

CHAPTER 2: ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT PROCESS

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2. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT PROCESS

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a process that considers how a proposed development will change existing environmental conditions and what the consequences of such changes will be. It therefore informs both the project design and planning decision making processes.
- 2.1.2 This Chapter sets out the regulatory context for undertaking EIA and the assessment methodology applied in the evaluation of effects, approach to mitigation and assessment of significance. The Chapter also outlines the structure of the EIA Report.

2.2 Baseline

- 2.2.1 The EIA Report provides an assessment of the likely significant effects of the Proposed Varied Development against the baseline information collected and presented as part of the 2015 ES and 2016 FEI Report. In agreement with statutory consultees (see Appendix 6.1: Pre Application Advice Pack), previous survey data collected for the 2015 ES and 2016 FEI Report remains valid, subject to updates where this was specifically requested by statutory consultees (e.g. updated otter survey and review of private water supply data).
- 2.2.2 In accordance with Regulation 5(4) of the EIA Regulations, the EIA Report will aim to avoid duplication of assessment by taking into account the results identified in the 2015 ES and 2016 FEI Report. Electronic copies of both the 2015 ES and 2016 FEI Report are submitted with the s.36C application for completeness. Hard copies will be made available at deposit locations.
- 2.2.3 The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 require the EIA Report to include a description of ‘the main respects in which the developer considers that the likely significant effects on the environment of the proposed varied development would differ from those described in any EIA Report or environmental statement, as the case may be, that was prepared in connection with the relevant section 36 consent.’ As such, the EIA Report provides a comparative assessment of how the effects of the Proposed Varied Development would differ from those described for the Consented Development, as assessed within the 2015 ES and 2016 FEI Report. In doing so, the EIA Report provides an assessment of the Proposed Varied Development as a whole and highlights any different effects associated with the proposed variation in comparison with the Consented Development. A comparative assessment is included at the end of each technical chapter, and is collated within Chapter 15: Comparative Environmental Assessment.

2.3 EIA Regulations

- 2.3.1 The 2015 ES was prepared in accordance with the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2000 (as amended).
- 2.3.2 Following the decision to reduce the number of turbines by one in 2016, the 2016 FEI Report undertook a review of the 2015 ES to determine if the changes would result in a change to the predicted effects identified in the 2015 ES, or record where no change was predicted.
- 2.3.3 Since submission of the 2015 ES and subsequent 2016 FEI Report, the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 have come into force, resulting in minor amendments to the EIA process and the introduction of new topics to be considered, including climate change, biodiversity, population and human health, and the risk of major accidents and disasters. This EIA Report has therefore been prepared in accordance with the 2017 Regulations, referred to hereafter as the ‘EIA Regulations’.

2.3.4 This EIA Report contains the information specified in Schedule 4 of the EIA Regulations. The approach to the assessment has been informed by current best practice guidance, including the following:

- Scottish Government Good Practice Guidance¹;
- Scottish Government Planning Advice Note (PAN) 1/2013 (revision 1.0²); and
- Planning Circular 1/2017³.

2.3.5 An overview of the guidance and methodology adopted for each technical study is provided within the respective technical chapters of this EIA Report.

2.4 Assessment of Likely Significant Environmental Effects

2.4.1 The approach to the assessment of environmental effects is detailed below, and is consistent with the approach undertaken in the 2015 ES, taking into account updated legislation and/or policy.

Sensitivity/Importance of Receptors

2.4.2 The sensitivity of the baseline conditions was defined according to the relative importance of existing environmental features within or in the vicinity of the site, or by the sensitivity of receptors which would potentially be affected by the Proposed Varied Development.

2.4.3 Criteria for the determination of sensitivity (e.g. high, medium, or low) or of importance (e.g. international, national, regional or authority area) were established based on prescribed guidance, legislation, statutory designation and/or professional judgement. The criteria for each environmental parameter are provided in the relevant chapter of the EIA Report.

Magnitude of Change

2.4.4 The magnitude of change to environmental baseline conditions was identified through detailed consideration of the Proposed Varied Development, taking due cognisance of any legislative or policy standards or guidelines, and/or the following factors:

- the degree to which the environment is affected, e.g. whether the quality is enhanced or impaired;
- the scale or degree of change from the existing situation;
- whether the effect is temporary or permanent, indirect or direct, short term, medium term or long term;
- any in-combination effects; and
- potential cumulative effects.

2.4.5 In some cases the likelihood of effect occurrence may also be relevant, and where this is a determining feature of the assessment this is clearly stated.

Evaluation of Effects

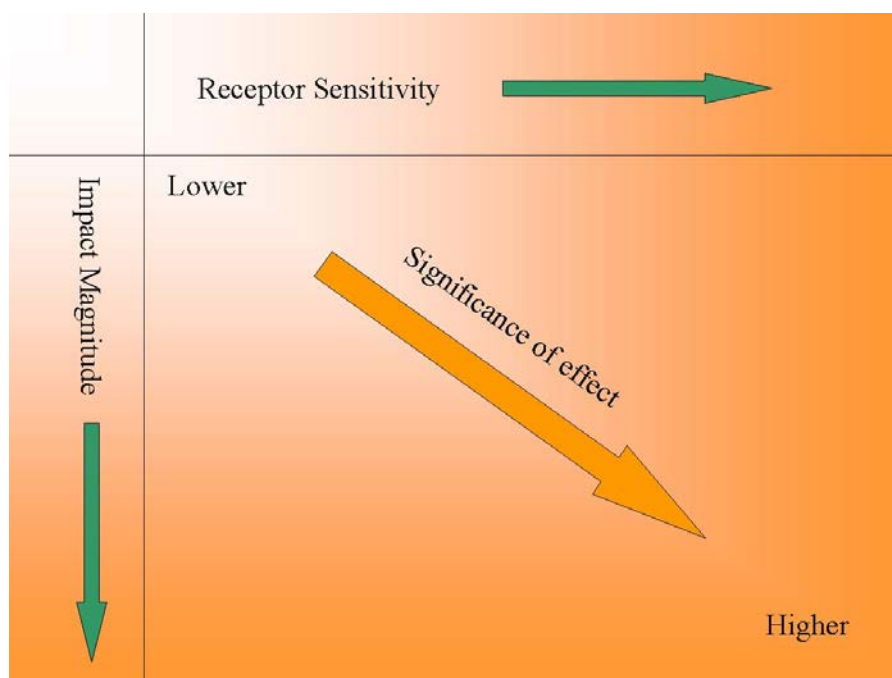
2.4.6 The potential effects have been evaluated taking into account the sensitivity of the affected receptor and the magnitude of the impact. The principle is illustrated in Plate 2.1 and where practical this approach has been adapted for application to all environmental effects to provide a consistent approach to evaluation.

¹ Scottish Government Energy Consents and Deployment Unit (2013) Good Practice Guidance.

² Scottish Government (2013, revised 2017) Planning Advice Note 1/2013 (revision 1.0): Environmental Impact Assessment.

³ Scottish Government (2017) Planning Circular 1/2017: Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations 2017.

Plate 2.1: Relationship between receptor sensitivity, impact magnitude, and effect significance



2.4.7 Thus, it does not follow that all high magnitude impacts will cause, or that high sensitivity receptors will always be subject to, significant effects. The converse is also true.

Significance of Effects

2.4.8 In identifying the likely significant effects, an attempt is made to reduce the scope of the assessment process to the most important potential effects. There is no general definition of what constitutes significance. Any consideration of the significance of environmental effects must recognise that environmental assessment is inherently a human concept which is centred on the effects of human activities and the importance that man places upon them. Accordingly, the assessment of significance or the importance of effects ultimately involves a judgement based on values which reflect environmental, social and economic criteria.

2.4.9 For obvious reasons, the question of significance of effect varies according to the environmental factor under consideration and the context in which the assessment is made. It depends on the availability of data relating to existing environmental conditions (which is unlikely ever to be complete) and the value placed on those conditions. Any limitations identified when compiling each technical discipline are identified in the appropriate chapter.

2.4.10 In the assessment of all environmental effects which are likely to be significant, the following factors require consideration:

- the relative importance of the environment i.e. whether of international, national, regional, county, district or local importance;
- the degree to which the environment is affected e.g. is its quality enhanced or impaired;
- the scale of the change e.g. the land area, number of people affected and degree of change from the existing situation;
- the scale of change resulting from cumulative effects;
- whether the effect is temporary or permanent and, if temporary, its duration; and
- The degree of mitigation that can be achieved.

- 2.4.11 Against this background, the environmental assessment for the Proposed Varied Development has been progressed through the identification of four levels of impact as appropriate:
- Major;
 - Moderate;
 - Minor; and
 - Negligible

2.4.12 Any impact or effect assessed as "Major" or "Moderate" is considered as "significant" within the terms of the EIA Regulations. Any impact described as "Minor" or "Negligible" is not considered as "significant" within the terms of the EIA Regulations. Occasionally, where it assists in describing the level of impact, a "Not Significant" category is also used. These terms are generally used to define the level of impact arising for the environmental factors. Where different terms to the above are used, they are defined within the methodology section for the topic area as appropriate.

2.4.13 For each environmental feature scoped into the EIA Report, a comparison of the predicted effects of the Consented Development with that assessed for the Proposed Varied Development is also provided. This is summarised in Chapter 15: Comparative Environmental Assessment.

Mitigation

2.4.14 Adverse effects which were identified as significant have been considered to determine whether they could be mitigated by measures to avoid, reduce or remedy the impact, beyond that already taken into account as normal good practice (e.g. the construction environment management plan (CEMP) included in Appendix 4.1 of this EIA Report). Where mitigation measures identified for the Consented Development are secured through Conditions of Consent, this is referred to in the EIA Report. In such cases, the EIA has considered site specific measures to mitigate the magnitude of the impact. The EIA has evaluated effects post-mitigation to determine the residual effects that are reported upon in the EIA Report. Mitigation measures are summarised in a Schedule of Mitigation (see Appendix 4.2), many of which are already secured through Conditions of Consent.

Assessment of Residual Effects

2.4.15 Any remaining effects following implementation of available mitigation measures are known as 'residual effects'. This assessment takes into account the mitigation as specified in the EIA Report to identify the remaining (residual) effects with this mitigation implemented. The residual effects are discussed for each potential effect and a significance level identified.

Cumulative Effects

2.4.16 In accordance with the EIA Regulations, the assessment has considered 'cumulative effects'. Cumulative impact assessment is a key part of the EIA process and is concerned with identifying situations where a number of potential effects from separate projects could combine to cause a significant impact on a particular resource. Cumulative effects have been assessed within each chapter, at a scale appropriate to that subject.

2.4.17 In the absence of any known change in the cumulative baseline scenario within close proximity to the site (as of a 'cut off' date of 30th September 2018, agreed with THC and SNH), the cumulative baseline scenario remains as reported within the 2015 ES and 2016 FEI Report.

2.5 EIA Quality

2.5.1 In accordance with Regulation 5(5) of 2017 EIA Regulations, by appointing ASH design+assessment Ltd. (ASH) to coordinate the EIA Report for the Proposed Varied Development the Applicant has ensured that the EIA Report has been prepared by 'competent

experts'. The EIA Report has been compiled and approved by professional EIA practitioners at ASH, holding relevant undergraduate and post-graduate degrees, and membership of IEMA. The EIA Report meets the requirements of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) EIA Quality Mark scheme. This is a voluntary scheme operated by IEMA that allows organisations to make a commitment to excellence in EIA and to have this commitment independently reviewed on an annual basis. In addition, the Applicant confirms that each of the impact assessment chapters has been prepared by a competent expert, with the chapter providing details of the relevant professional memberships of the authors and any applicable code of practice followed. The following provides a summary of specialist consultants appointed by the Applicant for this EIA Report:

- EIA Co-ordination – ASH;
- Landscape and Visual Amenity – Optimised Environments (OPEN);
- Ecology and Ornithology – RPS;
- Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology – ASH / SLR Consulting;
- Cultural Heritage – Catherine Dagg (Archaeologist);
- Traffic and Transport – White Young Green (WYG);
- Noise – Hoare Lea; and
- Other Issues – ASH / the Applicant.

2.6 Structure of the EIA Report

2.6.1 This EIA Report contains the environmental information required by the EIA Regulations and comprises a number of volumes as detailed below.

Volume 1: Non-Technical Summary

2.6.2 The Non-Technical Summary (NTS) summarises in non-technical language the findings of the EIA as reported in the EIA Report.

Volume 2: Written Statement

2.6.3 The Written Statement (this document) describes the project and the legal and policy framework within which the variation application will be determined. Details of alternatives considered are also included. The Written Statement includes the individual assessments undertaken under each of the specialist environmental topics identified, providing an assessment of the likely significant effects of the Proposed Varied Development.

2.6.4 Volume 2 of the EIA Report contains the following chapters:

- 1: Introduction
- 2: EIA Process
- 3: Consideration of Alternatives
- 4: Description of Development
- 5: Energy and Planning Policy
- 6: Scope and Consultation
- 7: Landscape and Visual Impact
- 8: Ecology and Nature Conservation
- 9: Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology
- 10: Ornithology
- 11: Cultural Heritage
- 12: Traffic and Transport

- 13: Noise
- 14: Other Issues
- 15: Comparative Environmental Assessment

2.6.5 The following chapter structure is generally followed for those topics covered in the EIA Report:

1. Introduction
2. Consented Development
3. Scope of Assessment
4. Methodology
5. Baseline
6. Potential Effects
7. Mitigation Measures
 - i. 2015 ES / 2016 FEI
 - ii. Relevant Conditions of Consent (2017)
 - iii. Additional Mitigation Measures Relevant to Proposed Varied Development
8. Residual Effects
9. Comparison of effects between Proposed Varied Development and Consented Development
10. Conclusion

Volume 3: Figures

2.6.6 This volume includes all accompanying figures referred to in the assessments in Volume 2, with figure numbering corresponding to the chapter numbers e.g. Figure 1.1, 2.1 etc.

Volume 3A: Landscape and Visual Wirelines and Photomontages (SNH Methodology)

2.6.7 Wirelines and photomontages produced from a series of viewpoints to accompany the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) (Chapter 7 of Volume 2). All wirelines and photomontages in this volume have been produced in accordance with SNH Methodology (Visual Representation of Wind Farms, Version 2.2, February 2017). All viewpoint locations have been agreed in consultation with THC and SNH, and are consistent with those presented and assessed in the 2015 ES and 2016 FEI Report.

Volume 3B: Landscape and Visual Wirelines and Photomontages (THC Methodology)

2.6.8 Wirelines and photomontages produced from a series of viewpoints to accompany the LVIA (Chapter 7 of Volume 2). All wirelines and photomontages in this volume have been produced in accordance with THC Methodology (The Highland Council's Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments, July 2016). All viewpoint locations have been agreed in consultation with THC and SNH.

Volume 4: Technical Appendices

2.6.9 This volume includes all accompanying technical appendices referred to in the assessments in Volume 2, with appendix numbering corresponding to the chapter numbers e.g. Appendix 1.1, 2.1 etc.

2.7 Supporting Documents

2.7.1 A Planning Statement is included with the application as supporting information. The Planning Statement considers the acceptability of the Proposed Varied Development in the context of existing and emerging planning policies.

2.7.2 Electronic copies of the 2015 ES and 2016 FEI Report are also submitted with the variation application for reference purposes. Hard copies will be made available at deposit locations.

2.8 References

- The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017
- The Highland Council (2016) Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments
- Scottish Government Energy Consents and Deployment Unit (2013) Good Practice Guidance
- Scottish Government (2013, revised 2017) Planning Advice Note 1/2013 (revision 1.0): Environmental Impact Assessment
- Scottish Government (2017) Planning Circular 1/2017: Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations 2017
- SNH (2017) Visual Representation of Wind Farms (Version 2.2)