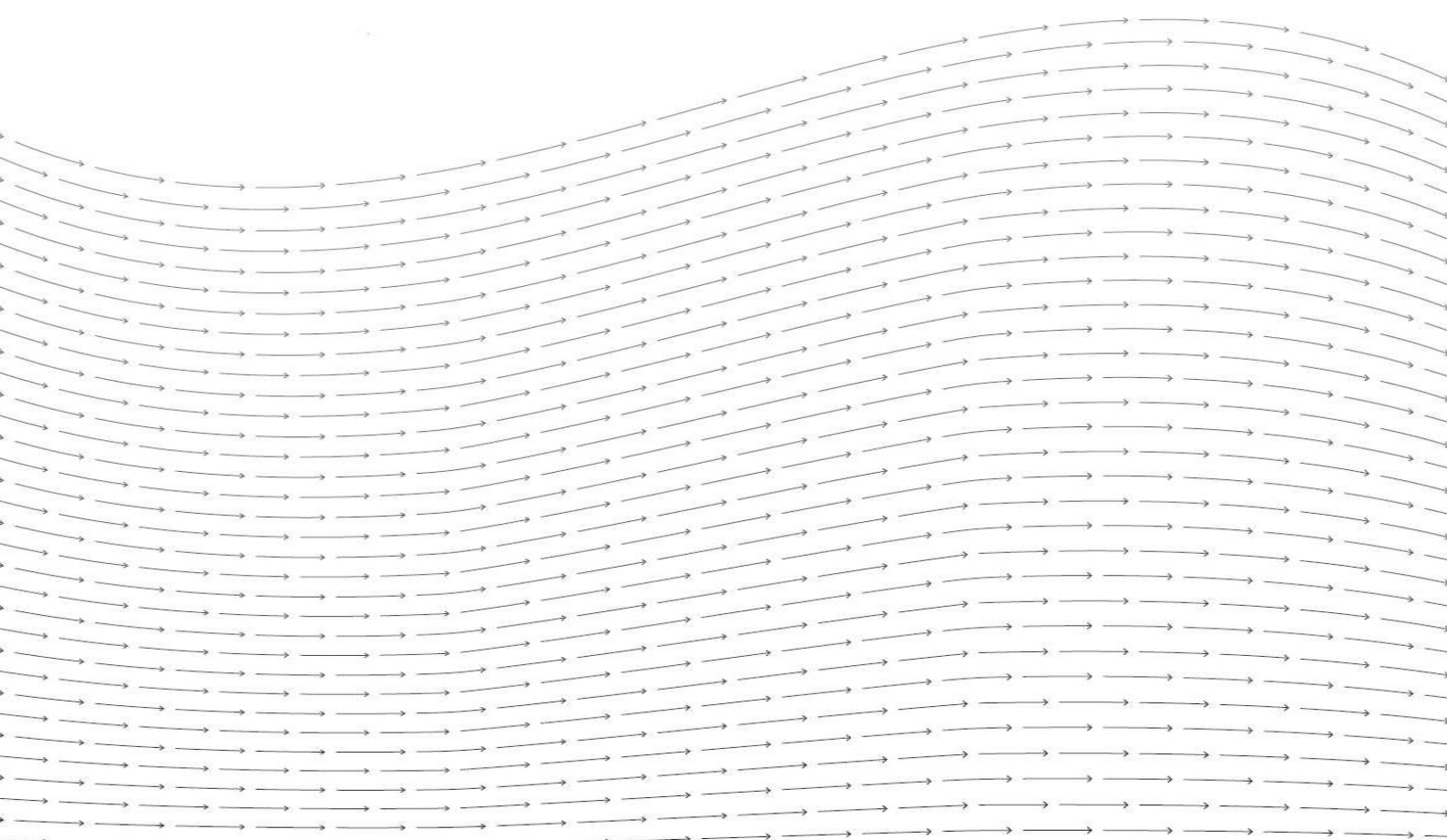


Coille Linne Wind Farm

Planning Statement

June 2025



CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
	Background	1
	The Applicant	1
	Purpose of this Planning Statement	1
	EIA Screening and Scoping	2
	Structure of this Statement	2
2	THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT	3
	Introduction	3
	The Site	3
	Description of the Proposed Development	4
3	RENEWABLE ENERGY POLICY FRAMEWORK	6
	Introduction	6
	International and European Context	6
	UK Energy Policy	7
	Scottish Climate Change and Energy Policy	8
	Scottish Renewable Energy Policy	10
	Compliance with and Weight to be Afforded to Energy Legislation and Policy	14
4	NATIONAL AND LOCAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK	16
	Introduction	16
	Highland-wide Local Development Plan	20
5	PLANNING ASSESSMENT	27
	Introduction	27
	The Principle of the Proposed Development	27
	The Acceptability of the Proposed Development	28
	THC Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance	41
6	CONCLUSION	49

1 INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared to accompany the submission of an application for consent under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 by Energiekontor UK Ltd ('the Applicant') to the Scottish Ministers for a proposed renewable energy development known as Coille Linne Wind Farm, comprising 15 wind turbines, an energy storage facility and associated infrastructure for a period of 35 years ('the proposed development') on land located approximately 21.9km north of Lairg and 16km south-east of Altnaharra¹ ('the Site')
- 1.2 This Planning Statement outlines the key characteristics, details of the proposed development, and summarises the relevant planning policy context, before providing an appraisal of the proposed development against the Development Plan and other relevant material considerations. In doing so, this Planning Statement demonstrates the need for the proposed development and provides justification for the granting of consent.
- 1.3 An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken for the proposed development and an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) has been submitted as part of this application. This Planning Statement should be read in conjunction with the EIAR submitted and draws evidence from it to demonstrate compliance where applicable.

The Applicant

- 1.4 Energiekontor UK Ltd is a wind energy development company with offices in Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Leeds. The company was formed in 1999 and develops onshore wind farms throughout the United Kingdom. The company has built eight wind farms in the UK with many more currently in the development process.
- 1.5 Energiekontor UK Ltd is part of the Energiekontor Group. The parent company, Energiekontor AG, was established in 1990 in Bremerhaven in Northern Germany. It has since grown to become one of the leading wind energy companies in Europe, having built more than 118 wind farms across the continent.

Purpose of this Planning Statement

- 1.6 Along with Section 36 consent, deemed planning consent is also sought under Section 57(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended) (the TCPA).
- 1.7 The purpose of this Planning Statement is therefore to set out the context and rationale for the proposed development and to demonstrate how it accords with the applicable planning policy framework against which the planning application must be assessed. In

¹ When measured from the centre point of the Site

doing so, the objective of this Planning Statement is to provide clear and robust justification for the granting of consent for the proposed development.

EIA Screening and Scoping

- 1.8 Generally, a proposal is screened against the EIA Regulations to ascertain whether a development would constitute EIA development. The Proposed Development is of a type described within Schedule 2 of the EIA Regulations as an installation for the harnessing of wind power for energy productions. It is not located within a 'sensitive area' as defined by the EIA Regulations; however, the project would exceed both of the applicable thresholds as it involves more than two wind turbines with hub heights of more than 15 metres ('m'). The requirement for an EIA was therefore determined based on whether the project would be likely to give rise to significant effects on the environment by virtue of its size, nature, or location. The scale, nature and location of the Proposed Development were considered such that, in order to allow the environmental impacts of the project to be appropriately considered throughout the application process, an EIA Report would be required.
- 1.9 Pursuant to the provisions of Regulation 17 of the Electricity Act (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017, in June 2024 the Applicant submitted an EIA Scoping Report to accompany a request for an EIA Scoping Opinion from the Scottish Ministers. This Scoping Report is included within the EIAR as Technical Appendix 1.1.
- 1.10 The Scottish Ministers issued their Scoping Opinion in September 2024 which set out the topics to be addressed in the EIA. This Scoping Opinion is included within the EIAR as Technical Appendix 1.2. Scoping is a voluntary process, and the responses received as part of this process are advice associated with the methodologies put forward by the Applicant for the determination and potential for likely significant environmental effects.
- 1.11 The EIA Scoping process therefore provides an accompanying background to the planning context for the policy analysis associated with the proposed development.

Structure of this Statement

- 1.12 This remainder of this Planning Statement is structured as follows:
- **Section 2 – The Proposed Development:** provides a summary of the main components associated with the Proposed Development, an overview of the Site and its surroundings, as well as a summary of the design evolution;
 - **Section 3 – Renewable Energy Policy Framework:** provides a summary of the wider renewable energy policy context relevant to the Proposed Development;
 - **Section 4 – Legislative & Planning Policy Framework:** outlines and surmises the relevant statutory Development Plan and other material considerations relevant to the Proposed Development
 - **Section 5 – Planning Assessment:** provides a planning appraisal of the Proposed Development against the relevant provisions of the Development Plan and other material considerations including principle and acceptability of the proposed development;
 - **Section 6 – Conclusions:** presents the overall summary and conclusions.

2 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

- 2.1 This section describes the various elements associated with the Site and the proposed development, whilst providing details of what processes will take place at the various stages of the project's lifecycle (construction, operation, and decommissioning).

The Site

- 2.2 The application boundary is set out on Figures 1.1a and 1.1b. Figure 1.1a is referred to as 'the Site' and occupies approximately 661.8 hectares (ha) whilst Figure 1.1b sets out the access boundaries required to facilitate the delivery of abnormal loads.
- 2.3 The Site, also shown in EIAR Volume 2, Figure 3.1, is located approximately 21.9km north of Lairg and 16km south-east of Altnaharra and covers an area of approximately 661.8 hectares(ha) with the present land use comprising commercial coniferous forestry which is actively managed. The Site lies within the administrative boundary of the Highland Council.
- 2.4 The summit of Meall Odhar (285m AOD) forms the highest point within the Site with the topography declining towards the River Fiag in the east. The River Fiag partially forms the eastern boundary of the site and runs from north to south but is located outwith the Site boundary.
- 2.5 There are a number of unnamed watercourses across the site which run in a generally easterly direction and drain into the River Fiag. Continuing south, the River Fiag then drains into Loch Shin which lies approximately 1.2km from the Site boundary.
- 2.6 The Site is accessed from the A838 which lies immediately to the south of the Site. The A838 is a major road in Sutherland which runs generally northwest from the A836 in the Lairg area to Laxford Bridge on the west coast of Scotland.
- 2.7 There are no main settlements within 15km of the Site boundary and residences are limited to scattered properties clustered along the A838 with the closest property lying approximately 3km from the nearest proposed turbine.
- 2.8 Strath Duchally Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SAC, SPA and RAMSAR designations lie within the north-western section of the Site boundary.
- 2.9 Strath Duchally SSSI forms part of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Protection Area (SPA) with the designation notified for the nationally important blanket bog habitat and breeding populations of dunlin, golden plover and greenshank. The Flow Country UNESCO World Heritage Site, inscribed in July 2024, is also within the boundary of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands designation. The area was nominated based the 'outstanding

example of a blanket bog ecosystem' and 'providing a globally significant natural habitat for an internationally important assemblage of specialist biodiversity'. The Ben Klibreck SSSI also lies within 10km of the site.

- 2.10 The Site lies approximately 7.5km to the south-west of the Creag Riabhach (22 turbines, 125m to tip) and Creag Riabhach Extension Wind Farm (3 turbines, 149.9m to tip), approximately 4.5km to the north-east of the consented Sallachy Wind Farm (9 turbines, 149.9m to tip) and 5km north-west of the Shinness Wind Farm (16 turbines, 200m to tip) which is currently in the application stage.

Description of the Proposed Development

- 2.11 The proposed development is illustrated on Figure 3.1 within Volume 2 of the EIAR and would consist of the following principal components:

- 15 turbines;
- Associated turbine compound areas including foundations and hardstanding areas for erecting cranes at each turbine location;
- On-site tracks connecting each turbine;
- Upgrade to existing bellmouth junction from the A838 (set out in Figure 12.5)
- Upgrade of existing forestry track;
- Two new watercourse crossings and eight upgraded watercourse crossings, as set out in EIA Report Volume 4, Technical Appendix 10.1;
- An energy storage compound to store batteries with a 5MW capacity which would be within the construction compound footprint;
- Underground cables linking the turbines to the substation;
- Up to three borrow pit search areas for the extraction of stone on-site (indicated on Figure 3.1 as borrow pit search areas);
- A temporary construction compound including provision for onsite concrete batching; and
- An on-site substation to provide a grid connection;
- Outline Habitat Management provisions as proposed within EIA Report Volume 4, Technical Appendix 8.3.

- 2.12 The proposed development would be time-limited to 35 years from the first date of commercial operation. The construction phase would last approximately eighteen months, and decommissioning would last approximately six months.

- 2.13 Deemed planning permission is sought to permit a period of ten years between the date of the Decision Notice and expiry of consent (should works not be commenced) rather than the usual three years.

- 2.14 The proposed development would provide approximately 108MW of installed capacity (depending on the turbine model chosen) in addition to 5MW of battery storage capacity. It is estimated by the Applicant that this installed capacity could generate approximately 396,358MWh of renewable electricity each year which would be expected to power the

equivalent of approximately 114,488 homes on average each year, or provide 2.2 million full battery charges for electric vehicles per year

- 2.15 The planning application includes an allowance for micro-siting of the wind farm infrastructure. If planning permission is granted, the Applicant will commission detailed ground investigations and geotechnical surveys to determine the ground conditions. A 100m micro-siting allowance is sought for the wind turbines (with restrictions in place to safeguard constraint buffers as applicable), and all other new elements of the Proposed Development.
- 2.16 Turbines would be of tubular steel construction, finished in a typical off-white matt colour and comprise three blades. The final turbine choice would be made post-consent during the procurement phase, but for the purposes of this EIA Report, representative candidate turbines of 250m to tip with 162m rotor diameter and hub heights of 169m.
- 2.17 Turbine co-ordinates, subject to a maximum of 100m micro-siting dependent upon localised constraints, are as follows within Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Proposed Wind Turbine Coordinates (subject to a 100m micro-siting allowance)

Turbine	Easting	Northing	Tip Height (m)	Hub Height (m)
1	244618	925477	250	169
2	245231	925221	250	169
3	244691	924974	250	169
4	245132	924730	250	169
5	244915	924134	250	169
6	245231	923675	250	169
7	245874	923674	250	169
8	245319	923120	250	169
9	246111	923189	250	169
10	245584	922610	250	169
11	246327	922692	250	169
12	245741	922137	250	169
13	246560	922141	250	169
14	245910	921660	250	169
15	246439	921474	250	169

3 RENEWABLE ENERGY POLICY FRAMEWORK

Introduction

- 3.1 This section of the Planning Statement provides an overview of the renewable energy legislative and policy framework relevant to the proposed development. It covers International, European, UK and Scottish energy policy and legislation. It provides an overview of the relevant international agreements and targets which set the policy criteria for national energy policy and guidance.
- 3.2 The framework outlined under the respective subheadings below demonstrate clear and consistent policy support for renewable energy, as well as the need for further transition to low carbon electricity generation. There is firm support for onshore wind developments as part of a diverse energy strategy, with an overarching intention that renewable energy developments will make significant a contribution to achieving the legally binding renewable energy targets established by the renewable energy policy framework.
- 3.3 An emphasis on Net Zero and Climate Emergency at UK, Scottish and The Highland Council (THC) level places significant weight on the overarching policy and legislative framework as a material consideration.

International and European Context

International Agreements and Obligations – The COP21 Paris Agreement

- 3.4 The Paris Agreement was adopted on 12th December 2015 by 196 parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, creating a legally-binding, international agreement towards tackling climate change. The UK is one of the signatories and is legally bound to the Paris Agreement.
- 3.5 The Paris Agreement came into force on November 4th, 2016, having been ratified by at least 55% (the point which triggers ratification) of the 196 countries. The meeting in Paris was considered a make-or-break opportunity to secure an international agreement on the approach to tackling climate change, commitment to a longer-term goal or near zero emissions in the second half of the century and supporting the transition to a clean economy and low carbon security.
- 3.6 The respective Governments involved agreed:
- A long-term goal of keeping the increase in global average temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels;
 - To aim to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius since this would significantly reduce risks and the impacts of climate change;
 - On the need for global emissions to peak as soon as possible, recognising that this will take longer for developing countries;

- To undertake rapid reductions thereafter in accordance with the best scientific guidance available.

3.7 Countries are legally obliged to make new post-2030 commitments to reduce emissions every five years.

UK Energy Policy

- 3.8 Energy policy is a matter reserved to Westminster; the UK Government have control of the overall direction of UK-level energy policy. However, although the overarching position is that energy policy is not a devolved matter, various documents have embraced and encouraged actions across the UK, with devolved Governments have an important part to play, particularly via the consenting of projects.
- 3.9 Overall, the UK Government is legally committed to the delivery of a reduction in emissions to 'net zero' by 2050 (with the Scottish Government committing to 2045).
- 3.10 The CCC published a landmark report entitled 'Net Zero – UK's Contribution to Stopping Global Warming' in May 2019. The foreword sets out that "the CCC has reviewed the latest scientific evidence on climate change, including last year's IPCC special report on global warming of 1.50C and considered the appropriate role of the UK in the global challenge to limit future temperature increases." It adds, "Net Zero is a more fundamental aim than previous targets. By reducing emissions produced in the UK to zero, we also end our contribution to rising global temperatures."
- 3.11 The report makes recommendations for the UK economy including a new tougher emissions target of net zero green gases by 2050, therefore ending the UK's contribution to global warming within 30 years. This replaces the previous target of an 80% reduction by 2050 from a 1990 baseline and accords with the obligations under the Paris Agreement. The report makes clear that at a UK level "current policy is insufficient for even the existing targets."
- 3.12 In June 2019, the Prime Minister Theresa May brought forward legislation to turn Net Zero into law, and the UK became the first major economy in the world to pass legislation to end its global warming contribution by 2050. The target is now legally binding via the provisions of the Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019.
- 3.13 The Institute of Government published a report in September 2020 stating that "not nearly enough progress had been made a year on from the net zero approach being adopted". The CCC Annual Report to Parliament (June 2020) offered an update on the progress towards Net Zero following adoption of the Net Zero Target.
- 3.14 The report states that in terms of building a resilient post-Covid economy, "*success requires that net zero emissions and improved climate resilience are integral,*" whilst investments towards achieving net zero will "*help create jobs and stimulate economic recovery, whilst changing the course of UK emissions and improving our resilience to climate change.*"
- 3.15 The National Audit Office offered an update report 'Achieving Net Zero' in December 2020 regarding progress on achieving Net Zero following the change to legislation in June 2019.

- 3.16 Key points from the report include that reducing emissions to achieve net zero will require wide ranging changes to the UK economy including further investment in renewable energy, changes “*unprecedented in their overall scale.*” Page 22 of the report sets out that a national fourfold increase in renewable energy capacity is needed.
- 3.17 The CCC set out the Sixth UK-wide carbon budget in December 2020 with recommendations from 2033 to 2037. This sets out the path the UK must follow to achieve Net Zero by 2050.
- 3.18 A key point includes the CCC's clear statement that new demand for electricity will mean that demand will rise 50% by 2035 and perhaps doubling or trebling by 2050.
- 3.19 The UK Energy White Paper in December 2020 set out a major shift in UK policy and highlights the importance of renewable forms of electricity. Page 38 states that a key objective is to “*accelerate the deployment of clean electricity generation through the 2020s*”.
- 3.20 The UK Government then published the UK Net Zero Strategy in October 2021 which sets out the long-term pathway to net zero by 2050, setting out the UK Government's plans to reduce emissions from each sector of the economy. Its sets out within page 103 that the Government will support sustained deployment of low carbon generation and that there is a need to continue to drive rapid deployment of renewables.
- 3.21 The Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, published in December 2024 by the UK Government, clearly highlights the requirement for rapid deployment of new clean energy capacity across the whole of the UK. The document reflects the shared renewable ambitions of the UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments and in accepting the government's central role in steering the creation of this new energy system, the document sets out the expectations for the 2030 capacities of key technologies at national and regional level.
- 3.22 Focusing on onshore wind specifically, the target set out within the document aims for 27-29 GW of capacity. Combined with large targets for other technologies such as solar and offshore wind, the key aim is to significantly reduce dependence on fossil-fuels – particularly gas.
- 3.23 In order to deliver the capacity, there is a requirement to deploy these technologies at a very significant scale and pace, which can only be delivered by taking rapid action to unblock delivery challenges. The ability to maximise the efficiency of the electricity system today and in future, is critical to delivering decarbonisation and a key step to achieve net zero by 2050.
- 3.24 Whilst the proposed development is unlikely to meet the 2030 target date for generation of clean power, it is clear that onshore wind forms a key part of the clean power mix for 2030 and beyond to 2035.

Scottish Climate Change and Energy Policy

- 3.25 The Scottish government has devolved authority over matters relating to the implementation of energy policy and there have been a number of policy documents and legislation produced in recent years dealing with climate change and renewable

energy. The documents summarised below are considered to set out the Scottish Government's commitment to reducing carbon emissions via the promotion and development of renewable energy and the contribution this can make to energy generation throughout Scotland.

Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009

- 3.26 The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 provides a long-term framework to ensure a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050, with an interim milestone of 42% by 2020.
- 3.27 Whilst successive bills and legislation have increased the target to net zero emissions, as reported below, the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 provides the wider context for Scotland's ambitious targets for the reduction of carbon emissions.

Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019

- 3.28 The Scottish Government introduced a new Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill to Parliament on 23rd May 2018. The Act was subsequently passed in September 2019.
- 3.29 The Bill raises the ambition of further reducing greenhouse gas emissions by amending the targets set out within the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, hence superseding them and sets a legally binding net zero target for all greenhouse gases by 2045. This target date is five years ahead of the current date set for the rest of the UK and aims to ensure Scotland contributes to the worldwide efforts to deliver on the Paris Agreement. It requires net zero by 2045 at the latest.
- 3.30 Whilst the target of net zero for 2045 remains, a statement made by the Climate Change Committee explained that the delay of the governments Climate Change Plan has meant that the goal of achieving a 75% reduction target by 2030 is fundamentally unachievable. As such, on the 18th of April 2024, the Scottish Government stated that:

'In light of the UK-wide Climate Change Committee's (CCC) recent rearticulation that the 2030 target for emissions reduction is not achievable, this will no longer be a statutory target.'

- 3.31 Despite the removal of the 75% emission reduction target, setting a net-zero target by 2045 is an ambitious target and places Scotland at the forefront of efforts to combat climate change. Therefore, through this Act and other associated Government strategies and policies, the Scottish Government aim to provide certainty and credibility to businesses, industries and investors that are vital partners in Scotland's transition to a low carbon economy.
- 3.32 The trajectory of net zero targets and the actions required to meet them have become steeper following the passing of the 2019 Act into law.

Climate Change Emergency

- 3.33 In April 2019, the Scottish Government declared a climate change emergency, which instigated a commitment to enforcing stronger climate change proposals and targets whilst delivering support to the transition to a low carbon economy. It is anticipated at this stage that this declaration will deliver revised approaches and shape future guidance for a range of policy decisions, affecting transport, oil and gas and renewable energy strategy.
- 3.34 The Highland Council opted to follow suit and declare its own climate emergency in May 2019.

Scotland's Carbon Budget

- 3.35 Published in May 2025, the Climate Change Committee issued Scotland Carbon Budget report using the most recent emissions data from 2022.
- 3.36 In 2024, Scotland's interim emissions targets for 2030 and 2040 were repealed as the progress required to meet the 2030 target was deemed to be beyond what was credible. The Act was amended to replace interim targets with carbon budgets. Carbon budgets are legally binding caps on greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland over five-year periods. The UK, Wales, and Northern Ireland also use carbon budgets to set binding milestones for emissions reductions on the way to their Net Zero emissions targets.
- 3.37 In line with the 2009 Act, the report sets out the Committee's advice on the level of Scotland's four carbon budgets, covering the period 2026 to 2045. The CC recommend that the Scottish Government sets its carbon budgets, at annual average levels of emissions that are:
- 57% lower than 1990 levels for the First Carbon Budget (2026 to 2030).
 - 69% lower than 1990 levels for the Second Carbon Budget (2031 to 2035).
 - 80% lower than 1990 levels for the Third Carbon Budget (2036 to 2040).
 - 94% lower than 1990 levels for the Fourth Carbon Budget (2041 to 2045).
- 3.38 Within the report, renewables have an essential role to play in meeting Scotland's carbon budgets and the wider UK emissions targets. In the pathway set out, the capacity of variable renewables in Scotland (including offshore and onshore wind and solar) more than triples from 15 GW in 2023 to 49 GW by 2035, increasing to 66 GW by 2045.
- 3.39 Whilst the report does not set policy but instead informs the Scottish Government on steps to take towards emissions reduction targets, it is evident that renewables and, in turn, onshore wind will play a key role in the route to Net Zero by 2045. The pathway outlines that in order to achieve these targets, renewable energy capacity must be accelerated.

Scottish Renewable Energy Policy

- 3.40 This section identifies recent shifts in Scottish Renewable Energy Policy and summarises the key documents including:

- The Scottish Energy Strategy (2017);
- The Update to the Climate Change Plan (December 2020);
- The Scottish Energy Strategy Position Statement (March 2021);
- The Onshore Wind Policy Statement (2022); and
- Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan (2023)
- Onshore Wind Sector Deal
- Climate Change Committee (CCC) Report to Scottish Parliament – Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland (March 2024)
- The Green Industrial Strategy (September 2024)

The Scottish Energy Strategy

- 3.41 The Scottish Energy Strategy 2017 sets out the Scottish Government's overarching position on many forms of energy, including onshore wind. Specifically, it states that *"onshore wind must continue to play a vital role in Scotland's future"..."which can be done in a way which is compatible with Scotland's magnificent landscapes."* The Energy Strategy is currently being updated, with a draft Energy Strategy accompanying the Just Transition Plan in early 2023. These reiterate the findings of the Onshore Wind Policy Statement, and aim to drive Scotland towards Net Zero by 2045, with a clear focus on the delivery of 12GW of new installed capacity by 2030.

The Update to the Climate Change Plan (December 2020)

- 3.42 In December 2020, the Scottish Government published an update to the Climate Change Plan, covering the period 2018 to 2032, and responding to the new requirement in Scotland to meet net zero by 2045. Page 9 in particular sets out the strategic goal of achieving *"decarbonisation across the whole energy system, including electricity, transport, industry and buildings"* and *"integrating climate change action into all of the decisions we make across Government"*.
- 3.43 The Update sets out the intention to prepare an Energy Strategy in 2021 and an updated Electricity Generation Policy Statement by 2022. Page 19 refers to a 2032 'pathway' whereby decisions take account of benefits across all energy sectors as well as economic and social benefits they create across Scotland. By 2032 it is intended that we will generate at least the equivalent of 50% of our energy from renewable sources. It is stated on page 18, importantly, that *"there will be a substantial increase in renewable generation, particularly through new offshore and onshore wind capacity"*.
- 3.44 The planning and consenting systems are recognised (p78) as remaining a *"critical enabler of rapid renewables deployment in Scotland"*. The Climate Change Plan Update expects that renewable energy generation is expected to increase substantially between now and 2032 with an expectation of the development of between 11 and 16GW of new capacity to meet a rapidly increasing electricity demand.

Scottish Energy Strategy Position Statement

- 3.45 The Scottish Energy Strategy Position Statement (March 2021) reinforces the consistent theme of the Scottish Government's support for a green, fair, and resilient economy.

Onshore renewables is addressed within section 8 of the Statement where it is reported that *"the continued growth of Scotland's renewable energy industry is fundamental to enable us to achieve our ambition of creating sustainable jobs as we transition to net zero"*. It adds that the Scottish Government *"is committed to supporting the increase of onshore wind in the right places to help meet the target of net zero."*

- 3.46 On 20th August 2021, the SNP-led Scottish Government and the Scottish Green Party signed the Bute House Agreement which represented a formal co-operation agreement for the next five years of Government. However, on the 25th of April 2024, the Bute House Agreement came to an end. Despite the end of the Bute House Agreement, a number of policies still remain relevant to climate change legislation set out by the Scottish Government. Page 12 of the agreement set out that *"the climate emergency means we need to use the limited powers we have to accelerate the decarbonisation of our energy system...our plans will see a significant increase in electricity demand for heating and transport. To accommodate this, we will support the continued and accelerated deployment of renewable energy."* This statement is still valid in the wider context of climate change and energy policy.

Onshore Wind Policy Statement

- 3.47 Subject to consultation the Government and Green Party aimed to deliver "an additional 8 to 12 GW of installed onshore wind by 2030, supported by changes to the planning system needed to permit the growth of this essential zero carbon sector". This still remains within the Onshore Wind Policy Statement (OWPS, 2022) which replaced the previous version published in 2017 and makes it explicitly clear that seeking greater security of supply and lower cost electricity are now key drivers alongside the need to deal with the climate emergency. It requires a minimum installed capacity of 20GW of onshore wind by 2030, with an additional 12GW installed between 2023 and 2030.
- 3.48 The OWPS states that deployment of onshore wind is *"mission critical for meeting our climate targets"* as an *"affordable and reliable source of electricity generation."*

The Draft Energy and Just Transition Plan

- 3.49 The Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan was published on 10th January 2023 which builds on the Scottish Energy Strategy (2017), by setting out how targets will be delivered. The purpose of the strategy is to set out clear policy positions and a route map of actions with a focus on the decisions the Scottish Government need to take and the changes the UK Government need to make by 2030, in order to deliver a net zero energy system for Scotland by 2045.
- 3.50 The draft strategy sets out key ambitions for Scotland's energy future. Specifically in relation to onshore wind, the draft strategy aims to deliver *inter alia* an additional 12GW of onshore wind by 2030.
- 3.51 The draft strategy sets out the scale of the opportunity to transform Scotland's energy supply, with energy increasingly provided from climate-friendly renewable electricity. Onshore wind *inter alia* will assist in achieving this transformation. The Scottish Government therefore commit to the following:

- Take action to deliver an additional 12GW of installed onshore wind by 2030, as set out in the Onshore Wind Policy Statement (2022). This will increase the total energy supply from onshore wind to 20GW;
- Working with the industry to deliver an Onshore Wind Sector Deal in 2023 to ensure deployment is maximised as well as the opportunities that flow from it;
- Ensure that the community energy sector is represented on the forthcoming onshore wind strategic leadership group; and
- Convene an expert group, including representatives from industry, agencies, and academia. This will provide advice to the Scottish Government on how guidance could be developed to support both peatland and onshore wind aims.

The Onshore Wind Sector Deal (2023)

- 3.52 The Onshore Wind Sector Deal, published in September 2023, provides a framework of commitments between Scottish Government and the onshore wind sector in order to support the rapid development and deployment of onshore wind, including the identification of barriers and potential solutions and actions to, for example, decrease consenting times. It is very clear that the Scottish Government wishes to see quicker deployment of onshore wind and is actively supporting the sector to do so.

Climate Change Committee (CCC) Report to Scottish Parliament – Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland (March 2024)

- 3.53 As set out above, the CCC Report presented to the Scottish Parliament entitled 'Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland' in March 2024. The related press release states that Scotland's 2030 climate goals are no longer credible due to continued delays to the updated Climate Change Plan and other related climate policies.
- 3.54 The press release states that a path to Scotland's post-2030 targets remain however stronger action is needed to reduce emissions across the economy. It states that there has been some progress in delivering renewable electricity generation in Scotland with the aim to develop 8-11 GW of offshore wind and 20 GW on onshore wind capacity, both by 2030. However, the report notes that "The growth in onshore wind capacity has slowed, however, and is slightly off track to deliver its 2030 target, which will require operational capacity to more than double." Page 40 states that in terms of onshore wind, Scotland must increase the deployment rate by more than a factor of 4 to an average annual rate of 1.4 GW.

The Green Industrial Strategy

- 3.55 In September 2024, the Scottish Government published a Green Industrial Strategy (GIS). The Executive Summary sets out the mission of the GIS, which states:
- 3.56 "This Green Industrial Strategy's mission is to ensure that Scotland realises the maximum possible economic benefit from the opportunities created by the global transition to net zero".
- 3.57 The strategy sets out five opportunity areas for Scotland where identified strengths are most likely to lead to growth and the potential to develop internationally competitive economic

clusters. The points focus on maximising Scotland's wind economy, developing carbon capture, utilisation, and storage, supporting the green economy by way of professional and financial services, expanding upon the hydrogen sector and establishing Scotland as a competitive centre for clean energy intensive industries of the future.

- 3.58 When focusing on onshore wind specifically, it is referred to detail at page 21 where the strategy states:
- 3.59 "Onshore wind is the biggest single technology in Scotland's current mix of renewable electricity generation, comprising 62% of installed capacity.
- 3.60 A thriving onshore wind sector is therefore critical to the decarbonisation in Scotland and the UK. As set out in our 2022 Onshore Wind Policy Statement, Government and industry are focused on delivering at least 20 GW of onshore wind by 2030 (doubling current capacity) and recent pipeline analysis shows that we should be on track to deliver this.
- 3.61 This trajectory is underpinned by the Onshore Wind Sector Deal which sets out a set of specific collaborative actions which include commitments by both the Scottish Government and the onshore wind industry to help deliver the 20 GW ambition.
- 3.62 A supportive policy environment and successful industry collaboration via the Onshore Wind Strategic Leadership Group confirms the shared commitment of Government and industry to achieve this successful and responsible growth.
- 3.63 The onshore wind workforce is highly skilled and opportunities in installation, consulting, operations, and maintenance are anticipated to rise in response to growth ambitions. Specialised engineering consultancy services such as wind farm design and financial due diligence related to onshore developments are expected to grow and offer additional export potential. There is commercial opportunity in circular supply chains related to the UK wind industry. Scotland's established, and now ageing onshore wind assets may also offer opportunities for innovative solutions in remanufacturing, recycling, and decommissioning end of life assets."
- 3.64 It is evident that in order to progress the Government's objectives with regard to wind energy, clear support for new investment and growth in onshore wind development is needed. Realisation of the economic and social opportunities can only be achieved through the development and consenting of additional wind energy developments. Such deployment will not only be critical towards achieving the net zero target, given the important contribution that wind energy will make in that regard, but will also help deliver the Government's clear green infrastructure mission.

Compliance with and Weight to be Afforded to Energy Legislation and Policy

- 3.65 The scale of the threat we face through climate change is widely acknowledged by governments across the world. The Scottish Government has recently taken the decision to declare a climate emergency, citing the need for world action to deliver transformative change. Everyone has a role to play in this global climate emergency, including businesses and local authorities. Extremely challenging targets have been set for decarbonising the

economy: net zero emissions for Scotland by 2045, the most stringent target for decarbonisation anywhere in the world.

- 3.66 It is evident that there remains a strong policy drive to continue to develop renewable energy. International and national commitments have been made to address the effects of climate change and to achieve greater security in the domestic supply of energy. This in turn has directly influenced a response through the land use planning system which through national planning policy strongly encourages renewable energy development and the evidence base demonstrates that wind energy is the key renewable resource for Scotland.
- 3.67 In the balance of material considerations, it is the role of the decision maker in terms of which weight to assign to each material consideration and then potentially groups of material considerations thereafter.
- 3.68 What is clear is that at a global, European, UK and Scottish level, there is a clear and determined effort to reduce global carbon emissions. It is also abundantly clear that onshore wind energy has a very significant part to play in this. Taken and read as a whole, there is a very clear policy priority upon the deployment of renewable technology.
- 3.69 The planning system (and its decision makers) is a critical enabler of this deployment. As per the next section of this Planning Statement, planning policy (and particularly local policy) cannot keep pace with the rate of change in climate change policy and legislation however that should not mean that this becomes a barrier to deployment. It is legitimate for the planning system to take account of updated and emerging issues as material considerations in arriving at a decision.
- 3.70 The current weight to be afforded to the preceding matters is therefore, in the Applicant's view, significant.

4 NATIONAL AND LOCAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

Introduction

4.1 This section sets out the planning policy framework relevant and material to the determination of the application. Consideration is given below to the following matters:

- National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)
- The statutory Development Plan applicable to the Site; and
- Other material considerations, including Supplementary Guidance, local planning guidance and relevant national policies, advice, and guidance.

NPF4

4.2 The Scottish Government is clear and unequivocal about the requirement for new onshore wind generation through legislation and policy.

4.3 The inclusion of 'Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure' as a 'national development' demonstrates the importance that the Scottish Government places upon the increase in onshore renewable generation. Annex B of NPF4 provides a statement of need. This states that "*a large and rapid increase in electricity generation from renewable sources will be essential for Scotland to meet its Net Zero emissions targets.*"

4.4 Wind farms in excess of 50MW generating capacity will comprise **national development**. The proposed development, at 108MW (plus 5MW of battery storage) exceeds this threshold and therefore be classed as a national development. Page 97 of NPF4 sets out that national developments are described as "*significant developments of national importance that will help to deliver the spatial strategy*". It adds that "*their designation means that the principle for development does not need to be agreed in later consenting processes.*"

4.5 There is and remains a clear support at a national level for the further development of renewable and low carbon technologies however greater emphasis has been placed on the pace at which these technologies are rolled out. It is then appropriate to examine the contents of particular policies of NPF4.

4.6 **Policy 1: Tackling the climate and nature crises** acts as an overarching policy which in turn filters into each individual policy detailed within NPF4, stating that when considering all development proposals, significant weight should be given to the global climate and nature crises, in order to ensure that they are recognised as a priority in all plans and decisions.

4.7 The intent behind Policy 1 is to encourage, promote and facilitate development that addresses the global climate emergency and nature crisis. The proposed development inherently seeks to address the climate crisis by providing low carbon energy and reduces

greenhouse gas emissions by contributing to a more sustainable energy mix across g78
1nqScotland.

4.8 Therefore, NPF4 introduces a key, prominent policy which states that the global climate emergency is a priority, and significant weight must be attached to this. Onshore wind, as a national development, accords fully with the aspirations of this policy and can draw immediate and full support.

4.9 **Policy 2: Climate change and Mitigation** aims to encourage, promote, and facilitate development that minimises emissions and adapts to the current and future impacts of climate change. Policy 2 states:

a) Development proposals will be sited and designed to minimise lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions as far as possible.

b) Development proposals will be sited and designed to adapt to current and future risks from climate change.

c) Development proposals to retrofit measures to existing developments that reduce emissions or support adaptation to climate change will be supported.

4.10 **Policy 3: Biodiversity** requires that “development proposals contribute to the enhancement of biodiversity, including where relevant restoring degraded habitats and building and strengthening nature networks”, integrating “nature-based solutions where possible”. Policy 3b) also states that national development, which the proposed development is defined as, will be ‘supported where the proposal will conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity, including nature networks so they are in a demonstrably better state than without intervention.’

4.11 **Policy 4: Natural Places** of NPF4 reinforces the need for the protection, restoration and enhancement of natural assets making best use of nature-based solutions. Part a) of this policy states that development proposals which would have an unacceptable impact upon the natural environment by virtue of type, location or scale will not be supported.

4.12 Policy Criteria is provided in 4(b) for proposals that impact upon National Parks, National Scenic Areas, SSSIs, Ramsar sites are as follows:

‘Development proposals that will affect a National Park, National Scenic Area, Site of Special Scientific Interest, or a National Nature Reserve will only be supported where:

i) The objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the areas will not be compromised; or

ii) Any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social, environmental, or economic benefits of national importance.

All Ramsar sites are also European sites and/ or Sites of Special Scientific Interest and are extended protection under the relevant statutory regimes.’

4.13 Part d) discusses impacts upon local designations and states where a site is designated as a “local nature conservation site or landscape area in the LDP, it will only be supported

where development will not have significant adverse effects on the integrity of the area and qualities for which it has been identified." Part ii) of d) states the second criteria for support, which is where "any significant adverse effects on the integrity of the area are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits or at least local importance."

4.14 Part e) states that the precautionary principle is to be applied whilst Policy 4(f) states that development proposals that are likely to have an adverse effect upon species protected by legislation will only be supported where it meets the statutory test.

4.15 **Policy 5: Soils** focuses on the protection of carbon-rich soils, the restoration of peatlands and the minimisation of disturbance to soils from development with wording as follows:

Development proposals on peatland, carbon-rich soils and priority peatland habitat will only be supported for:

- i) Essential infrastructure and there is a specific locational need and no other suitable site;*
- ii) The generation of energy from renewable sources that optimises the contribution of the area to greenhouse gas emission reductions targets;*
- iii) Small-scale development directly linked to a rural business, farm, or croft;*
- iv) Supporting a fragile community in a rural or island area; or*
- v) Restoration of peatland habitats.*

4.16 **Policy 7: Historic Assets and Places** details under part a) that "development proposals with a potentially significant impact on historic assets or places will be accompanied by an assessment which is based on an understanding of the cultural significance of the historic asset and/or place". Part h) is also useful and relevant, where it is stated that development proposals affecting scheduled monuments will only be supported "where i) direct impacts on the scheduled monument are avoided, ii) significant adverse effects on the integrity of the setting are avoided or iii) exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated to justify the impact on a scheduled monument and its setting and impacts on the monument or its setting have been minimised".

4.17 The key policy pertaining to energy is **Policy 11: Energy**, which contains the intent to "encourage, promote, and facilitate all forms of renewable energy development onshore and offshore. This includes energy generation, storage, new and replacement transmission and distribution infrastructure and emerging low-carbon and zero emissions technologies including hydrogen and carbon capture utilisation and storage (CCUS)."

4.18 At a local level, the policy also states that Local Development Plans (LDPs) should seek to realise their areas' full potential for electricity and heat from renewable, low carbon and zero emission sources by identifying a range of opportunities for energy development.

4.19 Policy 11 a) sets out that development proposals for all forms of renewable, low-carbon and zero emissions technologies will be supported, which include:

- i) wind farms including repowering, extending, expanding, and extending the life of existing wind farms;*

- ii) enabling works, such as grid transmission and distribution infrastructure;*
- iii) energy storage, such as battery storage and pumped storage hydro;*
- iv) small scale renewable energy generation technology;*
- v) solar arrays;*
- vi) proposals associated with negative emissions technologies and carbon capture; and*
- vii) proposals including co-location of these technologies.*

4.20 Policy 11 reiterates support for renewable and low carbon technologies, however there is a clear and direct reference to onshore wind farms, recognising this form of energy generation as a key component to achieving the outcomes of Policy 11 as well as wider overarching climate change policy and legislation which aim to expand renewable, low-carbon and zero emissions technologies at a national level.

4.21 While repowering, extensions and expansions are also supported, the creation of new onshore wind development must be supported to ensure there is a continued pipeline of new onshore wind farm schemes, such as the proposed development, which can be revisited for future repowering, extension, and expansion. In addition, the policy also includes support for battery storage which has been included as part of the development with 5MW of storage proposed.

4.22 Policy 11 (e) provides further information on the topics which should be addressed as part of renewable, low-carbon and zero emissions technologies. It states that:

In addition, project design and mitigation will demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed:

- i) impacts on communities and individual dwellings, including, residential amenity, visual impact, noise, and shadow flicker;*
- ii) significant landscape and visual impacts, recognising that such impacts are to be expected for some forms of renewable energy. Where impacts are localised and/ or appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they will generally be considered to be acceptable;*
- iii) public access, including impact on long distance walking and cycling routes and scenic routes;*
- iv) impacts on aviation and defence interests including seismological recording;*
- v) impacts on telecommunications and broadcasting installations, particularly ensuring that transmission links are not compromised;*
- vi) impacts on road traffic and on adjacent trunk roads, including during construction;*
- vii) impacts on historic environment;*
- viii) effects on hydrology, the water environment and flood risk;*
- ix) biodiversity including impacts on birds;*
- x) impacts on trees, woods, and forests;*

- xj) *proposals for the decommissioning of developments, including ancillary infrastructure, and site restoration;*
- xii) *the quality of site restoration plans including the measures in place to safeguard or guarantee availability of finances to effectively implement those plans; and*
- xiii) *cumulative impacts.*

- 4.23 Throughout the EIA Report, each topic listed within Policy 11 (e) has been fully assessed, in addition to the Planning Statement providing an appraisal on the level of impacts and justification for how the proposed development not only complies with existing policy but how project design and mitigation has resulted in no or limited significant effects.
- 4.24 Policy 11 states that “*in considering these impacts, significant weight will be placed on the contribution of the proposal to renewable energy generation targets and on greenhouse gas emission targets*”.
- 4.25 A key point of policy is that Policy 11 e) ii) recognises that where some landscape and visual impacts are to be expected, localised impacts and/ or the application of appropriate design mitigation has been employed, then effects are considered to be acceptable.

Highland-wide Local Development Plan

- 4.26 On 5 April 2012, the Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) (hereafter referred to as the Development Plan) was adopted by the Council and constituted as the Local Development Plan in law. It sets out the overarching spatial planning policy for the whole of the Highland Council area, except the area covered by the Cairngorms National Park Local Plan. However, since the adoption of the Development Plan in 2012 the national and local policy landscape has shifted considerably with the adoption of the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) with national policy now forming part of the statutory Development Plan for the first time.
- 4.27 A key provision legislated within section 13 of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 is that Section 24 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 is now amended to state that in the event of any incompatibility between a provision of NPF4 and the provision of an LDP, then whichever of them is later will prevail. In this case and at the time of writing, it is the NPF4 that should prevail over the LDP in case of any incompatibility.

Overarching Renewable Policy

- 4.28 Policy 67 is the key or ‘lead’ HwLDP policy for the assessment of onshore wind farm developments. The policy contains a number of criteria which generally address the environmental topics that are referred to in other policies within the Plan. The proposed development has been assessed against Policy 67 and the associated OWESG.
- 4.29 **Policy 67: Renewable Energy Developments** requires renewable energy developments to relate well to the source needed for its operation and sets out specific criteria THC will consider in the determination of any such application, including:

- The contribution of the proposed development towards meeting renewable energy generation targets; and
 - Any positive or negative impacts a proposed development is likely to have on the local and national economy.
- 4.30 Policy 67 confirms that renewable energy proposals will also be assessed against other policies within the Development Plan, the Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines, and will have regard to other material considerations, including demonstration of significant benefits such as making effective use of existing and/or proposed infrastructure or facilities. The Supplementary Guidance forms part of the Development Plan and supplements its key principles, whilst the Highland Renewable Energy Strategy has since been superseded.
- 4.31 Policy 67 confirms that THC will support proposals for renewable energy developments where they are satisfied that they are located, sited, and designed in such a manner that they will not be significantly detrimental, either individually or cumulatively, with other developments, having particular regard to any significant effects arising on the following receptors:
- Natural, built, and cultural heritage features;
 - Species and habitats;
 - Visual impact and impact on the landscape character of the surrounding area (reflecting the scale and character of the landscape seeking to minimise landscape and visual impact, subject to any other considerations);
 - Amenity at sensitive locations (including residential properties, workplaces, recognised visitor sites);
 - Safety and amenity of (regularly) occupied properties and grounds in relation to noise, ice throw, shadow flicker and shadow throw;
 - Ground and surface water, aquatic ecosystems, and fisheries;
 - Aviation, defence, or emergency service operations, including flight activity, navigation and surveillance systems and associated infrastructure or on aircraft flight paths or MoD low-flying areas;
 - Other communications installations or the quality of radio or TV reception;
 - The amenity of users of any Core Path or other established public access for walking, cycling or horse riding;
 - Tourism and recreation interests; and
 - Land based traffic and transport interests.
- 4.32 Policy 67 includes a requirement that seeks (via a legal agreement/obligation under section 75 of the Principal Act) suitable decommissioning of any development and associated infrastructure as part of the restoration of the site.
- 4.33 Policy 67 requires a proposed development to be assessed against the 11 factors listed above with regard to predicted significant effects, and a judgement has to be reached as to whether or not such effects would be “significantly detrimental overall”. Each of these 11 factors is addressed in the appraisal presented within Chapter 5 of this Planning

Statement. However, the broader aims of the policy and their relation to the proposed development is presented below.

- 4.34 Firstly, Policy 67 refers to the need for renewable energy development proposals to be “well related to the source of the primary renewable resources that are needed for their operation”. The proposed development meets this requirement as the “primary renewable resource” for its operation is wind and the location is one where the wind resource is particularly good.
- 4.35 Secondly, Policy 67 states the Council will consider a proposed development's contribution “towards meeting renewable energy generation targets”. The proposal has an indicative capacity of 108 MW with an additional 5 MW of battery storage and would therefore make a valuable contribution to unmet international, UK and Scottish Government climate change and renewable electricity and energy generation targets.
- 4.36 Thirdly, Policy 67 states the Council will consider “any positive or negative effects [a proposed development] is likely to have on the local and national economy”. The proposed development would contribute to the attainment of economic development objectives at local and national levels.
- 4.37 **The Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance** offers additional details on factors which the Council will take into consideration when determining applications. The Supplementary Guidance provides a draft spatial framework which applies to all turbines over 50m in height or more than one turbine with a height of 30m and above to blade tip. This framework is in line with the adopted SPP 2014 document. The proposed development lies predominately within a Group 3 area (area with potential for wind farm development subject to other policy consideration), however there is an area which falls within Group 2 (Areas of significant protection) owing to its classification as an area of Class 2 Carbon Rich Soil and Peat (the quality of this is explored further in Chapter 10: Hydrology, Geology and Peat).

Landscape and Visual

- 4.38 **Policy 28: Sustainable Design** states that the Council will support development which promote and enhance the social, economic, and environmental wellbeing of the people of Highland'. The policy notes that the impact of proposals on individual and community residential amenity will be considered. Reference is also made to sensitive siting considerations as well as the impact on various resources including;
- Habitats;
 - Freshwater systems;
 - Species;
 - Landscape;
 - Cultural heritage, and;
 - Scenery.
- 4.39 **Policy 29: Design Quality and Place-making** requires that development proposals should demonstrate sensitivity and respect towards the local distinctiveness of the landscape.

4.40 **Policy 30 Physical Constraints** requires consideration as to whether a development proposal is located within areas of constraint as set out within the Physical Constraints Supplementary Guidance;

4.41 **Policy 61 Landscape** sets out requirements for the evaluation of potential impacts on landscape character arising from a proposed development. Landscape Character Assessments, Landscape Capacity Studies and relevant supplementary guidance shall be taken into account by THC when assessing proposed developments;

Hydrology, Geology and Peat

4.42 **Policy 55 Peat and Soils** requires development proposals to minimise the disturbance, degradation or erosion of peat and soils. A peatland management plan may be required if development on peat is clearly demonstrated to be unavoidable;

4.43 **Policy 62 Geodiversity** states that development proposals which include measures to protect and enhance geodiversity interests of international, national, and regional/local importance in the wider countryside, will be supported. The Council will also support improvement of accessibility and interpretation as an educational or geo-tourism resource, where it is possible to integrate sympathetically development, geodiversity, and other existing interests.

4.44 **Policy 63 Water Environment** states that proposals that do not compromise the objectives of the Water Framework Directive, which is aimed at supporting the protection and improvement of Scotland's water environment will be supported;

4.45 **Policy 64 Flood Risk** requires development proposals within or bordering medium to high-risk flood risk areas will need to demonstrate compliance with Scottish Planning Policy through the submission of suitable information which may take the form of a Flood Risk Assessment;

4.46 **Policy 66 Surface Water Drainage** requires all proposed developments to be drained via Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS);

Ecology and Ornithology

4.47 **Policy 58 Protected Species, Policy 59 Other Important Species and Policy 60 Other Important Habitats and Article 10 Features** sets out requirements for development proposals to adhere to a range of criteria regarding the avoidance of detrimental impacts upon biodiversity, flora, and fauna. Consideration must also be given to any existing protected planting and wetland which have habitat and species value;

Cultural Heritage

4.48 **Policy 57 Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage** requires all development proposals to be assessed in consideration of designated heritage assets in close proximity to the development site. Furthermore, the design, layout, and massing of the development in relation to designated heritage assets must avoid detrimental impacts upon the character and setting of these assets;

Transport and Access

- 4.49 **Policy 56 Travel** requires details of on and off-site transport implications, those criteria relevant to the proposal advise proposed development's should:
- Be well served by the most sustainable modes of travel;
 - Be designed for the safety and convenience of all potential uses;
 - Incorporate appropriate mitigation, through developer contribution, if necessary, to improve and enhance all transport modes;
 - Include appropriate parking provision, and;
 - Green Travel Plans may be required for significant travel generating developments.
- 4.50 The Council will also take account of The Core Paths Plan.
- 4.51 **Policy 77 Public Access** requires developments which affect any route defined in a Core Paths plan, an access point to water or wider access rights, to maintain or enhance any existing path including its amenity value, or ensure alternative access provision is provided which is no less attractive, is safe and convenient for public use, and does not damage or disturb habitats or species. Any proposal classed as a major development will need to be accompanied by an Access Plan, indicating existing public access provision alongside proposed public access provision both during and post-construction.
- 4.52 **Policy 78 Long Distance Routes** confirms the Council, and partners will safeguard and seek to enhance long distance routes.

The Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan

- 4.53 The Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan) was adopted by THC in August 2018 and sets out the policies and provide a framework to guide and enable a range of levels of development.
- 4.54 The CaSPlan sets out a strategic vision for the area and includes a number of development allocations. The CaSPlan does not include any specific designations or planning policies relating to onshore wind energy developments or the Site and is not accompanied by any relevant appropriate supplementary guidance.

The Highland Council Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance

- 4.55 THC adopted its Onshore Wind Energy: Supplementary Guidance in 2016 and subsequently adopted an addendum to the supplementary guidance in 2017, entitled 'Addendum Supplementary Guidance: Part 2b Highland Strategic Capacity', hereafter referred to as 'the Supplementary Guidance'.
- 4.56 The Supplementary Guidance recognises the potential social and economic benefits onshore wind developments can bring to communities, and outlines THC's positive stance towards renewable energy developments. The Supplementary Guidance also sets out how THC will manage onshore wind energy development proposals against a range of

policy requirements in-line with Section 22 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended by the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006.

4.57 The guidance for potential onshore wind developments contained within the Supplementary Guidance is broadly structured around the following topics:

- Landscape and visual;
- Public access;
- Noise assessment;
- Natural and historic environment;
- Operational efficiency of other communications;
- Operational efficiency of wind energy developments;
- Water environment;
- Peat;
- Safety and amenity at sensitive locations;
- Tourism and recreation;
- Airport, defence, and emergency service operations;
- Traffic and transport;
- Electricity and gas infrastructure;
- Borrow pits;
- Construction environmental management plans;
- Restoration bonds; and
- Repowering.

4.58 Each topic provides specific guidance to inform the nature and context of technical assessments, as well as guidance towards the acceptability of potential significant impacts arising from an onshore wind proposal. Where relevant, these policy provisions are considered further under specific topic headings in Section 5 of this Statement.

4.59 In addition to the topics listed above, Pages 18-20 of the OWESG list ten landscape and visual criteria that the Council use as a framework for assessing proposals. They are not absolute requirements but set out key considerations that proposed developments should be aware of and take into account the within design and assessment. The criteria should influence the proposals and supporting documents for any application should include the developer's assessment against these criteria. The following criteria are likely to be of particular significance:

- *1 - Relationship between Settlements/Key locations and wider landscape respected.*
- *2 - Key Gateway locations and routes are respected*
- *3 - Valued natural and cultural landmarks are respected*
- *4 - The amenity of key recreational routes and ways is respected.*
- *5 - The amenity of transport routes is respected*
- *6 - The existing pattern of Wind Energy Development is respected*

- *7 - The proposal contributes positively to existing pattern or objectives for development in the area*
- *8 - The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected*
- *9 - Landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is respected*
- *10 - Distinctiveness of Landscape character is respected*

4.60 An assessment of the proposed development against the criteria listed above have been assessed in full in Section 5 of this Planning Statement.

5 PLANNING ASSESSMENT

Introduction

- 5.1 Following identification of the relevant planning policies, guidance and other material considerations in Section 4 of this Planning Statement, this section examines how the proposed development accords with the Development Plan, material considerations and other policy guidance considered in this statement.
- 5.2 Having regard to the relevant provisions within the Development Plan and other material considerations, the following determining issues have been identified:
- The principle of the proposed development;
 - The conformity of the proposed development against the Development Plan and supplementary guidance;
 - The acceptability of predicted environmental and other impacts arising from the Proposed Development, as assessed against the relevant Development Plan policies;
 - The consideration of other material considerations that may weigh in support of the proposed development.
- 5.3 These determining issues are considered further under the relevant headings below.

The Principle of the Proposed Development

- 5.4 By its nature, the proposed development will deliver sustainable renewable energy and make a valid contribution to national low-carbon energy targets and net-zero goals.
- 5.5 The Scottish Government is resolute in its ambitions to continue to capture and capitalise on our natural wind resource and projects such as the proposed development make a significant contribution to achieving the renewable energy generation goals established in national policies (as set out in Section 3 of this Planning Statement). There remains a sustained and enhanced emphasis on renewable energy as a key requirement for Scotland and the UK's transition to a just, Net Zero economy. Furthermore, the proposed development will make an active contribution to achieving the net zero greenhouse gas target date of 2045, whilst promoting a sustainable and resilient form of low carbon electricity generation in the face of the climate emergency declared in 2019.
- 5.6 There is explicit policy support for the principle of onshore wind energy across the Development Plan and other material considerations, including national policy and legislation. The publication of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) forms the most up to date component of the Development Plan. The proposed development is considered to be of national importance due to its generating capacity of over 50MW².
- 5.7 As set out in NPF4 (Page 97), national developments are defined as "*significant developments of national importance that will help to deliver the spatial strategy*", adding

² The proposed development has a generating capacity of 108MW with an additional 5MW of battery storage

that “their designation means that the principle for development does not need to be agreed in later consenting processes”. The rationale of designating schemes over 50MW as national development is that “a large and rapid increase in electricity generation” is “essential” for Scotland to meet its net zero emissions targets. This is the case for the proposed development.

- 5.8 In addition to the proposed developments status as national development, NPF4 **Policy 1: Tackling the climate and nature crises** (arguably the primary policy within the document) is emphatic that significant weight should be given to the global climate and nature crises, in order to ensure that they are recognised as a priority in all plans and decisions.
- 5.9 The intent behind Policy 1 is to encourage, promote and facilitate development that addresses the global climate emergency and nature crisis. It is evident that this overarching policy provides significant support for renewable energy generation in the need to reduce carbon emissions and by extension, support for the proposed development.
- 5.10 Given that both the Scottish Government and The Highland Council declared climate emergencies in 2019, this has reinforced the need and urgency required to act. The principle of development has clear and unambiguous support from the most current part of the Development Plan, and it is, therefore, undeniable that Scotland needs mature forms of renewable energy which can be rapidly rolled out. The proposed development fulfils all of these criteria.
- 5.11 It is, however, recognised, that development cannot come at any cost and consideration must be given to other relevant policy requirements which the proposed development has done in order to maximise energy yields whilst seeking to avoid or reduce environmental impacts. As such, details around the siting and acceptability of design and impact are dealt with in the relevant sections below.

The Acceptability of the Proposed Development

- 5.12 Having regard to the characteristics of the Proposed Development and the potential environmental effects identified and assessed within the EIAR, it is appropriate to test the policies of the Development Plan and demonstrate compliance using the evidence gathered within the EIAR. Topics include:
- Landscape & Visual;
 - Cultural Heritage;
 - Geology, Hydrology & Hydrogeology;
 - Ecology & Ornithology;
 - Noise;
 - Transport;
 - Socioeconomics and Tourism;
 - Forestry, and;
 - Other Issues.
- 5.13 These matters are considered further under the relevant subheadings below.

Landscape and Visual

- 5.14 Landscape and visual impacts are often a primary focus of wind energy developments and throughout the design evolution and assessment, potential impacts have been fully considered. As part of the accompanying EIAR, a landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) has been carried out and the findings are presented in full in EIAR Volume1, Chapter 6.
- 5.15 The key planning policy relevant to onshore wind energy development and subsequently landscape and visual matters is Policy 67 of the HwLDP. Policy 67 advises that THC will support renewable energy proposals where it is satisfied that they are located, sited, and designed in such a manner that they will not be detrimental overall, either on an individual or cumulative basis.
- 5.16 NPF4 provides an updated perspective on landscape and visual matters, set out within Policy 11(e)(ii) which states that significant landscape and visual impacts are to be recognised and expected for some forms of renewable energy. It states that “*where impacts are localised and/ or appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they will generally be considered to be acceptable.*”

Siting and Design

- 5.17 As defined within the Spatial Framework for Onshore Wind Energy for the Caithness and Sutherland LDP Area, the proposed development site sits within an area classed as *Group 3: Areas with potential for wind farm development*. Given its potential for wind farm development as designated within local policy, coupled with strong wind resources, distance from settlements and residential properties as well as an established pattern of onshore wind energy development within the area, the site was progressed.
- 5.18 The Site is located within an undesignated area of LCT 134: Sweeping Moorland and Flows – Caithness & Sutherland with key characteristics of gently sloping or undulating landform.
- 5.19 Wind farm development is now a landscape characteristic of many areas of Scotland, including the Highlands and within NatureScots description of this LCT it is recognised that wind farms and transmission lines are key features of this landscape type. This is the case for the proposed development with the undulating nature of the site and relatively simple landform used to produce a cohesive design. In addition to the specific characteristics of the Site informing the overall strategy, some general design principles were also applied. This included:
- The avoidance of overlapping or ‘stacked’ turbines, where possible, through careful placement in order to form a well-spaced group or array when viewed from the receiving landscape including key design viewpoints.
 - The avoidance of outlying turbines which appear separate or stand apart within the landscape in order to reduce the lateral spread of the Proposed Development.
 - The selection of an appropriate turbine height which respect the scale of the receiving landscape and achieves a balanced composition when viewed from the surrounding landscape whilst recognising that current wind turbine technology has progressed with larger turbines required for greater energy efficiency.

- The development of a layout which relates well to other existing and proposed wind farms within the local area, as well as being coherent in isolation.

5.20 As part of the design process, a pre-application consultation workshop was held with THC on the 11th of September 2024 to discuss the composition of the proposed development and its relation to the surrounding landscape.

Landscape Effects

5.21 The proposed turbines and infrastructure would be located within the LCT 134: Sweeping Moorland and Flows – ‘Strath Fiag/Tirry’ unit which covers the Site and land to the south-east only with the other LCT areas approximately 9km to the west and 10km to the north-east.

6.1 The area is characterised by some large areas of coniferous forestry plantation in various stages of maturity, including within the Site, areas to the west along Loch Shin, and areas east of Strath Tirry. The LCT unit does however feature undulating areas of moorland predominately between Loch Shin/ A838 and the A836. There are also scattered properties and small settlements as well as overhead powerlines with associated pylons.

5.22 The Shinness Wind Farm, currently in planning, is located approximately 6km to the south-east of the proposed development and lies within the same LCT. More broadly, wind farm development within 10km and the majority beyond this distance (up to 30km) to the south, south-east and east are located within the immediately adjacent *Rounded Hills - Caithness & Sutherland* LCT, establishing a precedent for development.

6.2 The Site is not located within a designated landscape and would have limited visibility from designations in the wider area, with the closest being the nationally designated Assynt - Coigach NSA, approximately 9.5km to the west of the Site at the closest point.

5.23 The nearest WLAs includes Foinaven - Ben Hee (WLA 37), which lies adjacent to the northern site boundary as well as Reay – Cassley * WLA 34.), approximately 1km west.

5.24 Despite the lack of designation, the landscape is in a reasonable condition in terms of its representativeness, landscape interest, perceptual and scenic quality, and is considered to be of Medium local value. This is due to the simple unenclosed land cover, limited settlements resulting in fewer visual receptors, and the influence of other wind farm development. Other factors which have influenced the sensitivity of the receiving landscape relate to forestry plantations around the Site and the wind-swept nature of the Site.

5.25 Whilst the northern, core parts of this LCT are more remote and feature open areas of moorland there is clear recognition that wind farms and transmission lines, are more prominent features within the modified outer fringes of which the proposed development is located. In addition to this, it is recognised that the proposed turbines would represent a notable change to the immediate vicinity of the Site however their location within and close to large areas of coniferous forestry plantation, as well as their location on sloping ground within Glen Fiag, limits the landscape character effects to some degree.

5.26 The LVIA concludes that in considering the landscape susceptibility to change, its sensitivity and the magnitude of effect, there would be significant adverse effects on the host LCT

extending over an area up to 8km which is expected with a scheme of the size and scale of a modern onshore wind farm. When considering theoretical visibility more widely, views of the proposed development becomes fragmented and patchy between 8km to 12km with the proposed development obscured by intervening rounded hills to the west and south-west.

- 5.27 Significant landscape effects within this range would constitute localised effects within NPF4, Policy 11(e)(ii) and would generally be expected and acceptable. Therefore, landscape effects are consistent with the provisions of the most up to date part of the Development Plan.

Visual Effects

- 5.28 The viewpoint analysis indicates that significant visual effects are likely to affect limited locations within approximately 9.5km distance from the proposed development (subject to a clear view of the proposed turbines, landform, and vegetation screening), as indicated by Viewpoints 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10. This is in keeping with localised effects which are constrained to approximately 10km aligning with the conclusions of S36 Public Local Inquiries such as Achany Glen³ in which Reporters have deemed impacts within this distance to be 'localised', and generally acceptable in accordance with NPF4.
- 5.29 Discussion on localised effects have also been reflected in consents such as Bunloinn Wind Farm⁴ (March 2024) which concluded that the wind farm would have significant landscape and visual impacts but overall, these would remain relatively localised with the majority of significant effects occurring within 12km of the proposed Development and none at a distance greater than 14.7km.
- 5.30 Significant visual effects would also be limited to the following visual receptors:
- A total of eight out of 20 viewpoints with significant effects extending out to 9.7km
 - The settlement of Shinness, located, approximately 8.5km to the south-east, would experience significant visual effects during daylight hours.
 - An individual property, namely Aulnacarach located approximately 4.7km to the south-east, would experience significant effects during daylight hours and hours of darkness.
 - A 5km stretch of the John o' Groats Cycle Route on the section of the route that passes near Crask Inn to the east.
 - Significant effects during daylight hours from sections of the A838 up to approximately 8km to the south-east of the proposed development.
- 5.31 The night-time viewpoint assessment concludes that when allowing for the embedded mitigation, three of the viewpoints would be significantly affected by the proposed aviation warning lights operating at either of the two lighting intensities, this being 200cd and 2000cd. A total of 6 out of 15 turbines would be lit with the maximum brightness only required for approximately 5% of the time.

³ <https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationDetails.aspx?cr=ECU00001930&T=6>

⁴ <https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationDetails.aspx?cr=ECU00003304&T=6>

- 5.32 It is the established view from both the Scottish Ministers and the Applicant that radar detection systems which switch aviation lights on and off based on flight activity are currently not mandated by aviation regulators and it may be some time before these are available. Appropriate conditions can be applied to any consent that would allow timely review of this position.
- 5.33 Again, similarly to landscape effects, significant visual effects are intrinsic to large scale wind energy development. It is useful to look at representative significant visual effects and assess the suitability and acceptability of them in planning terms.
- 5.34 Significant visual effects are unavoidable with onshore wind farms by the nature of their scale and size, however the proposed development has been sited and designed to provide a wind farm which despite its size and scale, has demonstrable localised significant effects which are acceptable in terms of the Development Plan and NPF4.
- 5.35 NPF4 Policy 11(e)(ii) requires consideration of whether or not the significant effects are localised. It is apparent from the ZTV, and the assessment of viewpoints as contained within Technical Appendix 6.5 of the EIA Report, that significant effects starts to dissipate at around 10km.
- 5.36 As set out above, a notable decision by Scottish Ministers in regard to what defines a localised effect can be found in the decision for Achany Extension in the Highlands, which lies approximately 13km from the proposed development and was consented in May 2023 (ECU reference ECU00001930). In this case, the Ministers found that Achany Extension would have significant effects which *"would remain relatively localised with the majority of significant effects occurring within 10km of the proposed development and none at a distance greater than 12.5km"* (Decision Notice, page 15). This is further extended by Scottish Ministers following the consent of Bunloinn Wind Farm (March 2024) where Scottish Ministers state that whilst significant landscape and visual impacts would occur, these would remain relatively localised with the majority of significant effects occurring within 12km of the proposed Development and none at a distance greater than 14.7km.
- 5.37 Other recent examples of decisions taken on the parameters of localised effects include Rowan (fka Kilberry) Wind Farm which was granted consent in April 2024. The Scottish Ministers considered the significant landscape and visual impacts to be mostly localised. Significant visual effects were identified as extending out to 13km.
- 5.38 It would be therefore logical and follow Ministerial decisions thus far that significant landscape and visuals effects can be deemed as localised up to 15km. Therefore, the proposed development can draw clear support from NPF Policy 11(e)(ii) as well as other decisions made in light of the adoption of NPF4. As the most up to date strand of Development Plan policy concerning significant landscape and visual effects, this takes precedence over the 2012 HwLDP and its provisions on visual effects.

Cultural Heritage

- 5.39 Chapter 7 of the EIAR provides an assessment on the potential effects of the proposed development on cultural heritage, fulfilling Policy 7a) of NPF4 which states that development proposals with a potentially significant impact on historic assets will be

accompanied by an assessment based on an understanding of the cultural significance of the historic asset. Whilst NPF4 Policy 7 provides an updated policy test, the relevant LDP policy pertaining to cultural heritage includes Policy 57 which aims to ensure the design, layout, and massing of the development in relation to designated heritage assets to avoid adverse effects upon the integrity of special qualities of international or nationally designated assets.

- 5.40 NPF4 Policy 7 continues by stating that the assessment should identify the likely visual or physical impact of any proposals for change, including cumulative effects and provide a sound basis for managing the impacts of change. The inclusion of an assessment on setting of identified cultural heritage assets within an extended 10km Study Area is set out in a series of photomontages and wirelines provided from cultural heritage receptors and located in EIAR Volume 2.
- 5.41 Accordingly, NPF4 Policy 7(h) sets out that development proposals affecting scheduled monuments will only be supported where:
- i. direct impacts on the scheduled monument are avoided;
 - ii. significant adverse impacts on the integrity of the setting of a scheduled monument are avoided; or
 - iii. exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated to justify the impact on a scheduled monument and its setting and impacts on the monument or its setting have been minimised.
- 5.42 Whilst the full assessment is available within Chapter 7 of the EIAR, it is considered important to discuss the assessment of heritage assets closest to the proposed development due to the nature of the proposed development and to demonstrate its compliance with policy.
- 5.43 A key cultural heritage asset is Cnoc Olasdail, hut circles & field systems – Scheduled Monument (ref: SM4375), or ‘Cnoc Olasdail’. This is a scheduled monument located 8.82km from the closest part of the asset to the nearest turbine and is described as a small settlement of five round houses on the south-western slope of a low, rounded hill, with at least one hut circle, clearance cairns, low banks and lynchets and more recent features including an annular enclosure.
- 5.44 The setting of this asset is formed by the low hill upon which it is located, and its situation overlooking the Tirry River Valley. The elevated position of the asset provides a vantage point from which wide-ranging views are available which take in a wide variety of landscapes including surrounding hills and along and across the Tirry River valley. However, views northwards (the orientation of the proposed development from the designation) and eastwards are more limited due to the rising slope in these directions.
- 5.45 When assessing the impact of the proposed development from this viewpoint, the visualisations show that there will be distant visibility of the upper extents of all turbines. In the majority of cases, this will largely be limited to the hubs and blades. The visibility of the turbines is however tempered due to the distance from Cnoc Olasdail. The turbines will also be observed beyond modern commercial forestry and will only be observed in peripheral views from the asset. The most important and focussed views south-wards, along the Tirry River valley will be unaffected by the proposals.

- 5.46 The key characteristics of this asset, most important views, and the elements which contribute towards its cultural significance will not experience change with the assessment concluding that the integrity of the setting of the asset would not be adversely affected.
- 5.47 The other Scheduled Monuments within the Study Area which were assessed in full include:
- The Ord, chambered cairns, cairns, settlements, and field systems – Scheduled Monument (ref. SM1812); and,
 - Cnoc a' Bhreac-leathaid, shielings and cairnfield 700m NNE of – scheduled monument (ref. SM5300)
- 5.48 Whilst the proposed development has theoretical visibility to and from these Scheduled Monuments and would introduce new, visible, and clearly modern components to views, it is concluded that the effects on setting and integrity would result in no significant effects upon any of the specified receptors. As such, the proposed development accords with key elements Policy 7 of NPF4 as well as sub-policy NPF4 7(h)(ii) due to careful consideration put into the design of the proposed development. There is also no conflict between the provisions of the Development Plan and the findings of the EIAR.

Ecology and Ornithology

- 5.49 Chapters 8 and 9 of the EIAR provide an assessment of the potential effects of the proposed development on ecological and ornithological interests, respectively. From review of the NPF4, Policy 3: Biodiversity and Policy 4: Natural Places of the NPF4 comprise up to date and relevant Development Plan policies whilst HwLDP, policies 58, 59 and 60 are all relevant. The general policy requirements are to conserve, protect and where possible enhance biodiversity and designated sites.
- 5.50 The site has been designed to limit impacts upon watercourses and fish within them, by adhering to 50m buffers from any watercourse, and by managing runoff via a Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP). Individual Species Protection Plans will be prepared as required, along with monitoring by a qualifying Environmental/Ecological Clerk of Works.
- 5.51 Collision risk for all bird species resulted in no significant effects identified. There were also no identified significant effects upon bat species across the Site.
- 5.52 An Outline Habitat Management Plan (OHMP (Technical Appendix 8.3) is provided within Volume 4 of the EIA Report, and details measures for the protection and enhancement of various sensitive receptors as well as an Outline Deer Management Plan. The OHMP also includes provision for the restoration of peat, alongside the Outline Peat Management Plan (EIA Report Volume 4 Technical Appendix 10.3)
- 5.53 Following the implementation of good practice, embedded design mitigation, and detailed additional mitigation as per the OHMP, no significant effects are predicted upon ecological or ornithological receptors. Enhancement are made to peatland habitat through the OHMP. In addition, a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment following the proposed completion of peatland restoration measures of the proposed development is set out in Technical Appendix 8.5, which demonstrates a net gain of 15% following the

implementation of mitigation and enhancement measures. Following NatureScot guidance, the proposed development has sought to achieve the recommended 1:10 (lost: restored) ratio of restoration to achieve offsetting as well as enhancement which accounts for an additional 10% of the baseline assessment of the extent of priority peatland habitat. As such a total of 62 hectares of peatland will be restored.

- 5.54 The areas identified for peatland restoration is located within the boundary of the Flow Country World Heritage Site and the Caithness and Sutherlands SAC.), both of which are designated due to the presence of blanket bog, peatland habitats and the associated wildlife species which these areas support. As set out within the Peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland Management Strategy 2021 – 2030⁵, a key pressure on areas of near natural peatland is forestry edge effects, conifer regeneration, drainage, grazing, trampling and wildfire damage.
- 5.55 A significant driver that is reducing key stressors such as commercial forestry in parts of Caithness and Sutherland is the development of wind farms, which can provide support for woodland removal, peatland restoration and ongoing management over longer timeframes (25-30 years). The proposed development will result in a loss of 36.37ha of commercial forestry and the areas identified for peatland restoration targets areas of degraded and modified peatland close to the forestry edge whilst completely avoiding areas of deep peat.
- 5.56 When considering the quantity of peatland restoration and the calculation of biodiversity net gain across the site, it is evident that there is no conflict with the policies of the Development Plan in this regard. Additionally, the contribution of peatland restoration within the Outline HMP provides a key requirement of NPF4 Policy 3 which states that states that national development proposals will be supported where it can be demonstrated that the proposal will conserve, restore, and enhance biodiversity, so they are in a demonstrably better state than without intervention and Policy 4 in contributing to enhancement of biodiversity, restoring degraded peat habits, and noting the need for restoration.

Geology, Hydrology and Hydrogeology

- 5.57 The key policies relating to geology, hydrology and hydrogeology include NPF4 Policy 5: Soils and Policies 55, 62, 63, 64, and 66 of the Development Plan as discussed previously within this Planning Statement.
- 5.58 Policy 5 (c)ii stipulates that Development proposals on peatland, carbon rich soils and priority peatland habitat will only be supported for the generation of energy from renewable sources that optimises the contribution of the area to greenhouse gas emissions reductions targets whilst Policy 5(d) outlines that development on peatland, carbon-rich soils or priority peatland, a site-specific assessment will be required to identify:
- i. the baseline depth, habitat condition, quality, and stability of carbon rich soils;
 - ii. the likely effects of the development on peatland, including on soil disturbance; and

⁵ <https://theflowcountry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/THE-PEATLANDS-OF-CAITHNESS-AND-SUTHERLAND-MANAGEMENT-STRATEGY-2021-2030.pdf>

iii. the likely net effects of the development on climate emissions and loss of carbon

- 5.59 Potential impacts upon peat, set out in full in Chapter 10 of the EIAR, have been assessed via extensive baseline data collection through Phase 1 and Phase 2 surveys (undertaken from June to December 2024) along with supplementary ecological information to classify areas of potential groundwater dependence and the quality of peat within the site.
- 5.60 The EIAR concludes that no significant potential effects on hydrological, geological and peat receptors have been predicted when taking account of mitigation by design and embedded mitigation such as the application of a Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and floated roads over areas of deeper peat. Additionally, design mitigation of the proposed development has minimised potential for adverse effects upon watercourses via implementing a 50m design buffer and reducing watercourse crossings as far as possible, with a total of two proposed across the Site.
- 5.61 In total 1093 peat probes were taken across the development site with 374 probes in June 2024 (Phase 1), 622 probes in September 2024 (Phase 2) and 97 probes in December 2024 (Phase 2b). The peat probing confirmed that the majority of infrastructure has avoided deep peat except a stretch of 750m of track which is to be floated. The average depth of peat across the site is 0.65m
- 5.62 The results of the peat probing show that twelve of the fifteen turbines are sited on 'peaty soil' rather than peat (<0.5m) whilst the remaining three are sited on peat recorded at depths ranging from 0.5m to 1m, therefore defined as peat, but not deep peat. All other infrastructure elements (construction compound, substation and borrow pit search areas) are sited on areas where the average peat depth is also less than 1.0m.
- 5.63 Extensive design iteration works were undertaken to avoid siting turbines or other infrastructure on deep peat resulting in areas of deep peat being avoided in the siting of all turbine / hardstanding areas. Thicker peat deposits were identified, particularly north of T7, although the design evolution sought to avoid the deepest areas of peat to the northeast of the track in this area. Some thicker peat deposits have also been recorded to the north of T2, to the north and west of T13 and to the north and south of T15. The requirement for peat excavation at these locations will be minimised, via the construction of floating road.
- 5.64 From a review of SNH's Carbon Rich Soils and Peatland map, the majority of site is designated and consequently the footprint of development has been categorised as Class 1 and 2 peat. However, the Carbon Rich soils, and peatland mapping exercise contain an allowance for these classifications to change should detailed and site-specific survey determine that conditions are different.
- 5.65 As such, Technical Appendix 8.1 contains an assessment of peatland condition within the Site boundary. The site is predominantly commercial forestry resulting in the shallower peat depths observed across the site however there are areas of blanket bog and acid/neutral flushes. For the peatland condition assessment, a total of 27 mapped polygons were selected for the peatland condition assessment with a total of 17 polygons assessed as near natural, seven classified as modified and three classed as actively eroding.

- 5.66 Near natural peat have been completely avoided as part of the design and no infrastructure has been placed in these areas. These areas of near natural peat overlap with the Caithness and Sutherlands Peatlands SAC and the Flow Country World Heritage Site (WHS).
- 5.67 This is explored more thoroughly within the EIA and its associated appendices, specifically Chapter 10 of the EIAR and Technical Appendix 10.3: Outline Peat Management Plan.
- 5.68 Based on an extensive peat survey programme, the proposed development layout, including turbines and associated infrastructure, has been designed to avoid the areas of deep peat identified, wherever possible, and areas where peat landslide may occur. The Peat Slide Risk Assessment states that hazard from peat slide on the site is also considered to be low. As such, compliance with NPF4 is apparent through the design principles applied throughout the evolution of the proposed by firstly avoiding and then minimising disturbance to soils as well as protecting soils from damage.
- 5.69 The draft Peat Management Plan also demonstrates that peat can be retained onsite, and no peat will be removed from the site whilst Outline Habitat Management identifies areas of peatland outside of the main turbine area which would be subject to restoration, offering carbon and habitat benefits.
- 5.70 Accordingly, with appropriate and standard construction controls there are not anticipated to be significant effects upon hydrology, geology, or peat, and therefore the proposed development accords with the Development Plan and the relevant policies of NPF4.

Noise

- 5.71 An assessment was undertaken to consider potential noise effects associated with the proposed development, the findings of which are presented in Chapter 11 of the EIAR.
- 5.72 Operational noise effects have been assessed using the methodology described in ETSU-R-97 (ETSU) and the proposed Development in isolation would comply with the simplified criterion of 35 dB, LA90,10min described in ETSU-R-97.
- 5.73 The operational noise assessment was carried out to assess potential impacts that may arise from the Proposed Development in isolation. Predicted immission from the proposed turbines were found to be below 31dB(A) at all assessment locations, with a maximum predicted level of 30.6dB(A), at NAL2 (East Overscaig). This resulted in a minimum compliance margin of 4.4dB with the simplified ETSU-R-97 limit of 35dB(A). This suggests that noise impacts would be negligible and not significant.
- 5.74 A cumulative assessment was conducted with predicted noise levels from both Sallachy Wind Farm and the Project, which demonstrated total predicted immission levels would increase by approximately 2dB over baseline levels, during worst-case downwind propagation, but remain below 35dB(A). When assessing consented levels, the derived cumulative limits would be complied with at all locations. The residual effect was assessed to be negligible as the expected change in level is minimal and the expected immission

levels would be lower due to directivity during the most common wind directions for the area.

- 5.75 Best practice measures will be employed to manage noise during the construction and decommissioning stages of the proposed development, and no effects associated with these stages are considered to constitute significant effects. Construction noise will be limited in duration and confined to working hours as specified by THC and can therefore be adequately controlled through the application of good practice measures and secured by an appropriately worded planning condition. Noise during decommissioning will be of a similar nature to that during the construction phase and will be managed
- 5.76 The proposed development is therefore not considered to represent any significant impact to nearby noise receptors, either in isolation or cumulatively.
- 5.77 When referring to relevant policy, NPF4 Policy 11(e) states:

'....project design and mitigation will demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed:

i. impacts on communities and individual dwellings, including, residential amenity, visual impact, noise, and shadow flicker;'

- 5.78 Accordingly, the proposed development complies with the policies outlined in NPF4, HwLDP policies 67 and 72 as well as the provisions of THC's Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance.

Traffic and Transport

- 5.79 The relevant policies within the Development Plan are Policies 56, 77 and 78 which aim to maintain and improve connectivity, public transport, and ensure Traffic Impact Assessments are undertaken where required in order to preserve the performance and safety of the road network. This is in addition to Policy 67 which also considers traffic and transport related access as well as public access.
- 5.80 Chapter 12 of the EIAR addresses the proposed developments effects on Traffic and Transport. It concludes that the construction programme associated with the proposed development is anticipated to cover an 18-month period, during which there would be 118 daily total HGV trips during the busiest construction month (Month 9) whilst the movement of abnormal loads is not anticipated to exceed six trips per week over the course of four months.
- 5.81 The movement of abnormal loads traffic would also require small scale and temporary remedial works at a number of locations along identified delivery route.
- 5.82 Following an assessment of the road network, significant issues prior to mitigation have been noted particularly for users of the A838 which would result in delays to road vehicle users, pedestrians, and severance of communities Through the use of traffic management measures and the successful implementation of these measures, the effects can be considered as non-significant.

5.83 It should be noted that the increased traffic is temporary in nature and can be accommodated by the existing road network. Effective management through the implementation of a Construction Traffic Management Plan can also be achieved. The CTMP will ensure that the volume of HGV trips is minimised as much as possible restricting travel during peak periods or at the start/end of the school day and that they adhere to a lowered speed limit. Additionally, the CTMP will ensure that there is signage along the construction routes to make residents aware of the additional HGV traffic and to provide the opportunity to plan accordingly. Each of these measures will contribute to minimising the level of effect experienced by residents in Pittentrail, Lairg and Bonar Bridge and the isolated properties along the routes.

5.84 As such, it is considered that the relevant policies are adhered to with the assessment demonstrating that there is capacity on the road and there would be no significant effects. Accordingly, the proposed development does not conflict with the Development Plan in this regard.

Socio-economics

5.85 An assessment of the proposed development towards socioeconomic and tourism receptors has been undertaken and the findings of this are presented as Chapter 13 of the EIAR with Policy 67 being the most relevant policy from the Development Plan.

5.86 In addition to Policy 67, under Policy 11(e)(iii), NPF4 addresses that renewable energy developments will only be supported by the Scottish Government when the project's design and mitigation strategy show consideration of any impacts to public access. Policy 11(c) also addresses that renewable energy developments will 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."

5.87 Following the assessment, it is concluded that up to £3.78 million will be spent within the area with up to 68 jobs created across the Highlands.

5.88 On the basis of 15 turbines with a power output of 108MW, the annual operating cost for the proposed development would be around £10m, and a lifetime operating cost of around £351.5m. The BEIS report, Electricity Generation Costs 2020 estimates that by 2025, operating costs for onshore wind will be around £23,500 per year, per MW installed. As a result, for the proposed development, this would equal around £2.5m per year, or £88.8m over the lifetime of the development.

5.89 As part of the proposed development, a community benefit package in line with prevailing Scottish Government guidance would be delivered during the operational phase of the proposed development. The Applicant is supportive of all potential uses of the community benefit package but recognises that it will be for local communities to decide on how to achieve the greatest benefits. The commitment to maximising net economic gain for the Highlands reinforces that the proposed development accords with policies set out in both NPF4 and the Development Plan.

Forestry

- 5.90 The relevant Development Plan policy for forestry includes Policy 51. In general terms, these policies aim to minimise the loss of woodland and look to protect, conserve or enhance it. The Supplementary Guidance requires that any development which has an adverse impact upon tree resource is required to provide provision for the preservation and where appropriate planting of new trees.
- 5.91 NPF4 Policy 6(c) also adds that that proposals involving woodland removal will “only be supported where they achieve significant and clearly defined additional public benefits in accordance with relevant Scottish Government policy on woodland removal”.
- 5.92 The forestry plans and assessment have been included as Chapter 14 of the EIA Report. To construct the proposed development, a total of 258.71 ha of tree removal would be required, with a further 221.35ha as management felling which would be replanted in situ. An offset of 10m applied to all infrastructure which is included in the permanent woodland loss and excluded from the replanting plan. As such, there would be a net woodland loss of 37.36ha arising from the permanent infrastructure and standoff distances required for operational and safety reasons.
- 5.93 The species composition would remain materially unaltered resulting from the proposed development as permanent woodland loss is within conifer compartments.
- 5.94 As a result of the woodland permanently felled for the infrastructure including tracks, other permanent infrastructure and stand-off distances between trees and turbines and wind management zones would result in a net woodland loss of 52.93 ha. In the absence of mitigation, this would be moderate and not significant.
- 5.95 In order to comply with the Scottish Government's Control of Woodland Removal Policy, compensation planting would be required to mitigate the loss of woodland area. The Applicant is committed to providing appropriate compensatory planting of 37.36ha. The extent, location and composition of such planting would be agreed with Scottish Forestry, taking into account any revision to the felling and restocking plans prior to the commencement of operation. Compensatory planting will be agreed with Scottish Forestry through an appropriately worded planning condition and the proposed planting plan shall be evaluated.
- 5.96 Following completion of the compensatory planting, the forestry proposals accord with the Development Plan. The additional public benefit associated with construction of an onshore wind farm would be significant in line with Policy 6(c) of NPF4.

Other Issues

- 5.97 Chapter 15 of the EIAR outlines the assessment of the proposed development against a variety of ‘other issues’, including infrastructure, aviation and radar, health and safety, telecommunications and television, and shadow flicker. An assessment on the proposed developments impact on the native woodland plantation is also included in this chapter.

- 5.98 An aviation lighting scheme has been agreed with the CAA due to the height of the proposed turbines. In addition to this further dialogue was held with the MoD regarding potential impacts upon Lossiemouth. A conclusion that the proposed development will have no operational impact was reached and agreed.
- 5.99 As set out within, The Highland Council Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (November 2016) onshore wind energy schemes should be designed to avoid causing shadow flicker at regularly occupied buildings not associated with the development.
- 5.100 Whilst there is no standard guidance for assessing shadow flicker in Scotland, as per THC guidance, a shadow flicker assessment is required if any regularly occupied properties not associated with the development lie within 11x rotor diameter of the wind farm which would give an allowance of 1782m where effects may occur. Given the separation distances between occupied properties and the proposed development (exceeding 2km), it is unlikely that significant effects relating to shadow flicker would occur.
- 5.101 In terms of ice throw, modern wind turbines are designed and manufactured to withstand the most extreme weather conditions which arise in the UK in terms of wind speeds, turbulence, and temperature. Properly designed and maintained wind turbines are a safe technology and the likelihood of the occurrence of ice throw, given the history of the industry, is very low.
- 5.102 The results of the Carbon Calculator for the proposed development show that it is estimated to produce annual carbon savings in the region of 80,133 tonnes of CO₂e per year, and lifetime savings of 2,804,655 t of CO₂e. These savings come about through the displacement of grid electricity, based on the current average grid mix.
- 5.103 The assessment of the carbon losses and gains has estimated an overall loss of 257,168 tonnes of CO₂e, mainly due to embodied losses from the manufacture of the turbines and provision of backup power to the grid, which should be reduced through the provision of on-site energy storage. As such, the estimated payback time (against grid mix) of the proposed development, using the Scottish Government's Carbon Calculator, is estimated at 3.2 years, with a minimum/maximum range of 2.4 to 4 years.
- 5.104 This line of assessment links to NPF4 Policy 5 which states that the likely net effects of the development on climate emissions and loss of carbon should be included as part of a site-specific assessment.

THC Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance

- 5.105 Although it is not part of the Development Plan, assessment against the principles contained within the Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG) is important to determine the balance that should be afforded to the OWESG and to what extent the proposed development accords with its provisions.

Table 5.1: THC OWESG Landscape and Visual Criteria

Criteria	Measure	Comments / Outcome
(Quoted from THC's Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance, pages 18-20)		

Criteria	Measure		Comments / Outcome
Criterion 1: Relationship between Settlements / Key locations and wider landscape respected.			
<i>Relationship between Settlements / Key locations and wider landscape respected.</i>	<i>The extent to which the proposal contributes to perception of settlements or key locations being encircled by wind energy development.</i>	✓	The proposed development is located approximately 18.5km to the south-east. There is no predicted theoretical visibility of the proposed development within the main part of the village, including from along the A836, The Main Street, Manse Road, and Lochside. Some theoretical visibility occurs to the south of the settlement close to the junction of the A836 and A839 and Ord Place; however, most views towards the proposed development would be filtered by Ferry Wood and Lairg Power Station.
<i>Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</i>	<i>Turbines are not visually prominent in the majority of views within or from settlements/Key Locations or from the majority of its access routes.</i>	✓	As such, there would be no significant visual effects on any settlements within the Study Area.
Criterion 2: Key Gateway locations and routes are respected			
<i>Key Gateway locations and routes are respected.</i>	<i>The extent to which the proposal reduces or detracts from the transitional experience of key Gateway Locations and routes.</i>	✓	Viewpoints from the A838 have been a key consideration in the overall design strategy for the proposed development. Views of the proposed development along the A838 from the west and north-west up to 4km do not result in any significant effects.
<i>Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</i>	<i>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.</i>	✓	The assessment of roads found that receptors would experience significant effects during daylight hours from sections of the A838 up to approximately 8km to the south-east of the proposed development. The resulting significant effects are concentrated in one direction and are localised as a result. All other effects upon roads during daylight and hours of darkness are deemed to be not significant. The A836 and the Moray Firth Tourist Route have also been considered with no significant effects identified along these routes.
Criterion 3: Valued natural and cultural landmarks are respected			
<i>Valued natural and cultural landmarks are respected.</i>	<i>The extent to which the proposal affects the fabric and setting of valued natural and cultural landmarks.</i>	✓	There are no Gardens and Designed Landscapes, or Conservation Areas within the 10km of the proposed development, however, there is one Scheduled Monument within 10km and a further two

Criteria	Measure		Comments / Outcome
<i>Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</i>	<i>The development does not, by its presence, diminish the prominence of the landmark or disrupt its relationship to its setting.</i>	✓	outwith 10km that have also been assessed. The proposed development would not significantly impact the fabric and setting of valued natural and cultural landmarks. In particular, the fabric and setting of The Ord would not be compromised by the proposed development (see EIAR Volume 1, Chapter 7: Cultural Heritage). The Flow Country World Heritage Site lies within the site boundary. However, this WHS is designated, not for its landscape but for its ecological value. It is recognised that the more remote areas of this designation have valuable landscape qualities however, the proposed development lies on the modified outer fringes which already have established energy infrastructure. Regarding the ecological value, no infrastructure has been placed within the boundaries of the designation. All effects have been fully assessed within EIAR Volume Chapter 8: Ecology. The proposed development has also been designed to avoid known heritage assets and those identified by the baseline study.
Criterion 4: The amenity of key recreational routes and ways is respected			
<i>The amenity of key recreational routes and ways is respected.</i>	<i>The extent to which the proposal affects the amenity of key recreational routes and ways (e.g. Core Paths, Munros and Corbetts, Long Distance Routes etc).</i>	✓	When considering the Moray Firth Tourist Route, no visual effects have been identified. The Core Paths assessed within the LVIA lie to the north-east, south-east, south, west, and north-west of the Site, at varying distances exceeding 15km from the proposed development. Along various points of the Core Paths there are views of existing turbines however the main assessment of the Proposed Development identified no significant effects. The John O'Groats Cycle Route follows the A836 near to the Site, as well as passing through Lairg to the south-east. The cycle route passes approximately 6km east of the proposed development at its closest point.
<i>Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</i>	<i>Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of key routes and ways.</i>	✓	

Criteria	Measure		Comments / Outcome
			At this closest point, significant effects have been identified along a 5km stretch of the cycle route. Whilst some of the proposed turbines would likely be partly obscured by intervening landform, all turbines would be visible to some extent and visible on the skyline or distant hills. Given the proximity to the proposed development and the recognising that such impacts are to be expected for some forms of renewable energy it is not considered that this would overwhelm or significantly detract from the visual appeal of the cycle route. When considering views along the cycle route at greater distance, the proposed development would either be obscured by intervening vegetation or have limited or no theoretical visibility. In addition, there would be no theoretical visibility of the proposed development from the route to the south of Lairg.
Criterion 5: The amenity of transport routes is respected			
<i>The amenity of transport routes is respected.</i>	<i>The extent to which the proposal affects the amenity of transport routes (tourist routes as well as rail, ferry routes and local road access).</i>	✓	The closest transport receptor is the A838, which is located approximately 850m to the south at its closest point. Beyond that, the A836 is located approximately 6km to the east at its closest point with the A839 located approximately 19km to the south-east at its closest point.
<i>Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</i>	<i>Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of transport routes.</i>	✓	The assessment of roads found that receptors would experience significant effects during daylight hours from sections of the A838 up to approximately 8km to the south-east of the proposed development. The resulting significant effects are concentrated in one direction and are localised as a result. All other effects upon roads during daylight and hours of darkness are deemed to be not significant. The wind farm design has sought to limit the potential for adverse effects by introducing a medium magnitude of change to the landscape on the amenity and visual appeal of these routes, with the wind farm being capable of being appreciated as an object in the landscape in its own right.

Criteria	Measure		Comments / Outcome
Criterion 6: The existing pattern of Wind Energy Development is respected			
<i>The existing pattern of Wind Energy Development is respected.</i>	<i>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.</i>	✓	The proposed development would appear as a clearly recognisable scheme that sits with the simplicity of the local landscape character, such that the aesthetics and visual composition of the turbines (appearing as a simple and reasonably balanced composition) can be appreciated in their own right. The simple visual composition of the turbines reflects the character of the host LCT as well as the adjacent Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland LCT and the pattern of other existing and consented wind farm development nearby. As part of the strategy for the proposed development, design principles have been carried through the design evolution. This has ensured the turbine composition would appear as a simple, cohesive, and ordered layout, both in isolation and cumulatively.
<i>Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</i>	<i>The proposal contributes positively to existing pattern or objectives for development in the area.</i>	✓	Design consideration was also given to the cumulative design of the neighbouring wind farms including Sallach and Shinness. Both wind farms have a linear, row structure similar to that of the proposed development. The design of the proposed development is the result of a considered iterative process which has sought to minimise landscape and visual effects whilst achieving the technical and commercial requirements to ensure project viability without public subsidy. Considering the design of the proposed development and its relationship to the baseline cluster of wind farm development, it is considered that these criteria are generally respected
Criterion 7: The need for separation between developments and / or clusters is respected			
<i>The need for separation between developments and / or clusters is respected.</i>	<i>The extent to which the proposal maintains or affects the spaces between existing developments and / or clusters.</i>	✓	The proposed development is located approximately 7.6km from the operational Creag Riabhach Wind Farm, 8.3km from the consented Creag Riabhach Extension, 5km from the consented Sallachy Wind Farm and 7.7km from Shinness Wind Farm which is currently in planning.

Criteria	Measure		Comments / Outcome
Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	The proposal maintains appropriate and effective separation between developments and / or clusters.	✓	The distance between the proposed development and other wind farms in the vicinity is considered appropriate and will not give rise to unacceptable cumulative effects.
Criterion 8: The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected			
The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected.	The extent to which the proposal maintains or affects receptors' existing perception of landscape scale and distance.	✓	The proposed development would not adversely affect the receptors' existing perception of landscape scale and distance, being located within a suitably large scale landscape and designed to appear as a simple and balanced wind farm, the scale of which is distinctly separate from other existing wind farm developments in this area such that perceptions of intervening distance and scale are maintained.
Appearance Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	The proposal maintains the apparent landscape scale and / or distance in the receptors' perception.	✓	
Criterion 9: Landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is respected			
Landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is respected.	The extent to which the landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is affected by the proposal.	✓	In relation to cumulative effects, the assessment found that when the consented wind farms are considered to already form part of the baseline landscape there would be a reduction in the extent of significant landscape character and visual effects predicted when judging the proposed development against the current baseline conditions. In the first cumulative scenario considered (where other consented wind farms are also considered to be operational), there would be five additional developments: Creag Riabhach Extension, Chleansaid, Strath Tirry, Achany Extension, and Sallachy 2nd Submission. Each of the developments are located to the north-east, south-east, south, and south-west of the Site at varying distances between 3km and 14km. In the cumulative assessment, it was recognised that the introduction of the consented developments into the baseline landscape would extend the existing influence of wind farms present in views within 20km of the Site. Whilst the addition of the proposed development would extend the influence of wind turbines in views from certain locations, the presence of the consented
Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	Proposal relates well to the existing landscape setting and does not increase the perceived visual prominence of surrounding wind turbines.	✓	

Criteria	Measure		Comments / Outcome
			developments means the proposed development would not result in any change to the solus effects identified in the main assessment, nor would it introduce a cumulative significant effect. Overall, collectively the operational developments serve to result in wind energy being seen as a notable feature in many views in the landscape of the wider study area to the north-east, south-east, and south of the Site. The addition of the proposed development would serve to reinforce this pattern of wind energy. Considering the design of the proposed development and its relationship to the baseline cluster of wind farm development, it is considered that these criteria are generally respected. This conclusion takes account of various cumulative design scenarios.
Criterion 10: Distinctiveness of Landscape character is respected			
<i>Distinctiveness of Landscape character is respected.</i>	<i>The extent to which a proposal affects the distinction between neighbouring landscape character types, in areas where the variety of character is important to the appreciation of the landscape.</i>	✓	The proposed turbines and associated infrastructure are located within NatureScot Landscape Character Type (LCT) 134: Sweeping Moorland and Flows (Strath Fiag/ Tirry unit). The LCT features undulating areas of moorland predominately between Loch Shin/ A838 and the A836 as well as scattered properties, small settlements and energy infrastructure.
<i>Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</i>	<i>Integrity and variety of Landscape Character Areas are maintained.</i>	✓	The southern boundary of the Site located adjacent to NatureScot LCT 135: Rounded Hills – Caithness & Sutherland. The proposed development would result in direct and significant effects on the parts of the 'host' landscape character type however all effects are localised. Indirect and significant effects would occur to parts of the neighbouring LCT 135: Rounded Hills – Caithness & Sutherland. All other effects upon LCTs would be not significant. This is in common with other existing and consented wind farm development, it is located within the Rounded Hills - Caithness and Sutherland LCT.

Criteria	Measure		Comments / Outcome
			As such, none of the key characteristics of this LCT would be notably affected by the proposed development.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 This document provides a clear policy and legislative support for renewables and specifically onshore wind energy as a principle, in order to reach our Net Zero obligations by 2045 as set out in law.
- 6.2 The Scottish Government is clear and unequivocal about the requirement for new onshore wind generation through legislation and policy. Between 8 and 12 GW of new generation needs to be deployed before 2030. This is the equivalent to between 90 and 140 new wind farms the size of the proposed development, across Scotland which demonstrates the size and scale of the task at hand.
- 6.3 NPF4 also provides a clear policy direction towards addressing the climate emergency (Policy 1) and removing barriers to rapid deployment of onshore wind as well as focusing on development which can not only mitigate climate change but adapt to future challenges (Policy 2) through the reduction of emissions and the creation of a more sustainable energy mix in order to move away from the use of fossil fuels.
- 6.4 Both the Scottish Government and the Highland Council are supportive of the principle of onshore wind with each respectively declaring climate emergencies in 2019. The principle is not in doubt however the pace of change and deployment needs to be accelerated to meet the fast approaching and challenging 2030 interim targets.
- 6.5 Given the nature of the proposed development drawing immediate support from its designation as a national development, coupled with the significant increase of proposed onshore wind, national policy provides an overwhelmingly supportive background to decision making.
- 6.6 However, it is recognised that development cannot come at any cost and careful consideration has been given to all the topics set out within the EIAR. The merits of the proposed development have been assessed within this document and an analysis against the policies set out within the HwLDP as well as the OWESG and NPF4 as organised by the conclusions drawn within the EIAR has been carried out. It is important to note the NPF4 forms the newest part of the Development Plan and therefore is to be given primacy where any parts of the development plan are not in tandem.
- 6.7 It is therefore a question of siting and design, and associated policy, upon which the acceptability of this proposed development must be based.
- 6.8 Significant visual effects are likely to affect limited locations within approximately 9.5km distance from the proposed development (subject to a clear view of the proposed turbines, landform, and vegetation screening). This is in keeping with localised effects which are constrained to approximately 10km aligning with the conclusions of recent S36 Public Local Enquiries in which Reporters have deemed impacts within this distance to be 'localised', and generally acceptable in accordance with NPF4.

- 6.9 In addition to the design of the proposed development, the Applicant is committed to providing community benefit in line with the prevailing Scottish Government guidance with the proposed development also creating jobs and spending within the local economy. Although the community benefit package is not a material planning consideration per se, the resultant potential socio-economic benefit is significant, and ties in with the clear NPF4 policy wording around maximising net economic benefit.
- 6.10 In conclusion, the Scottish Government has made it clear that wind energy should be deployed in a timely manner to reach 2030 net Zero interim targets if we have any chance of becoming Net Zero by 2045 as is set out by law. The Development Plan is in situ and is what a decision should be based on, however material considerations play a strong role in reaching a conclusion of acceptability. If we require a further 8-12GW of new onshore deployment by 2030, the planning and consenting system must play its role in facilitating this in situations where the local or regional policy background has not yet caught up.
- 6.11 This is the case for the proposed development. Planning policy at the Highland Council has not yet caught up with the new reality. This is not the fault of the Council, but the reality remains that the policy upon which the assessment is being made is now over 10 years old in the case of the Local Development Plan and more than 5 years old for the OWESG.
- 6.12 In light of other material considerations including the need for Net Zero in law, it is the view of the Applicant that the case for the proposed development is therefore very strong in line with the tilted balance consideration above and the fact that the proposed development largely accords with the Development Plan as well as NPF4 policies. In respect of NPF4, recent decisions in 2023 since its adoption clearly and unequivocally change the goalposts for the consenting of wind farms, with an overwhelming policy position in favour of onshore wind.
- 6.13 At the time of writing, several S36 wind farms across Scotland have been approved since NPF4 was adopted, with Reporters noting that matters have shifted considerably in policy terms.
- 6.14 Fundamentally, the proposed development can draw support from NPF4, LDP and OWESG in terms of the siting and design of the wind farm. With the use of the mitigation measures which have been carefully inbuilt to the development and the additional mitigation measures that have been supplied within Chapter 16 of the EIA Report (and would be subject to planning condition).
- 6.15 Despite this it is concluded that the proposed development when considered within a planning balance is in general accordance with the Development Plan, is in accordance with national policy and is in strong accordance with other relevant material considerations.
- 6.16 It is respectfully requested that the Scottish Ministers, The Highland Council and other relevant consultees, stakeholders, and members of the public support this application for the reasons stated within this document and based on the evidence collected within the EIAR.