordinates)	Standardised wind speed at 10 metres height (m/s) within the site averaged over 10-minute periods									
	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	L_{A90} Decibel Levels									
Dalnessie	26.5	29.0	33.8	35.9	37.8	38.2	38.2	38.2	38.2	38.2

(2) Table 2 – Between 23:00 and 07:00 – Noise limits expressed in dB LA90,10-minute as a function of the standardised wind speed (m/s) at 10 metre height as determined within the site averaged over 10 minute periods.

Location (easting, northing grid coordinates)	Standardised wind speed at 10 metres height (m/s) within the site averaged over 10-minute periods									
	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	L_{A90} Decibel Levels									
Dalnessie	26.5	29.0	33.8	37.9	38.2	38.2	38.2	38.2	38.2	38.2

(1) The turbines shall be designed to permit individually controlled operation or shut down at specified wind speeds and directions in order to facilitate compliance with noise criteria.

(2) The Company shall continuously log power production, wind speed and wind direction. These data shall be retained for a period of not less than 24 months. The Company shall provide this information to the Planning Authority within 14 days of receipt in writing of a request to do so.

(3) Prior to the Date of First Commissioning, the Company shall have submitted to, and received written approval of the Planning Authority to, a list of proposed independent consultants who will undertake compliance measurements in accordance with this condition. Amendments to the list of approved consultants shall be made only with the prior written approval of the Planning Authority.

(4) Within 21 days from receipt of a written request from the Planning Authority following a complaint to it from an occupant of a dwelling alleging noise disturbance at that dwelling, the Company shall, at its expense, employ a consultant approved by the Planning Authority in terms of paragraph (4) above to assess the level of noise immissions from the wind farm at the complainant's property. The written request from the Planning Authority shall set out at least the date, time and location to which the complaint relates and any identified atmospheric conditions, including wind direction, and include a statement as to whether, in the opinion of the Planning Authority, the noise giving rise to the complaint contains or is likely to contain a tonal component [or amplitude modulation].

(5) The assessment of the rating level of noise immissions in terms of paragraph (5) above shall be undertaken in accordance with an assessment protocol that shall previously have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. The protocol shall include the proposed measurement location(s) where measurements for compliance checking purposes shall be undertaken, whether noise giving rise to the complaint contains or is likely to contain a tonal component, and also the range of meteorological and operational conditions (which shall include the range of wind speeds, wind directions, power generation and times of day) to determine the assessment of rating level of noise immissions. The proposed range of conditions shall be those which prevailed during times when the complainant alleges there was disturbance due to noise, having regard to the written request of the Planning Authority under paragraph (5) above. [Within 21 days of a written request by the Planning Authority, following a complaint to it from a resident alleging noise disturbance at the dwelling at which they reside and where excess amplitude modulation is considered by the Planning Authority to be present in the noise emissions at the complainant's property, the Company shall submit a scheme, for the approval of the Planning Authority, providing for the further investigation and, as necessary, control of excess amplitude modulation. The scheme shall be based on best available techniques and shall be implemented as approved.]

(6) Where the property to which a complaint is related is not listed in Tables 1 or 2, the Company shall submit to the Planning Authority for written approval proposed noise limits selected from those listed in Tables 1 and 2 to be adopted at the complainant’s property for compliance checking purposes. The proposed noise limits are to be those limits selected from Tables 1 and 2 specified for a listed location which the independent consultant considers as being likely to experience the most similar background noise environment to that experienced at the complainant’s property. The rating level of noise immissions resulting from the combined effects of the wind turbines shall not exceed the noise limits approved in writing by the Planning Authority for the complainant’s property.

(7) The Company shall provide to the Planning Authority the independent consultant’s assessment of the rating level of noise immissions within two months of the date of the written request of the Planning Authority for compliance measurements to be made under paragraph (7), unless the time limit is extended in writing by the Planning Authority. Certificates of calibration of the instrumentation used to undertake the measurements shall be submitted to the Planning Authority with the independent consultant’s assessment of the rating level of noise immissions.

(8) Where a further assessment of the rating level of noise immissions from the wind farm is required, the Company shall submit a copy of the further assessment within 21 days of submission of the independent consultant’s assessment pursuant to paragraph (6) above unless the time limit has been extended in writing by the Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interest of amenity.

Signature:	Dafydd Jones
Designation:	Planning Manager - North
Author:	Mark Fitzpatrick
Background Papers:	Documents referred to in report and in case file.
Relevant Plans:	Plan 1 - Location Plan – Figure 1.1
	Plan 2 - Proposed Site Layout Plan – Figure 2.2
	Plan 3 - Turbine Elevations - Figure 2.3

Appendix 2 – Viewpoint Assessment Appraisal – Visual Impact

			Proposed Development			Combined Development		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility of receptor / value of the view)**	**Magnitude of Change (size and scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility)**	**Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Susceptibility of Receptor)**	**Significance (Major & Moderate are Significant)**	**Magnitude of Change (size and scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility) *Inferred from Applicant's assessment**	**Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Susceptibility of Receptor) *Inferred from Applicant's assessment**	**Significance**
VP1 Right of Way near Dalnessie	APP	Medium-high	High	Major	**Significant**	Low	Minor	**Not significant**
	THC	High	High	Major	**Significant**	Medium	Moderate	**Significant**
	Entrance to Wild Land, which increases the value of the landscape - edge of settled landscape although far from the public road, views across rough pasture to the moorland behind in middle distance. Landscape is rolling, perspective of the photograph appears lowdown so viewer is enclosed by the landscape, contrastingly however, the view southeast, behind the viewer when looking at the turbines, is along the shallow valley of Strath Brora toward the relatively distant Kilbraur Hill and Ben Horn Compositionally the turbines are ok from this close viewpoint although the composition will be quick-changing as the receptor moves past the turbines, receptors move slowly. Turbines reduce the sense of remoteness by considerably increasing the scale and scope of human activity in the area from traditional land management and activities associated with an Highland country estate to wind energy. Turbines dwarf landscape features including Sròn Leathad Chleansaid and will be audibly experienced as well as visually. Largely in agreement with the applicant's assessment as a standalone development. Cumulative: Kilbraur and extension turbines are very noticeable despite distance when walking through the area, although this may depend on light conditions, as there is a direct view through Strath Brora to them. We note the view to the Kilbraur away in the NatureScot montage is unhelpfully blocked by machinery. The development will, in combination with the Kilbraur array, bookend the shallow strath, which the applicant does not acknowledge within the EIAR. While they schemes would likely be viewed 'successively', when experienced together they will have the effect of increasing the visual prominence of the Kilbraur turbines while increasing the association of the area with turbine development. We therefore consider the magnitude of cumulative change to be medium in combination with the Kilbraur turbines, moderate level of effect, which is significant in accordance with the applicant's methodology. Based on current 'on the ground conditions', the turbines of the Achany / Rosehall / Meall Buidhe (if permitted) wind farm cluster would have less of an influence due to intervening buildings and commercial forestry,							

			Proposed Development			Combined Development		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility of receptor / value of the view)**	**Magnitude of Change (size and scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility)**	**Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Susceptibility of Receptor)**	**Significance (Major & Moderate are Significant)**	**Magnitude of Change (size and scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility) *Inferred from Applicant's assessment**	**Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Susceptibility of Receptor) *Inferred from Applicant's assessment**	**Significance**
	however their influence will increase when the forestry is harvested. Notwithstanding, they would be experienced in association with estate buildings and would have less of a jarring effect on the rural character of the site.							
VP2 A836 Rhian Bridge	APP	Medium	Medium	Moderate	**Significant**	Low	Minor	**Not significant**
	THC	High	Medium	Moderate	**Significant**	Medium	Moderate	**Significant**
	View from a relatively remote section of the A836 4.4km from the nearest turbine. National Cycle Route 1, some tourists. Simple landscape composition of scrub and moorland landform in foreground intersected by forestry in the midground and undulating and rising rounded hills beyond the forestry. Photography is taken on the north side of Rhian Bridge where the influence of roadside vegetation screening south facing views is greater. Had the photography been taken from the entrance to the track south of the bridge then it would have been more representative of this open sweeping landscape that gives way to a more complex pattern of undulating and rising hills beyond forestry and higher peaks in the distant background to the south. The landform and features on the landscape (forestry and Strath) draw the eye. Turbines present as a single row (with exception of T4 & T8), T16 & T1 appear as outliers although removing T16, would make T15, and T10 also appear as outliers, so removing T16, T15, and T10 from the left of the view and T1 from the right would tighten up the composition of the array. The development would be experienced in sideways views except where receptors make a stop along the route (although the Abhainn Sgeamhaidh watercourse does draw the eye into the landscape beyond the road) so from this VP the composition would not be a determining factor. Turbines are in the middle distance and again they dwarf and disrupt views of landscape features behind, including Sròn Leathad Chleansaid and Meallan Liath Mor. Cumulatively, the development would be experienced in combination with the four turbines of Strath Tirry, despite the photography, as well as successively and sequentially when moving along the A836 in both directions. There will be a noticeable and potentially jarring difference in turbine scales given that Strath Tirry is approved for 135m tip heights. Together the two schemes foreshadow and then frame the many arrays to the south (when moving southwards), where the towers of Lairgs I and II will be visible and depending on the outcome of Garvary, that scheme may visually connect the Lairgs to the Achany / Rosehall / Meall Buidhe (if permitted) cluster. The wirelines for this VP illustrate that development would be experienced successively and sequentially with a significant number of schemes, extending the influence of wind							

			Proposed Development			Combined Development		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility of receptor / value of the view)**	**Magnitude of Change (size and scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility)**	**Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Susceptibility of Receptor)**	**Significance (Major & Moderate are Significant)**	**Magnitude of Change (size and scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility) *Inferred from Applicant's assessment**	**Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Susceptibility of Receptor) *Inferred from Applicant's assessment**	**Significance**
	energy north along the A836 and significantly reducing any respite from wind energy development, particularly when experienced in combination with Strath Tirry, and when sequentially experiencing the landscape. The magnitude of change in combination with Strath Tirry would be high given the development quintuplicates the number of turbines, while the level of visual effect is moderate in relation to the developments to the south (given the oblique view of the development), we consider the cumulative visual impact of the development to be moderate and significant							
VP3 Saval, Lairg	APP	Medium-high	Medium	Moderate	**Significant**	Low	Minor	**Not significant**
	THC	Medium-high	Medium	Moderate	**Significant**	Medium	Moderate	**Significant**
	Settled agricultural landscape of rough pasture in the foreground giving way to a large swathe of commercial forestry in middle distance with the hills of the WLA and SLA behind. Ben Klibreck appears as a distant peak. Compositionally, the section of the view towards the development is of a simple with sweeping horizontal elements, although the presence of OHL has introduced vertical manmade elements into the near ground of the view. The OHL draws the eye to the left (west) of the view, where the visible Dalchork Substation is under construction and where the landscape gives way to the more complex view of settled slopes with plentiful but scattered residential properties and the farmed plain of the strath, which then gives way to Loch Shin and more distant peaks in the background. To the right (east) the view is limited by vegetation from the VP however opens up towards Strath Fleet for the viewer if they move beyond the vegetation. Despite the area having views along Strath Tirry, Strath Brora, and Strath Fleet, this is not a view of high value; the road is a dead end with limited housing while views from some houses are restricted by vegetation. Judging by orientation of houses and vegetation, it would appear the views to the south are more valued by residents although residents will have high susceptibility.							

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	No major issues with the array compositionally, T6 would be the outlier and T13 & T18 could be positioned better in relation to each other to reduce blade overlap but this wouldn't be a determining issue. Chleansaid will add additional manmade vertical elements in to the view, these ones will be moving, of a much larger scale than, and relative set back from the viewer relative to, the OHL, which will result in visual dissonance and reduce the simplicity of the overall view composition. Nevertheless, largely in agreement with the applicant's assessment of impacts from this viewpoint however. The geographic extent is medium-large in our view as the perception is going to be of a wide array given that all turbines are visible and will be viewed in relation to several landform features behind. Cumulatively, the array brings the influence of turbine development closer to the small settlement from the northwest, i.e., in relation to Creag Riabhach and Strath Tirry, which are read as a succession of wind energy developments although each scheme has its own distinct setting. While there is currently a degree of separation with schemes to the east (Kilbraurs), which are not so visible along this route, this would change if Kintradwell is approved, as Strath Brora would be bookended by turbines, although it would be the blades of Kintradwell that would be visible over the distant horizon. While not in the view from the VP, to the south of this small settlement, the arrays of Lairg I and II, Beinn Tharsuinn, Beinn nan Oighrean, Coire na Cloiche, Novar Phases 1 and 2, Braemore, sweeping westward to Achany, Rosehall, and Sallachy, exert influence, in particular to the left of the view looking south. The turbines of both Lairg schemes, potentially in combination with Garvary, draw the eye to more distant schemes south and then sequentially with those to the west; such that residents of the settlement here will experience the impression of being encircled by turbine developments, which is a significant cumulative effect.						
VP4 Dalchork Bird Hide	APP	Medium	Medium	Minor	**Not significant**	Low	Minor	**Not significant**
	THC	Medium-high	Medium	Moderate	**Significant**	Medium	Moderate	**Significant**
	Viewpoint is relatively low lying on the flat Loch Shin / River Tirry flood plain with views to the northeast over reed covered marshy ground into Strath Tirry with the peak of Ben Klibreck and Armine hills in the background. The viewer's right feels more enclosed by the landform with landscape features appearing in the middle ground but becoming more distant as the viewer pans left. the middle ground is very much occupied by manmade features including the A838 and associated bridge, OHL, residential properties, agricultural premises, and commercial forestry,							

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	all of which act as scale indicators in the landscape. The Dalchork Substation is around 1km ENE of the VP and is partially behind landform – photography shows only one construction crane visible in the photography but not included in the wireframe. To the south views are screened by vegetation but would otherwise be over Loch Shin and the forested slopes of the rounded hills to its south, as well as funnelled into the Achany Glen. The valued view from the bird hide is towards and along the loch when bird viewing. The path provides access for recreational users not engaged in bird watching, although it is not as welcoming for this purpose given that it is a dead end. Nevertheless, the view is of the Special Landscape Area, which, given its protection, intrinsically elevates the view's value. Together, we consider this medium-high. The hubs of the majority of turbines are associated with the horizon from this viewpoint although T10 reveals more of itself from behind the ridge and, exceptionally, T16, the tower of which is visible before the horizon, meaning the array is not quite contained within landform. T16 is the feature that indicates the scale of the turbines behind the horizon, when viewed in relation to manmade feature in the foreground. These features also amplify the horizontal spread of the array as it is viewed over and above them despite the scheme not occupying a large portion of the view. From the A836 near the VP the array would be viewed behind the horizon, while many of the manmade features Compositionally, the array is clumped in distinctive groups of three and one group of four (T16, T10, T15, and T11), which gives it some rhythm. The obvious turbine to remove would be T16, which would limit the extent the scheme is seen on the nearside of the horizon and reduce the horizontal extent. Cumulatively, the array would visually connect with the four turbines of Strath Tirry in forward views, with the tips of Creag Riabhach appearing in the periphery of the view at a distance. The development therefore interacts most with Strath Tirry, which sits in the foreground of the landform that rises to the main peak of Ben Klibreck and competes with the peak of the SLA for visual dominance. Given the visual connection with Chleansaid WF, the latter scheme would amplify this effect, and reduce the scale and importance of Ben Klibreck in the landscape, and therefore the appreciation of the view, further, which is a significant and adverse cumulative impact, although would be reduced with the removal of T16. We consider this to be the main cumulative impact of the proposal and the development's interaction with other nearby developments to be not significant.							

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VP5 The Ord above Ferrycroft Visitors Centre	APP	Medium	Medium	Moderate	**Significant**	Low	Moderate	**Significant (total)**
	THC	High	Medium	Major	**Significant**	Large	Major	**Significant**
	Elevated viewpoint looking northeast across the settled glen of the river Shin and over Lairg towards the sweeping moorland and rounded hills of the WLA and SLA, which form the backdrop of the view and skyline. The view becomes more expansive towards the south along the Achany Glen, and to the north over Loch Shin. The northern edge of Lairg is below the southernmost turbines of the array (T1, T5, T6, T7, T12). The Ord hill is a landmark feature at the southern edge of Loch Shin and northern extent of Achany Glen that hosts a telecommunications lattice tower. The view incorporates lots of man-made features including fields, houses, roads, OHL, a hydroelectric dam, and forestry, as well as the three turbines of Lairg 1 to the east. With the exception of Lairg I and the under construction Lairg II, as well as patches of Forestry, these manmade features are generally contained below the moorland summits however Lairg I is behind the horizon and viewed against the sky. Broadleaf woodland demarks the banks of Loch Shin northwards and the path of the River Shin southwards. The moorland summits are a simpler, wilder and horizontal component of the view distinguished from the complex farmed and forested slopes below. The view over to the WLA and SLA hills and the peak of Ben Klibreck is regionally important while the Scheduled Ancient Monuments of the landmark Ord Hill are nationally designated, whereby the view is paramount to the appreciation of the historic resources. Given the inward and outward focus of visitors to Ord Hill, the susceptibility to change and the sensitivity of receptors is high. From the VP the turbines will compete in scale with its hosting hills where they would complicate the view by introducing vertical moving elements with overlapping blades in contrast with the horizontality of the otherwise simple wilder moorland covered rounded hills. Compositionally, the array appears designed from this viewpoint although there are groupings, gaps, and outliers with T6 being the obvious turbine to remove, stacking appears to have been largely avoided. Turbines are visually contained within the landscape and easily associated with the moorland covered rounded peaks.							

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	Turbines represent a very noticeable change to the baseline view with a perceptibly wide array relative to the landform although contained and occupying a small portion of the repceptor's view so the extent of the change is medium. Based on that judgment, the magnitude of change is considered medium. Given the value of the view, the level of effect is major and significant. Similar to VP4, the proposal will have a significant cumulative impact in combination with the turbines of Strath Tirry by virtue of drawing the viewer's eye to that array and heightening its visual prominence relative to the peaks of Ben Klibreck, indeed the northward views towards the SLA and Strath Tirry would now be framed on both sides by larger schemes. There would be some scalar dissonance in combination with Strath Tirry due to the difference in turbine heights (135m to tip for Strath Tirry). Significant successive effects occur from this VP when experienced with developments in the wider surrounds including (clockwise from north): Creag Riabhach, Strath Tirry, the Kilbraurs, Lairgs I and II, potentially Garvary, Braemore, Rosehall, Achany, potentially the Achany Extension, Sallachy, and back to Creag Riabhach, The proposal essentially 'fills a gap' in the landscape where there is currently no approved scheme. The magnitude of change in doing so would be large given there would be little visual respite for receptors from turbine development as Ord Hill would be encircled (as well as the town of Lairg itself).							
VP6 A836 south of Lairg (Torroble)	APP	Medium	Medium-low	Minor	**Not significant**	Low	Minor	**Not significant**
	THC	Medium-high	Medium	Moderate - minor	**Not significant**	Medium	Minor	**Not significant**
	Elevated north facing view from rural / residential road close to site entrance of Lairg II WF. Complex view over undulating rural landform with a middle distant and relatively high skyline to the viewers right sloping and giving way to the distant peaks of Ben Klibreck in the middle of the view and Ben Hee to the receptor's left. The fore to middle-ground contains several manmade elements including a farmsteading / residential property in the near ground containing signs of activity within the steading including cut wood and parked vehicles. From here the foreground drops perceptibly northward giving way to broadleaf woodland and undulating fields topped by commercial forestry in the middle and right of the receptor's view. To the left, the undulating fields have a general decline towards Lairg and the River- and Loch- Shin, behind which are							

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Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility of receptor / value of the view)**	**Magnitude of Change (size and scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility)**	**Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Susceptibility of Receptor)**	**Significance (Major & Moderate are Significant)**	**Magnitude of Change (size and scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility) *Inferred from Applicant's assessment**	**Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Susceptibility of Receptor) *Inferred from Applicant's assessment**	**Significance**
	farmed and forested slopes that undulate to the distant Ben Hee. The river and loch are framed by the not too distant landmark Ord Hill, which marks the head of the Achany Glen beneath the rounded hills behind. The glen sweeps southwards as the viewer pans further left, however views are restricted by vegetation and the topography of the steep slope, which also restrict views to the south (where the Lairg I and II developments, and potentially Garvary, are sited). The broader view is emblematic of the complex interplay of Strath, Rounded Hill, Sweeping Moorland, Farmed and Forested Plain with Crofting landscape character types that confluence at Lairg. The higher distant peaks and limited views of rounded peaks offer visual respite from the visual clutter of manmade elements including OHL due to the simplicity of the landcover – despite limited pockets of commercial forestry on their slopes. Not all properties along the route are related to agriculture, there are single houses and pods offering tourist accommodation, all oriented to take advantage of the views – although not all properties are north facing and overlooking the proposal. The view is therefore valued by residents and tourists alike, although unlikely to be used by non-short-or long-stay residents, therefore receptors are considered to be of medium-high sensitivity. The turbines are associated with the middle distant landform with, assuming no commercial forestry, visibility of majority hubs and 10no towers, with turbines T1, T5, T6, T12 to the right of the array disappearing behind the landform although their tips will break the skyline with the tips of T5 and T6 disappearing behind the horizon as they rotate. Turbines would impinge rather than disrupt views from this VP, their presence is noticeable but not dominant given their location and set back from the rural complex of Lairg and its immediate low lying surrounds. Similarly, the turbines do not disrupt on the special qualities of the SLA when viewed from outside of the SLA as they do not impinge on views of the foothills in any significant manner. The turbines would be most noticeable where the hubs are visible to the left of the array and would therefore have influence within the view over a medium geographic extent. We consider that the magnitude of change would be medium and the level of effect is moderate and therefore significant, although most likely acceptable, singularly, from this location.						

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	Similar to VP3, Chleansaid WF brings the influence of wind energy development closer to the receptor in north facing views, and therefore closer to Lairg with Strath Tirry and the Loch Shin Basin increasingly, and likely irreversibly, associated with wind energy development over a perceptibly large distance – based on the wirelines. Although given the distance from Creag Riabhach and scale of Strath Tirry, the in combination effect is less likely to be significant on the ground. Lairg I is visible to the receptor's right successively, while Lairg II is largely screened behind the receptor from here and would likely be audibly experienced rather than visually, with the larger cumulative visual impact likely to be experienced successively with the schemes located along the Glen Cassley. We consider the level of effect of these cumulative impacts to be moderate and significant, however not necessarily unacceptable. We would question the representation of the intensity of the 2000 candela as represented on the night time visuals, at maximum intensity, red lights are very intense with a glow that spreads from the source meaning that aviation lighting is not a single point or dot of red light. When viewed in relation to other schemes of varying distance they have the effect of flattening distances making it more difficult for receptors to discern the relative distances of schemes. However it is not possible based on the information submitted with the application to complete a cumulative assessment of the night time impact from aviation lighting.							
VP7 Rhilochan	APP	Medium	Medium-low	Minor	**Not significant**	Low	Minor	**Not significant**
	THC	Medium	Medium-low	Minor	**Not significant**	Medium	Moderate	**Significant**
	Sweeping view west to east view along Strath Brora west to east with the valley floor continuing between the rounded peaks of the valley sides to the west and meandering north below the slopes of Kilbraur Hill, Ben Horn, and Meall Odhar, which frame the valley. Simple landscape composition of rough grazing and loose field patterns defined by old, deteriorated stone walls that give way to the unsegregated moorland that covers the rounded peaks above. Behind the viewer are OHL and telephone lines both supported by timber poles. While there are clear signs of human intervention in this landscape, the impression is of a settled landscape area that is largely left unchecked and minimally maintained, i.e., infrequently visited but not deserted. To the west of the VP there are a limited number of properties along the Pittenrail to Gordonbush Road, largely of traditional rural housing that may be associated with estate management and agriculture, although							

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	some newer standalone properties exist. Consequently, this is not a view of high value more due to the remoteness of the area meaning it is not well known rather than value being a measure of attractiveness. Susceptibility would be medium as would receptor sensitivity. Turbines are middle distant, contained within landform located to the left of the wider view, while they do block visibility of a distant peak, the peak would not be the defining feature of the view. The composition of the array is not favourable from this VP with stacking and overlapping. Agree with the applicant's assessment of significance. Cumulatively, the turbines directly face those of the Kilbraur wind farms and therefore the strath is bookended by turbine development, which is a significant cumulative impact, although not necessarily unacceptable at this location.							
VP8 Ben Klibreck, Meall nan Con	APP	High	Medium	Moderate	**Significant**	Low	Minor	**Not significant**
	THC	High	Medium-high	Moderate-major	**Significant**	Medium-high	Moderate-major	**Significant**
	Panoramic elevated viewpoint from the summit of Meall nan Con (Ben Klibreck) within the SLA and WLA. The main view towards Chleansaid is south facing over rounded hills, sweeping moorland, and settled plains with the peaks of rounded mountain massifs in the distance. The view contains occasional lochans and forestry while Loch Shin is to the receptor's right. As the viewer pans right, west- and northwest- ward, the landscape becomes more rugged with defined ridges and slopes while the skyline is defined by distant lone mountains with the peaks of Ben Hee appearing middle distant. To the receptor's left, southeast to northeast, the landscape appears to 'flatten' northwards towards the coastal edge, although the plain is disrupted by occasional small peaks, rounded hills, which reveal the undulating landform. This section of the view contains the lochs and lochans of the flow country, occasional rivers, and forestry, while the viewer is presented with the dramatic scenery of straths, lochs, massifs, and coast as she pans north. Overall, a relatively simple view composition with a heightened sense of scale, distance, and drama especially as the viewer pans around the panorama. The view is highly valued as it is used by hill walkers engaged in an appreciation of landscape qualities.							

			Proposed Development			Combined Development		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility of receptor / value of the view)**	**Magnitude of Change (size and scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility)**	**Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Susceptibility of Receptor)**	**Significance (Major & Moderate are Significant)**	**Magnitude of Change (size and scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility) *Inferred from Applicant's assessment**	**Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Susceptibility of Receptor) *Inferred from Applicant's assessment**	**Significance**
	Turbines are middle distant and contained behind a single ridgeline and are therefore associated with that landform feature, albeit that feature oscillates between summits, plateaus, and valley, making the proposal perceptibly wide in the view, however the turbines do follow the topography successfully. Compositionally there are four distinct groupings and there will be a lot of stacking and overlapping particularly in the larger groupings to the right of the array. Chleansaid will therefore add complexity to the view by introducing vertical and moving manmade features, which may be reduced by removing the rear turbines (T4, T9, T10, T14, T15). While the turbines do not occupy a large portion of the receptors sight, they do represent a marked and unavoidable change in the baseline view, the magnitude of change is considered medium-high, the level of effect is major-moderate and significant. Given the distances of the majority of turbine developments, the obvious manmade feature in the landscape was forestry, which is generally a horizontal element in view. The view will no longer be (relatively) free of manmade structures however given the proximity of Strath Tirry and the under construction Creag Riabhach WF. If constructed, the approval of Strath Tirry now brings wind farm development to the near side of Loch Shin from this VP in south facing views, which reduces the sense of remoteness of the location, while Chleansaid will bring the influence of wind energy development significantly closer with turbines of a much larger scale. Due to the jarring contrast of scales, Chleansaid would create visual dissonance with Strath Tirry and amplify that scheme's impact on the view as experienced. Strath Tirry will successively connect Chleansaid with Creag Riabhach, which due to their relatively close proximity, will contribute to a sense of being overwhelmed (although not encirclement given distances to the Strathy developments and intervening landform in views towards the north coastline), by wind energy development thus reducing the receptors' enjoyment of the summit. Also in combination with Strath Tirry, the scheme will draw the eye to more distant wind farms in south facing views, reducing the degree to which the viewer has respite from turbine developments. These effects represent a medium-high magnitude of change and major-moderate significant level of effect.							
VP9 Ben Armine	APP	Medium-high	Medium-low	Minor	**Not significant**	Low	Minor	**Not significant**
	THC	High	Medium	Moderate-major	**Significant**	Medium	Moderate	**Significant**

			Proposed Development			Combined Development		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility of receptor / value of the view)**	**Magnitude of Change (size and scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility)**	**Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Susceptibility of Receptor)**	**Significance (Major & Moderate are Significant)**	**Magnitude of Change (size and scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility) *Inferred from Applicant's assessment**	**Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Susceptibility of Receptor) *Inferred from Applicant's assessment**	**Significance**
*poor colour correction in photography, images appear bleached.	Panoramic elevated viewpoint from the summit of Ben Armine within the SLA and WLA with views of Chleansaid WF to the southwest. The summit is distant from public roads, relatively inaccessible, and very remote. The view encompasses rounded hills, sweeping moorland and flows, and strath, with the peaks of rugged mountain massif in the distance; the view encompasses two National Scenic Areas (Assynt – Coigach NSA to the right, and Wester Ross NSA forward on) and the Fannichs, Beinn Dearg and Glencalvie Special Landscape Area forward on. The view contains occasional rivers, lochans and forestry but is generally of a simple composition of horizontal features. Northwest views towards Ben Klibreck and Creag Riabhach beyond are not included, however there is no theoretical visibility of CR from this VP. As with Ben Klibreck, the view is of high value for those who make the journey to the summit, which given that it is more remote and more difficult to get to, the expectation is of a greater sense of reward. Turbines are middle distant with the hubs of T4, T9, T10, T11, T14, T15, and T16 associated with the ridgeline of rounded hill summit while towers of T1, T2, T3, T5, T6, T7, T8, T12, and T13 are visible to a lesser or greater extent. Turbines are backdropped by land but are associated with different landforms so the array perceptibly reads as wide in the landscape. Compositionally, the development almost reads as a single linear spread, although there is obvious stacking and overlapping. The angle of view means that the development does not relate as strongly to intervening landforms as in VP8 and the array appears less compact. Turbine 16 seems detached from the whole and the slight separation of the group formed by T1, T5 and T6 is emphasised by their being most remote from the anchoring forms of Creag Riabhach na Ghreige in the middle ground. There would be some effects on perception of scale and distance in the landscape, with the turbines adding prominence to the mid-horizon between the Rounded Hills and Sweeping Moorland and Flows. Strong disagreement with the applicant's assessment, given the remoteness of the summit, the change in the baseline view is highly notable and unavoidable and therefore magnitude of change is medium-high, the level of effect is Moderate-major, significant and adverse. The tips of Strath Tirry would be visible between the hubs of T9, T14, and T11 of very noticeable different scale where these are discerned resulting in a very jarring visual dissonance. If the tips of Strath Tirry are not discernible (this is not clear in the photography), Chleansaid would be against the pattern of wind farm development as it brings the influence of turbine development to the north of Loch Shin and significantly closer to the SLA and WLA. While Chleansaid does not occupy a portion of the view that is currently turbine free, the proposal would draw the							

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Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility of receptor / value of the view)**	**Magnitude of Change (size and scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility)**	**Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Susceptibility of Receptor)**	**Significance (Major & Moderate are Significant)**	**Magnitude of Change (size and scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility) *Inferred from Applicant's assessment**	**Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Susceptibility of Receptor) *Inferred from Applicant's assessment**	**Significance**
	receptor's eye to the more distant turbines of the Achany and Rosehall cluster, resulting in noticeable vertical stacking of turbines in the view in combination with these schemes whereby several folds in the landscape is occupied with turbines, contributing to an impression the wind energy is a common feature of the landscape beyond the SLA, which is an adverse visual effect. It would make sense to remove the outlying turbine 16 in this view to reduce the spread of Chleansaid and so it does not visually link turbined development to Achany Extension (if approved). Given the distance of the rear turbines relative to Chleansaid, the cumulative magnitude of change is considered to be medium while the level of effect is moderate, significant.							
VP10 Reay - Cassley WLA Ben Sgeireach	APP	Medium-high	Medium-low	Minor	**Not significant**	Low	Minor	**Significant (total)**
	THC	Medium-high	Medium	Moderate	**Significant**	Medium	Moderate	**Significant**
	Elevated viewpoint from the summit of Ben Sgeireach to the west-south-west of the application site and on the western side of Loch Shin within the Reay - Cassley WLA. Loch Shin dissects the view from the wilder summit in the near ground over to the relatively settled shores of the loch, which host a mosaic of residential properties, agricultural fields, broadleaf woodland, and commercial forestry, giving way to moorland covered rounded peaks above including the peak of Ben Armine within the WLA and SLA. The viewpoint visually connects two areas within the Rounded Hills LCTs across Strath, and, Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCTs. As the viewer pans right and southwards, the view is occupied by many folds in the landform that continue to distant peaks and are largely of simple moorland landcover with occasional rocky outcrops, lochans, commercial forestry, and agricultural fields on lower ground. The turbines of the Achany Extension WF may occupy the near distant portion of this view however turbines already occupy the majority of this view. To the receptor's left, i.e., as the viewer pans north, the scenery becomes still wilder and more rugged with multiple high peaks defining the skyline. The turbines of Sallachy would be visible from this viewpoint largely contained behind a ridge in the landform. While outward views from summits lose the sense of wildness from the Reay - Cassley WLA, the summit is used by recreational hill walkers engaged in an appreciation of the landscape and therefore is of high value although a reduced susceptibility due to views of human inhabitation of the landscape. Agree therefore with the applicant's assessment of medium-high sensitivity.							

			Proposed Development			Combined Development		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility of receptor / value of the view)**	**Magnitude of Change (size and scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility)**	**Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Susceptibility of Receptor)**	**Significance (Major & Moderate are Significant)**	**Magnitude of Change (size and scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility) *Inferred from Applicant's assessment**	**Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Susceptibility of Receptor) *Inferred from Applicant's assessment**	**Significance**
	Turbines appear highly prominent in the landscape due to their scale and horizontal spread given that the towers are wholly visible and turbines are viewed in association with several features including forestry and multiple fields to the scheme's nearside, and viewed against several summits to its rear, meaning they are perceptibly wide. From this VP the turbines will compete in scale with its hosting hills, especially Ben Armine of the SLA, where they would complicate the view by introducing vertical moving elements with overlapping blades in contrast with the horizontality of the otherwise simple wilder moorland covered rounded hills. Compositionally, there is some stacking and overlapping from the VP (T3 & T7, and, T2 & T5), however it would be more beneficial to remove the outliers to reduce the horizontal spread and its comparative visual prominence with Ben Armine (T1, T10, T15, and T16). However, repositioning T1 to render the array more compact and contained, and drawing back T16 would improve the relationship of the array to the less differentiated Rounded Hills than those which rise towards Ben Armine and Ben Klibreck. Notwithstanding, the turbines are a highly notable change to the baseline view, the magnitude of change is medium-high, the level of effect is moderate-high and significant. Cumulative in combination impacts arise with Strath Tirry due to dissonant scale of turbines while the latter scheme visually connects Chleansaid to the Gordonbush schemes, increasing the prominence of those more distant turbines in the view and increasing the extent of wind energy development's influence along the eastern slopes of Loch Shin, which is also a successive visual impact with Creag Riabhach from the north, and from the south cumulatively with existing and approved schemes. Consequently the development would reduce the degree to which the receptor's vision is free of turbine development and contribute to a perception of encirclement of wind farm development from this location. The cumulative magnitude of change is therefore considered medium, with a moderate level of effect, which is significant.							
VP 11 Ben Hee	APP	High	Low	Minor	Not significant	Low	Minor	**Not significant**
	THC	High	Low	Minor	Not significant	Low	Minor	**Not significant**
	The viewpoint is located near the summit of Ben Hee, 865m AOD, from where a panoramic view is gained across extensive areas of north-western Scotland, including Ben More Assynt, Ben Klibreck, Ben Hope and Ben Loyal. It is located on the eastern edge of the rugged mountain massif LCT. Views to the development are to the southeast from the VP. Generally a simple view composition in that direction due to moorland							

			Proposed Development			Combined Development		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility of receptor / value of the view)**	**Magnitude of Change (size and scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility)**	**Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Susceptibility of Receptor)**	**Significance (Major & Moderate are Significant)**	**Magnitude of Change (size and scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility) *Inferred from Applicant's assessment**	**Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Susceptibility of Receptor) *Inferred from Applicant's assessment**	**Significance**
	landcover, the landscape sweeps downwards from the mid-distant summit of Ben Klibreck towards the south with smaller rounded summits of Kilbraur Hill and Beinn Lunndaidh that would backdrop the turbines in the distance. View contains loch, lochans, and commercial forestry as well as several distant turbine developments. The summit of Ben Hee is a popular destination for those wishing to appreciate landscape qualities and therefore receptors will be of high sensitivity. The VP is 23km from the proposed development, has a limited proportion of the panoramic view and is backdropped by landform, while the proposed development would likely be more visible on clear days. The array appears reasonably contained in the landscape from this distance and no immediately obvious compositional issues. Singularly, the proposed development is not considered to result in a significant visual effect on receptors at Ben Hee. There are a number of wind energy developments with theoretical visibility, including the nearby Creag Riabhach, and more distant Gordonbush, Kilbraurs, Lairgs I and II, Achany, Beinn Tharsuinn, Rosehall and Coire na Cloiche. The proposal would occupy a portion of the view currently free of turbines although depending on the outcome of South Kilbraur, the proposal would combine to create vertical turbine stacking, which is generally not an acceptable visual impact as it flattens the landform and disrupts the sense of scale in the landscape, however form this distance the effect is not considered significant. The proposal is not considered to result in a significant cumulative visual effect.							
VP12 Ben More Assynt	APP	High	Low	Minor	Not significant	Low	Minor	**Not significant**
	THC	High	Medium-low	Moderate-minor	Not significant	Medium-low	Moderate	**Significant**

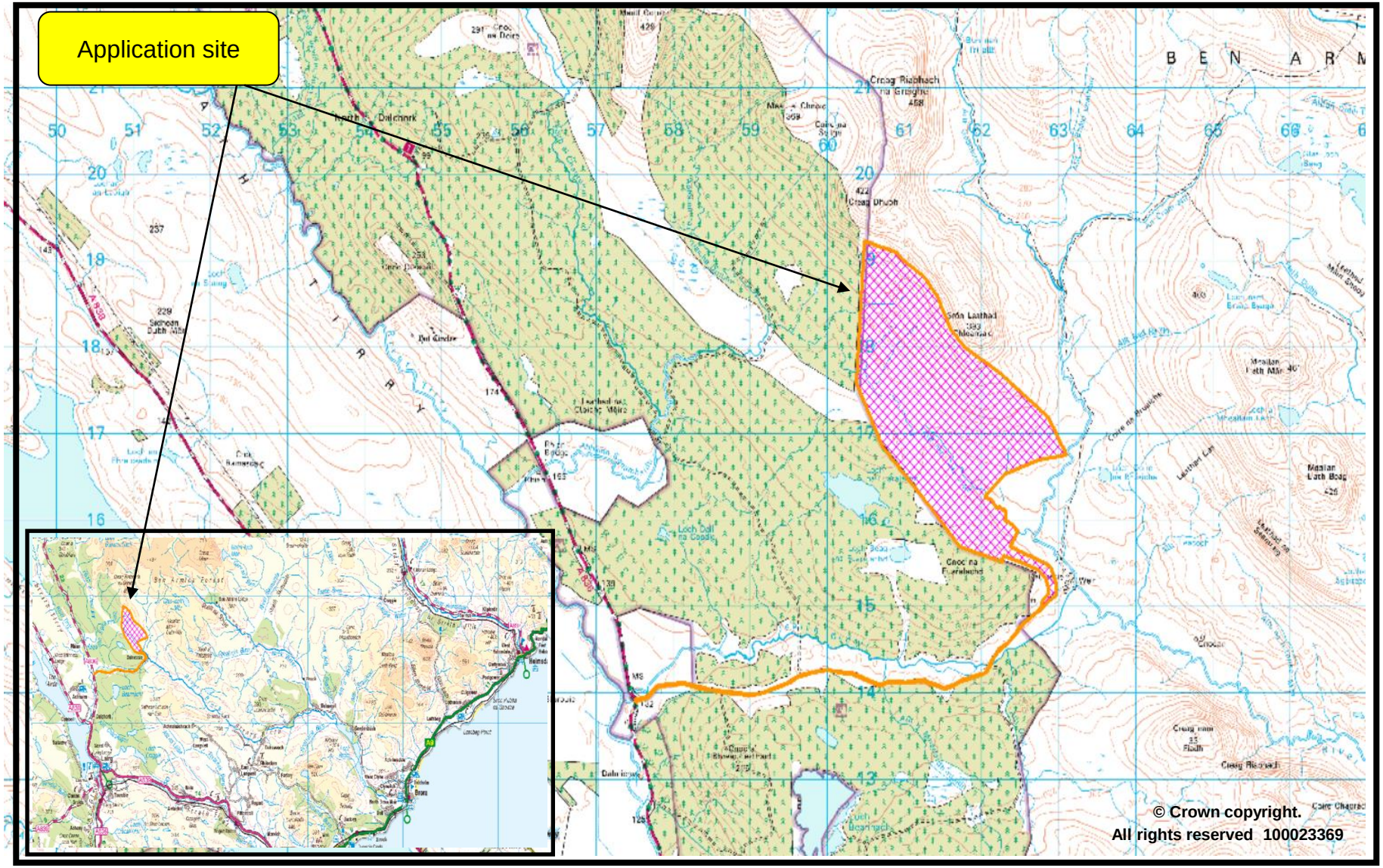
			Proposed Development			Combined Development		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility of receptor / value of the view)**	**Magnitude of Change (size and scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility)**	**Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Susceptibility of Receptor)**	**Significance (Major & Moderate are Significant)**	**Magnitude of Change (size and scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility) *Inferred from Applicant's assessment**	**Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Susceptibility of Receptor) *Inferred from Applicant's assessment**	**Significance**
	This viewpoint is located at the summit of Ben More Assynt, 994m AOD, within WLA34 (Reay – Cassley) and Assynt – Coigach NSA known for its extraordinary landscape. The viewpoint is located at the southern end of an extensive area of rugged mountain massif LCT. The viewpoint has a panoramic view across north-west Scotland, including Assynt mountains of Canisp, Cul Mor, Quinag and Suilven. The view looks over Loch Shin within the middle distance, which dissects the landscape in westward views towards the proposed development. The view has a high value and is a well-known hillwalking location due to its Munro status. The VP is nearly 29km from the proposed development, however the turbines appear relatively prominent despite this distance, and perceptibly wide as it is viewed at the arrays widest extent while towers are visible increasing their sense of scale even though the development would occupy only a small portion of the view. As such, the proposal is a noticeable change to the baseline view and magnitude of change is considered medium-low, while the level of effect is moderate-minor, not significant (just). In terms of cumulative impact there are other wind energy developments with theoretical visibility in the distance. The proposal would occupy a portion of the view not free of turbines, while, starting with the nearer approved Sallachy, the proposal would contribute to the vertical stacking of wind farm development in that view and effectively fill the vertical extent of the landscape view with turbines, consequently the cumulative Magnitude of Change is considered Medium-low with a moderate in combination impact, which is significant and adverse.							

Appendix 3 – Assessment against Landscape and Visual Assessment Criteria contained within Section 4 of the Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance

Effects with regard to the Onshore Wind Supplementary Guidance Design Criteria		
1	Relationship between Settlements/Key locations and wider landscape respected.	Turbines are not visually prominent in the majority of views within or from settlements/Key Locations or from the majority of its access routes. ---------- While turbines are increasing in prominence around Lairg they are not visually prominent in the majority of views within or from Lairg itself, but this development would increase the degree to which they are a prominent feature from the majority of its access routes. Turbines appear to encircle both the Loch Shin basin and the settlement of Lairg, which means that Chleansaid as a cumulative development is potentially not meeting the threshold of this criterion, although in the case of Lairg, this encircling effect is experienced from without looking over the town rather than from within Lairg itself. The proposal is unlikely to meet this threshold.
2	Key Gateway locations and routes are respected	Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise detract from landscape characteristics which contribute the distinctive transitional experience found at key gateway locations and routes. ---------- Generally agree, the LCA is not of a high susceptibility here, with the wind farm set back a suitable distance from the road to the area where the Sweeping Flows and Moors, and, Rounded Hills C&S LCTs meet, which conforms with the development pattern of the wider area. Threshold is met.
3	Valued natural and cultural landmarks are respected	The development does not, by its presence, diminish the prominence of the landmark or disrupt its relationship to its setting. ---------- The turbines are large in scale and compete with Ben Armine and the less differentiated rounded hills more than with Ben Klibreck, which is the more distinctive landscape feature – removing T16 would increase the development's setback from the peak and reduce the scheme's interaction with it, better ensuring that the threshold is met with regard the SLA. The proposal's impact on Scheduled Ancient Monuments does not raise national concerns.
4	The amenity of key recreational routes and ways is respected.	Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of key routes and ways. ---------- While the turbines would be visible, and in places prominent, they would not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of key routes and ways excepting the estate access

		road / public right of way, however impacts on this track are considered unavoidable. The threshold is otherwise met.
5	The amenity of transport routes is respected	Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of transport routes --- While the turbines would be visible, and in places prominent, they would not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of the A836, which is the major transport route of the area. Threshold is met.
6	The existing pattern of Wind Energy Development is respected.	The degree to which the proposal fits with the existing pattern of nearby wind energy development, considerations include: • Turbine height and proportions, • density and spacing of turbines within developments, • density and spacing of developments, • typical relationship of development to the landscape, • previously instituted mitigation measures • Planning Authority stated aims for development of area --- The development would be broadly in keeping with the majority of developments within the wider area, allowing for the changes of scale which have come with development technology. Creag Riabhach shares similar siting in terms of landscape character, and further east at Gordonbush and Kilbraur, locations on the transition between Sweeping Moorland and Flows and Rounded Hills have become characteristic. Otherwise the proposal would be anomalous with the development pattern set by Strath Tirry, however given the anomalousness of that development, it is not considered sufficient for the proposal not to meet the threshold of this criterion.
7	The need for separation between developments and/or clusters is respected	The proposal maintains appropriate and effective separation between developments and/ or clusters --- The development would be improved by further separation from Strath Tirry through the relocation / removal of turbine 1, and the removal of turbine.
8	The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected	The proposal maintains the apparent landscape scale and/or distance in the receptors' perception. --- From Bens Klibreck and Armine there would be some effects on perception of scale and distance in the landscape, with the turbines adding prominence to the mid-horizon between the Rounded Hills and Sweeping Moorland and Flows and leading the eye on to existing development further from the viewpoint. It would contribute to an impression the wind energy is a common feature of the landscape beyond the SLA. Turbines are larger than may backdropping landscape features such as the

		undifferentiated moorland covered rounded hills and compete with Klibreck for prominence in some views, but are generally appropriately set back from that summit. Nevertheless, the proposal is unlikely to achieve this threshold from some views.
9	Landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is respected	Proposal relates well to the existing landscape setting and does not increase the perceived visual prominence of surrounding wind turbines. ---------- Proposal relates well to the existing landscape setting but does, to some degree, increase the perceived visual prominence of consented wind turbines at Strath Tirry amplifying the shortcomings of that development. However this assessment is for Chleansaid and not Strath Tirry and given that its interactions with the settings of other nearer schemes are limited by distance, the threshold is otherwise considered met.
10	Distinctiveness of Landscape character is respected	Integrity and variety of Landscape Character Areas are maintained. ---------- Generally agree with the applicant's assessment. Similar to Criterion 2, the wind farm's set back is a suitable distance from the road to the area where the Sweeping Flows and Moors, and, Rounded Hills C&S LCTs meet that it does not overwhelm distinctive pattern of elements of any one LCA or LCT, or detract from how these landscape features and characteristics are perceived as a whole. Threshold is considered met.



The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

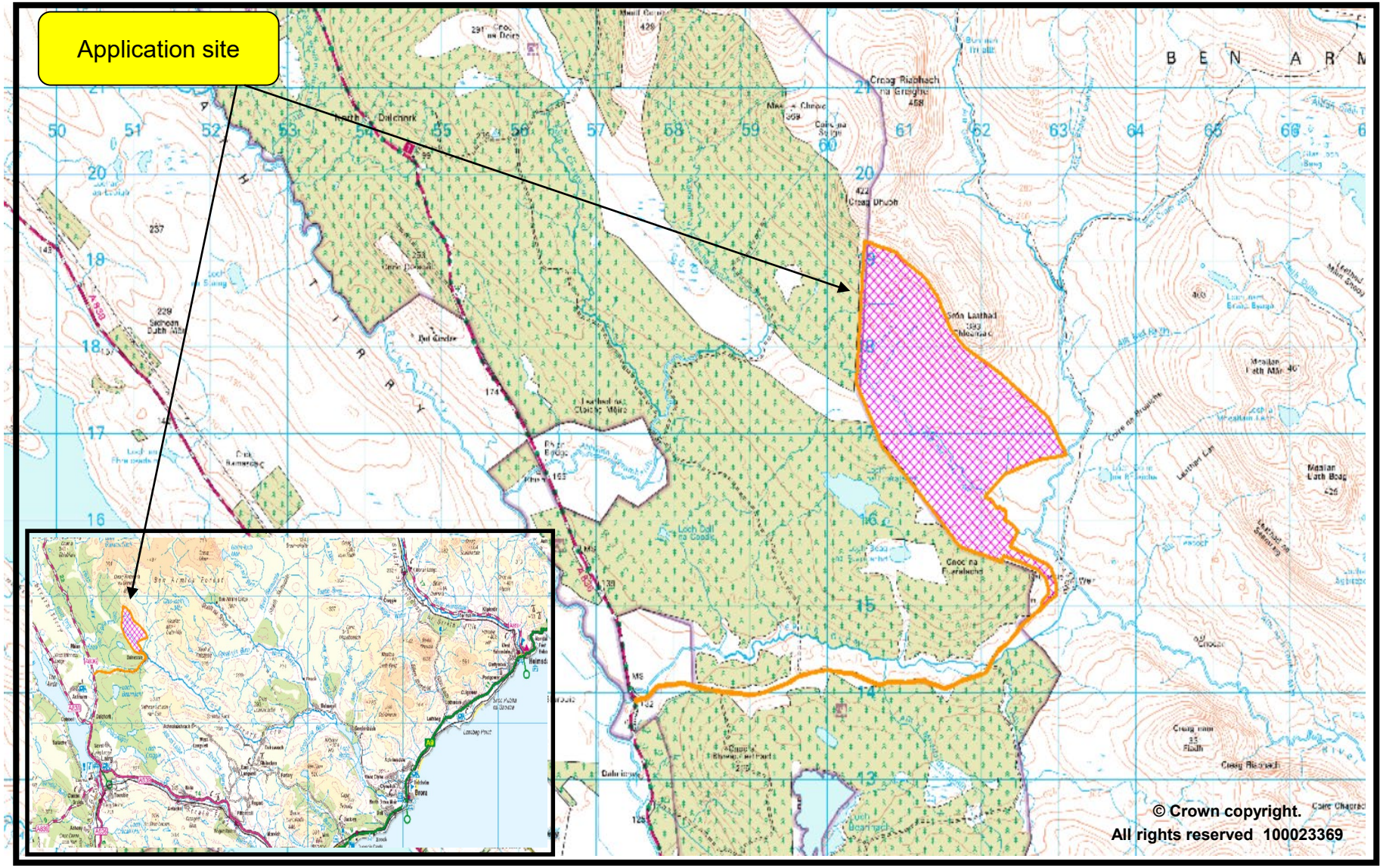
Planning and Development Service

22/01635/S36

Land 2375, NW of Keepers Cottage, Dalnessie, Lairg

Chleansaid Wind Farm - Erection and Operation of a Wind Farm comprising 16 turbines 12 turbines at 200 metres and 4 turbines at 180 metres, generating around 96MW and associated infrastructure (access tracks, borrow pits, substation, control building) and includes battery energy storage facility 20MW

Scale:



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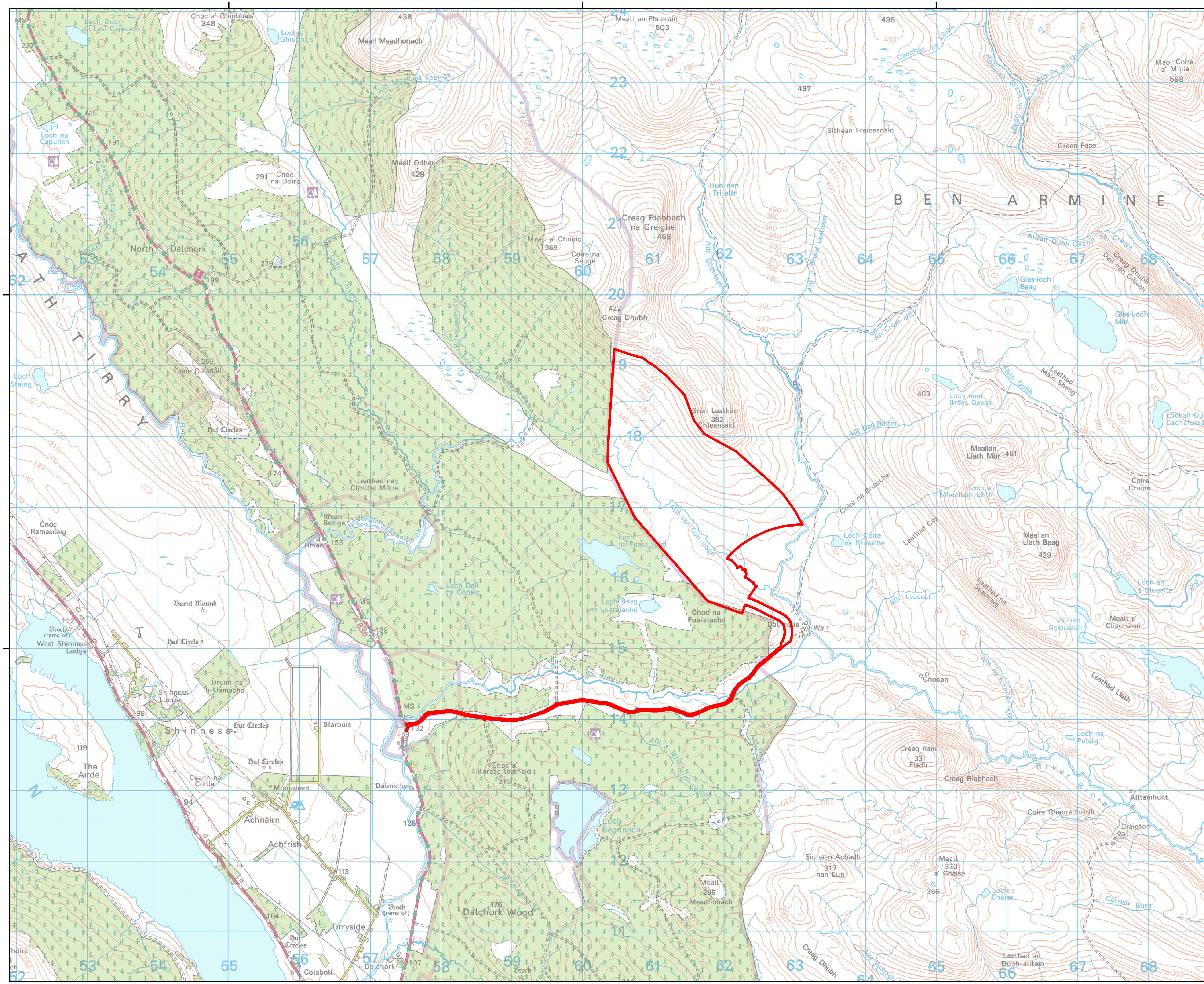

Coordinate System: British National Grid
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: OSGB 1936
Units: Meter

Rev	Date	Description	Drn	Chk	App
00	04/01/2022	First Draft	NH	AP	JS

Chleansaid Wind Farm

TITLE:
Figure 1.1:
Site Location Plan

0 1 2
Kilometres
SCALE: 1:50,000 @ A3

N W E S

REV 00

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259000 260000 261000 262000 263000 264000

919000 918000 917000 916000 915000

Legend:

- Proposed Turbine Locations
- Permanent Met Mast
- Permanent Lidar Location
- Application Boundary
- Turning Head
- Hardstanding
- Access Track
- Control Building and Substation Compound (100m by 75m)
- Substation Construction Compound and Battery Energy Compound (75m x 45m)
- Main Construction Compound (100m by 40m)
- Additional Construction Compound (100m by 40m)
- Mobilisation Compounds
- Borrow Pit

Coordinate System: British National Grid
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: OSGB 1936
Units: Meter

Rev	Date	Description	Drn	Chk	App
03	19/01/2022	BP1 extents	NH	GA	JS
02	24/11/2021	Borrow Pit extents	NH	GA	JS
01	05/11/2021	Met mast/lidar	NH	GA	JS
00	01/10/2021	First Draft	NH	AP	JS

Chleansaid Wind Farm

TITLE:

Figure 2.2:
Proposed Site Layout

0 250 500
Metres
SCALE: 1:17,500 @ A3

REV 03

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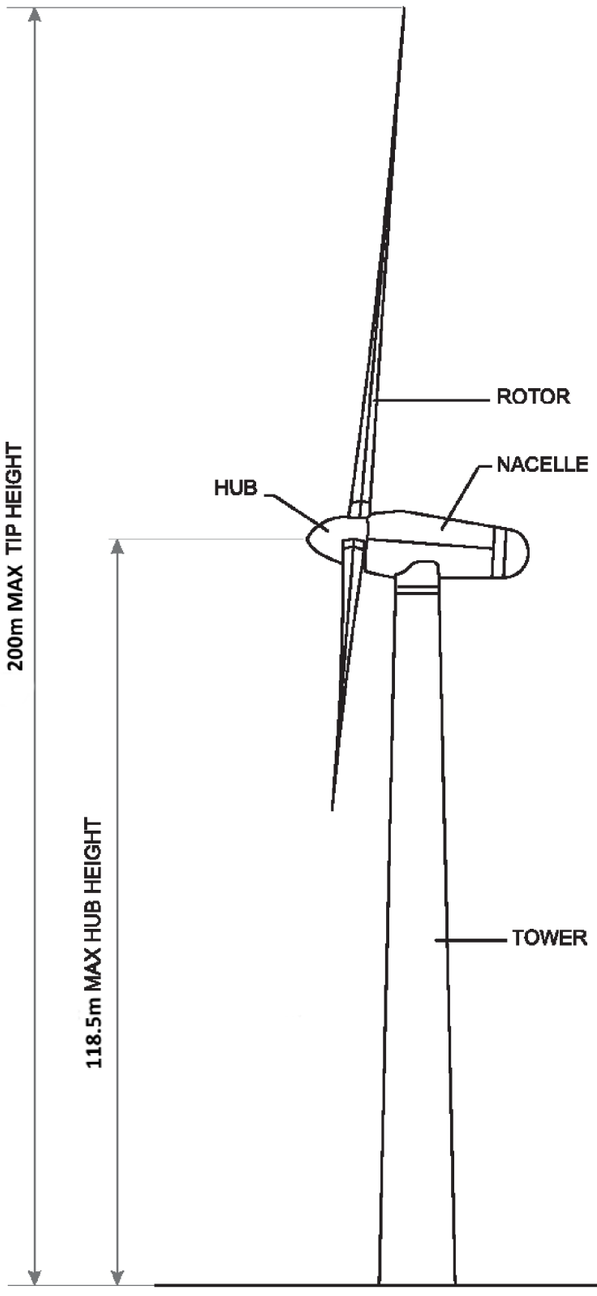
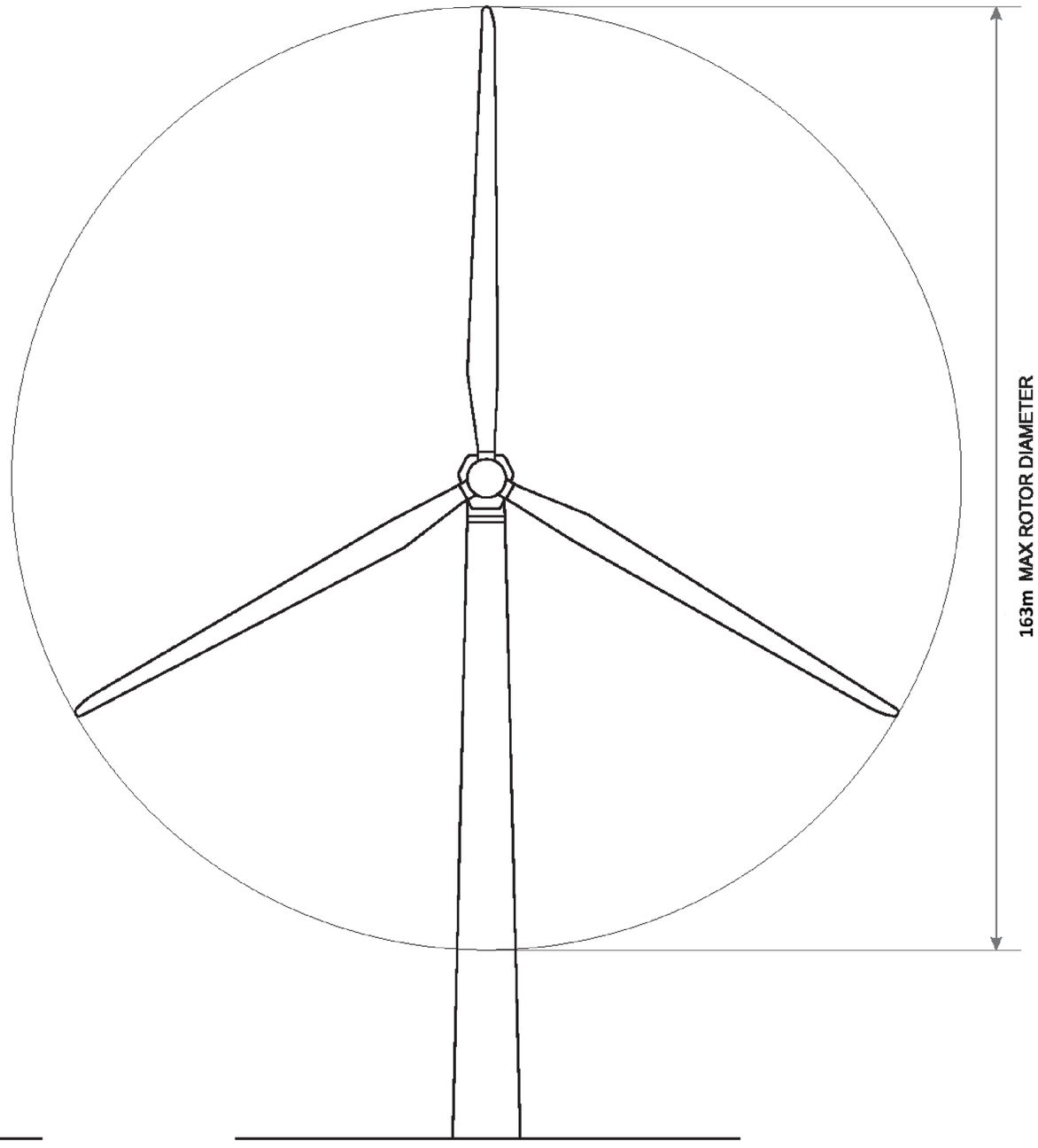


SIDE ELEVATION



FRONT ELEVATION

Legend:

Coordinate System: British National Grid
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: OSGB 1936
Units: Meter

Rev	Date	Description	Drn	Chk	App
00	22/11/2021	First Draft	NH	GA	JS

Chleansaid Wind Farm

TITLE:

Figure 2.3:
Turbine Elevations

Not to Scale

REV 00

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