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## **7. Landscape and Visual Amenity**

### **7.1 Executive Summary**

#### **Introduction**

- 7.1.1 A landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) has been undertaken for the proposed Achany Extension Wind Farm (the Proposed Development) by ASH design + assessment Ltd (ASH), Chartered Landscape Architects, in accordance with best practice guidance including the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (GLVIA3). This has considered the potential effects of the Proposed Development on landscape character, designated and protected landscapes, and also the potential effects of the Proposed Development on the visual amenity of those present within the landscape, including established views from residential areas, routes and recreational areas within a 40km study area. It also gives full consideration to the cumulative landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development when considered in addition to other existing and proposed wind farm developments.
- 7.1.2 The Proposed Development is located in close proximity to the operational Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms which already result in landscape and visual effects within the study area and thereby reduce the sensitivity of the landscape and visual resource to additional wind farm development.

#### **Landscape Effects**

- 7.1.3 The assessment of landscape effects has considered potential effects on Landscape Character Types (LCTs) identified by NatureScot, National Scenic Areas (NSAs), Wild Land Areas (WLAs), Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) and sites included on the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes.
- 7.1.4 The majority of effects on landscape character, landscape designations and other protected landscapes resulting from the Proposed Development would not be significant. Significant effects are anticipated to occur within a relatively localised area up to around 10km from the Proposed Development, largely confined to areas within Glen Cassley, and across the elevated plateau moorland to the east and west of Glen Cassley, affecting two LCTs: LCT 135: Rounded Hills, Caithness and Sutherland; and LCT 142: Strath – Caithness and Sutherland.
- 7.1.5 The Proposed Development would be located within the southern tip of WLA 34. Reay – Cassley, and significant landscape effects across the plateau areas to the east and west of Glen Cassley would also lead to some significant effects on a localised area within the southern part of the WLA, although the greater majority of the WLA would not be affected and the integrity of the WLA would be retained.
- 7.1.6 There would be no significant effects to any NSAs, SLAs or sites included on the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes.

#### **Visual Effects**

- 7.1.7 Twenty-one representative viewpoints (VPs) have formed the basis of the assessment of the effects on visual amenity. The assessment also considered potential visual effects on residential areas within 20km of the Proposed Development, and transport and recreational routes. The visual effect at the majority of visual receptor locations was identified as being not significant. Potential significant effects are anticipated within an

area largely contained within 10km of the Proposed Development, and not greater than 12.5km away. These would affect visual receptors located at six of the twenty-one VPs and nearby residential areas and routes focussed within three parts of the study area:

- Around Achnairn and Shinness on the north-east side of Loch Shin;
- Near the confluence of Glen Cassley with Strath Oykel and Kyle of Sutherland; and
- To the west and north-west of the Proposed Development, in and around Glen Cassley and in a localised area to the west of Glen Cassley around Meall an Aonaich.

7.1.8 Visual effects for receptors in all other locations within the study area would not be significant.

#### **Cumulative Landscape and Visual Effects**

7.1.9 The cumulative landscape and visual assessment (CLVIA) has considered the potential landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development when added to two baseline cumulative scenarios:

- With other operational and consented sites within 40km of the Proposed Development; and
- With the addition of application, appeal and selected scoping sites within 40km of the Proposed Development in agreement with of The Highland Council (THC).

7.1.10 The cumulative baseline of application and scoping sites reflects the situation as of 5<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

7.1.11 The CLVIA identified that both cumulative baseline scenarios were found to result in few additional significant effects in relation to the Proposed Development compared to the assessment on the basis of the current baseline, and in some areas effects would be slightly reduced. The cumulative effect could be slightly greater in extent across a small part of WLA 34 to the east of Glen Cassley, under a baselines scenario including application and scoping sites because the Sallachy Wind Farm would also be located in this WLA. However, the integrity of the WLA would be retained. Overall, cumulative landscape and visual effects 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 from the Proposed Development.

7.1.12 There would be no significant cumulative effects to any NSAs, SLAs or sites included on the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes.

#### **Summary**

7.1.13 Overall, the LVIA has concluded that the Proposed Development would result in a limited number of localised significant effects on landscape character and visual amenity, affecting relatively localised parts of the landscape and visual resource up to 10km, and locally to 12.5km from the Proposed Development. This would affect a range of residential, recreational and route-based visual receptors in areas to the north-east of Loch Shin, around Rosehall and Glen Cassley and recreational users within a localised part of the upland area to the west of Glen Cassley, and would result in some increased influence of wind turbines on the landscape character within parts of Glen Cassley, the upland plateau areas to either side of it, and a localised part of WLA 34, Reay – Cassley. Outwith these areas, landscape and visual effects would not be significant.

## 7.2 Introduction

7.2.1 This Chapter presents the findings of the LVIA for the Proposed Development. The purpose of the LVIA is to identify and describe potential significant effects which may occur as a result of the Proposed Development to views obtained by those living, working and visiting in the area, and the wider landscape resource. The LVIA has been undertaken by ASH, Chartered Landscape Architects, in accordance with best practice guidance, set out within GLVIA3 (Landscape Institute (LI) / Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA), 2013). ASH is a registered practice with the Landscape Institute, the Chartered body for professional landscape architects.

7.2.2 The assessment is supported by Volume 4, Technical Appendices 7.1 – 7.11 and Figures / Photomontages included in Volume 3, 7.1.1 – 7.8.18, Volume 3A, 7.9.1 – 7.29.4 and Volume 3B, 7.30.1 – 7.50.6 of the EIA Report.

### Landscape and Visual Effects

7.2.3 Although closely related, landscape and visual effects differ, and are considered separately in this LVIA for clarity and robustness.

#### Landscape Effects

7.2.4 The character of the landscape relates to the natural processes and human activities that have been at work over time to shape the land to its present form. Factors contributing to landscape character include topography, vegetation cover, sense of space or enclosure and past and present land use. Landscape character and resources are considered to have an importance in their own right and are valued for their intrinsic qualities.

7.2.5 Landscape effects may occur when elements of the landscape which contribute to its key characteristics are changed.

#### Visual Effects

7.2.6 Visual amenity relates to the way in which people visually experience the surrounding landscape.

7.2.7 Visual effects may occur through the introduction into established views of new features which modify the existing structure, scale and composition of the view. Visual effects may also occur where existing features in the view are removed or altered.

#### Cumulative Effects

7.2.8 Cumulative effects may occur where other infrastructure of a similar type would combine with the Proposed Development to form an increased perception of landscape or visual effect. In the context of the Proposed Development, cumulative landscape or visual effects may result where the Proposed Development would lead to an increase in perception or prominence of wind turbines within particular landscapes or views.

### Approach to the Identification of Significant Effects

7.2.9 The judgement of effects significance has been established within this LVIA through professional judgement, complemented by structured methods and criteria to evaluate landscape value and landscape, visual and cumulative sensitivity, magnitude and significance of effect. The assessment has been undertaken and verified by two experienced Landscape Professionals (Chartered Landscape Architects) at ASH, to

provide a robust and consistent approach. This approach is consistent with best practice guidance (LI / IEMA, 2013, paragraph 2.23 – 2.26).

- 7.2.10 Landscape and visual effects have been expressed through a four point scale of Negligible, Minor, Moderate and Major as detailed in Table 7.5.4, Table 7.8.3, Table 7.9.3 and Table 7.12.2. However, it should be noted that these criteria and levels of significance represent points on a continuum. Where required, interim ratings, such as Minor-Moderate, have been used to indicate the anticipated significance of effect.
- 7.2.11 For the purposes of the LVIA and CLVIA, effects with a rating of Moderate or greater are considered to be significant in terms of the EIA Regulations.
- 7.2.12 Landscape and visual effects may be both adverse or beneficial and this may depend on an individual's subjective opinion. Wind farms inevitably attract a spectrum of opinion from members of the public, ranging from adverse to beneficial reactions. However, using the precautionary principle, the LVIA has been carried out based on the assumption that all landscape and visual effects reported as a result of the Proposed Development are adverse.

### 7.3 Scope of Assessment

- 7.3.1 The LVIA considers all aspects of the Proposed Development during the construction phase and during operation, as described in Chapter 3: Description of Development. It gives consideration to potential effects on the character of the landscape and also the visual amenity of those present within the landscape. It also gives full consideration to the potential effects of the Proposed Development on designated and protected landscapes, and to the cumulative landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development when considered in addition to other existing and proposed wind farm developments.

#### Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV)

- 7.3.2 As an aid to establishing the scope for the LVIA, a ZTV has been produced for the Proposed Development and is presented in Figure 7.1.1 (a larger version is provided as Figure 7.1.2). The ZTV is a computer generated diagram which uses a terrain model to indicate areas from which the Proposed Development would be theoretically visible. The ZTV for the Proposed Development has been generated using ESRI ArcGIS software based on a terrain modelled using Ordnance Survey (OS) T5 DTM data. Detailed technical information on the methods for production of ZTVs is included in Technical Appendix 7.1: Technical Methodologies for Visual Representation.

#### Study Area

- 7.3.3 In line with current guidance (Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)<sup>1</sup> Visual Representation of Wind Farms (Version 2.2), February 2017 page 12, paragraph 48 (SNH, 2017g)), the Study Area for the LVIA has been set at 40km radius from the Proposed Development site boundary (the wider study area). This is considered to be the maximum distance within which any significant landscape or visual effects may be experienced. However, following initial review and in discussion with NatureScot and The Highland Council (THC) a detailed

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<sup>1</sup> In 2020, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) rebranded as NatureScot. However when referencing guidance published by the organisation before this date, SNH has continued to be referred to as this was the name under which the guidance was published at that time.

study area of 20km has been adopted for a more targeted and detailed assessment of effects on residential areas and landscape character (the detailed study area).

7.3.4 The study areas have been applied as follows:

#### Landscape Assessment

- All designated and protected landscapes within the wider study area have been given consideration within the assessment. However, following an initial appraisal, where effects are identified as unlikely, these areas have been scoped out of more detailed assessment (see Table 7.6.1).
- Following an initial appraisal of the Proposed Development, it was considered that any potentially significant effects on landscape character would be likely to be limited to the detailed study area of 20km. For this reason, the detailed assessment of effects on landscape character has been concentrated within this area.

#### Visual Assessment

- Within the wider study area, a series of 20 viewpoints (VPs) have been selected in consultation with NatureScot and The Highland Council (THC). These VPs form the basis of the visual assessment.
- In addition to the VP based assessment, a more targeted assessment of potential visual receptors within the detailed study area of 20km, has taken place. This has considered views from routes, including public roads, Core Paths and other established recreational routes, and views from settlements and residential areas.

#### Cumulative Landscape and Visual Assessment (CLVIA)

- 7.3.5 Following best practice (Assessing the Cumulative Impact of Onshore Wind Energy Developments, page 13 (SNH, 2012)), all operational and consented wind farm sites, and those which are currently in process through the planning system have been identified within a search area of 60km radius from the Proposed Development. These developments are shown on Figure 7.7.1. Within this search area, a total of thirty wind farm sites wholly or partly within 40km have been identified as most likely to combine with the Proposed Development to result in potential cumulative landscape and visual effects, as presented in Table 7.8.4 and on Figure 7.7.2: Cumulative Sites included within the Assessment. The rationale for the selection of these sites is detailed in paragraph 7.8.13. The CLVIA has considered the potential for effects to all landscape designations, and viewpoints within the wider study area and landscape character types and routes within the detailed study area, as described under paragraph 7.3.4.
- 7.3.6 All wind energy schemes with a tip height in excess of 50m have been considered in the assessment. Smaller wind turbines have not been included in the search as it is considered that turbines of this scale are usually of a domestic nature and are unlikely to be considered by the viewer in parallel to commercial scale structures. Single turbines have also been scoped out of the detailed assessment as these are considered unlikely to combine with the Proposed Development in a manner likely to produce significant cumulative effects.
- 7.3.7 The number of wind farm applications made or withdrawn changes frequently. Therefore, in order to inform the cumulative baseline scenario a cut-off date of the 5<sup>th</sup> March 2021 has been used. All new applications, applications withdrawn or refused and addendums to current projects taken place since the cut-off date have therefore not been considered in this assessment.

- 7.3.8 Because the focus of the CLVIA is on potential significant effects, areas or viewpoints which were identified as experiencing a Negligible landscape or visual effect were scoped out of the CLVIA as it is considered that a Negligible individual effect could not contribute to a significant cumulative effect.

### Consultation Responses

- 7.3.9 As described in Chapter 5: Scoping and Consultation, a request for a Scoping Opinion for the Proposed Development was submitted to the Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit (ECU) in August 2019. The Scoping Opinion was issued in October 2019. Issues raised within the Scoping Opinion of relevance to the subjects of landscape and visual amenity are addressed in Table 7.3.1.

**Table 7.3.1: Scoping Responses of Relevance to Landscape and Visual Amenity**

Consultee	Issue Raised	Action
Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit (ECU)	Scope and methodology of wild land assessments should be decided in discussion with SNH (now NatureScot).	In agreement with NatureScot, WLA Assessments were undertaken for WLA 34 (Reay – Cassley) and WLA 37 (Fionaven – Ben Hee in accordance with NatureScot's Wild Land Assessment Guidance: 'Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Areas – Technical Guidance' (NatureScot, 2020). This scope and method is as confirmed by NatureScot in their response to the Scoping Refresh dated 8th December 2020.
	Viewpoints (VPs) should be agreed with THC, SNH (now NatureScot), HES and MS and presented in the EIA Report.	VP locations have been determined following review of advice provided through the Scoping process, and through further consultation with THC and NatureScot. A final viewpoint list (see Table 7.10.1) was agreed by letter with THC and NatureScot in March 2021 and no requests for additional viewpoints were made.
The Highland Council (THC)	The landscape and visual impact of the Proposed Development should be assessed separately.	Landscape and visual effects are assessed separately in sections 7.7 and 7.11 of this Chapter.
	Visualisation should be prepared to the THC 'Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Development' (2016). And presented in a separate volume to SNH (now NatureScot) visualisations. THC encourages use of their "single frame panoramic viewer" and animation.	Visualisations produced to the THC 'Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Development' (2016) are included as Volume 3B of this EIA Report and images for the panoramic viewer have been supplied. Technical details of visualisation are included in Technical Appendix 7.1: Technical Methodologies for Visual Representations.

Consultee	Issue Raised	Action
	All existing turbines in visualisation should be re-rendered even if they appear to be facing the viewer in the photograph.	This has been undertaken as detailed in Technical Appendix 7.1: Technical Methodologies for Visual Representations.
	The assessment should include the expected impact of on-site borrow pits and access roads.	These elements have been included in the assessment.
	It is recommended to undertake the cumulative assessment over a study area the same as the visual assessment. However if the turbines to be brought forward greater than 150m an increase to the study area to a minimum 45km study area is recommended.	A study area of 40km was agreed with THC for the landscape, visual and cumulative assessments in accordance with best practice guidance (SNH 2017g).
	VPs should be agreed with THC and as far as possible should correspond with VPs used for existing wind energy schemes within the area and the purpose of VPs should be make clear. Additional VPs requested by local communities should be taken into account.	The final list of VPs was agreed with THC and NatureScot. The purpose of VPs is detailed in Table 7.10.1 and Technical Appendix 7.2: Landscape and Visual Scoping Appraisal.
	When assessing the impact on recreational routes all core paths, the national cycle network, long distance trails, and the North Coast 500 should be assessed.	The assessment has included all the mentioned routes with the exception of the North Coast 500 which was scoped out due to lack of visibility.
	The SNH (NatureScot) 2019 landscape character assessment should be used.	This has been used.
	An assessment on WLAs should be included.	This is included as Technical Appendix 7.5: Wild Land Area Assessment – Wild Land Area 34: Reay – Cassley and Technical Appendix 7.6: Wild Land Area Assessment – Wild Land Area 34: Foinaven – Ben Hee.
	An assessment of the proposal against the criterion set out in the Council’s Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG) should be included.	An appraisal of the 10 criteria is presented in Technical Appendix 7.11.

Consultee	Issue Raised	Action
	An assessment of the impacts of the proposal on landscape should assess the impacts on any landscapes designated at a national and local scale. As part of this the impact on the Special Landscape Areas (SLA) must be undertaken using the SLA citations.	The LVIA considers the effects on all nationally and locally designated landscapes as detailed in section 7.6 and Technical Appendix 7.4: Assessment of Designated and Protected Landscapes including review of citations
	The effect of the aviation lighting should be in a Lighting Impact Assessment.	As the turbines proposed are below 150m in height, visible aviation lighting for the Proposed Development is not required under Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) regulations.
NatureScot	An assessment of the effects on wild land should be undertaken using the 2017 consultative draft guidance as a starting point and the scope of the wild land assessment should be discussed with SNH (NatureScot) an early stage.	In agreement with NatureScot, WLA Assessments were undertaken for WLA 34 (Reay – Cassley) and WLA 37 (Fionaven – Ben Hee in accordance with NatureScot’s Wild Land Assessment Guidance: ‘Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Areas – Technical Guidance’ (NatureScot, 2020). Confirmation of the approach was confirmed through the Scoping Refresh and subsequent letter of 2nd March 2021 and email of 7th June 2021.
	Hard copies of any visuals that may be contained within the wild land assessments as part of the EIA submission were requested.	Visualisation produced to support the LVIA and WLA Assessment are included in Volume 3A of this EIA Report.
	A lighting assessment including the effects of lighting on WLAs should be included in the EIA Report.	As the turbines proposed are below 150m in height, visible aviation lighting is not required for the Proposed Development.
Mountaineering Scotland (MouS)	The impact on the experience of Ben More Assynt will be primary but there are many other hills that could be impacted, especially given the intrusion of Creag Riabhach into many angles of view previously without turbines in near proximity.	An assessment of Ben More Assynt is included as VP10 in Technical Appendix 7.9: Visual Assessment Tables and cumulative assessment with Creag Riabhach and other wind farms is included in Technical Appendices 7.8: Cumulative Landscape Assessment Tables and 7.10: Cumulative Visual Assessment Tables.
	An explicit comparison with the previous application is required to demonstrate to what extent previous concerns (and reasons for refusal) remain applicable and to what extent they have been overcome.	The LVIA comprises a stand alone assessment of the Proposed Development. Information on layout development and iterations is provided in Chapter 2: Scheme Alternatives and Technical Appendix 2.1: Design Statement.

Consultee	Issue Raised	Action
	The proposed 'detailed study area' of 15-20km is too small. It could exclude Creag Riabhach, Ben Hee and Seana Bhràigh, all of which are likely to have clear views of the Proposed Development at distances of <25km. A detailed study area radius of not less than 25km is requested.	A detailed study area of 20km was agreed with NatureScot and THC. Both Ben Hee (VP5) and Seana Bhràigh (VP19) are included specifically as VPs in the visual assessment and are representative of other nearby summits.
	The assessment should demonstrate that effects on WLAs other than WLA 34 (Reay – Cassley) would be not significant.	In agreement with NatureScot, a WLA assessment has been undertaken but limited to WLA34 and WLA37 as significant effects are considered unlikely for other WLAs.
	Requested that VP18 be reinstated into the LVIA.	VP18 (Carn Chuinneag) has been included in the visual assessment.
	A photomontage should be included for VP5 (Ben Hee)	Photomontages to NatureScot and THC Guidance have been included for all VPs.

7.3.10 A further Scoping Refresh was undertaken for the Proposed Development in October 2020. Further issues were raised by consultees as part of the Scoping Refresh are summarised in Table 7.3.2. Issues repeated from the previous Scoping Response are not reiterated.

**Table 7.3.2: Responses to the Scoping Refresh of Relevance to Landscape and Visual Amenity**

Consultee	Issue Raised	Action
THC	Requested the reinstatement of VP2 (A836 bridge by Dalnessie entrance) and addition of a further VP at Struie Viewpoint on the B9176.	VP2 has been included in the assessment and the VP at Struie Viewpoint is included as VP15 (see Table 7.10.1)
	A full visualisation pack should be provided for Seana Bhràigh (VP19) and Cul Mòr (VP20)	Visualisations to NatureScot and THC Guidance have been included for all VPs.
	Requested further consultation on VP locations prior to work commencing in detail on the LVIA.	The final viewpoint list (see Table 7.10.1) was agreed with THC and NatureScot.
	Requested that a viewpoint at Leathad Dail nan Claibh be included in the WLA Assessment.	Following further consultation, it was agreed that an existing location included in the WLA assessment at Càrn na Ceàrdaich was adequate to represent this part of the WLA.
	Requested an increase in the study area to 45km.	A study area of 40km was subsequently agreed with THC in accordance with best practice guidance (SNH 2017g).

Consultee	Issue Raised	Action
	Confirmed that it was acceptable to include a VP at Creich Broch in the Cultural Heritage rather than the LVIA.	This is included as Figures 12.3.1 – 12.3.4: Cultural Heritage Viewpoint 1: Dail Langwell, in Chapter 12: Cultural Heritage.
NatureScot	The assessment of effects on wild land should use the new Wild Land Technical Guidance (Sept 2020)	The assessment has been undertaken in accordance with the latest September 2020 guidance.
	The Wild Land Assessment should include both Wild Land Areas: Reay – Cassley WLA and Foinaven – Ben Hee WLA	WLA Assessments are included as Technical Appendix 7.5: Wild Land Area Assessment – Wild Land Area 34: Reay – Cassley and Technical Appendix 7.6: Wild Land Area Assessment – Wild Land Area 34: Foinaven – Ben Hee.
	Additional assessment locations from lower areas should be identified for the WLA Assessments in addition to the VPs included in these areas to reflect areas where the influence of other development, such as wind farms, in the baseline is not so apparent.	The WLA Assessment has been undertaken from a range of locations at higher and lower elevation. This approach was confirmed via letter to NatureScot on 2nd March 2021 and email from NatureScot on 7th June 2021.
	Not all the wild land qualities for the Reay-Cassley WLA may be required for detailed assessment due to their individual susceptibility to the proposal. NatureScot are happy to comment on a draft list of qualities that will require a detailed assessment.	As only four WLA Key Qualities existing for WLA 34, all of these were included in the assessment for robustness.
	We are particularly keen to see how the LVIA will inform modifications and refinements to the detailed design and identify any further appropriate mitigation measures to reduce potential effects.	Mitigation is discussed in section 7.13. Detail on the evolution of the layout for the Proposed Development is included in Chapter 2: Scheme Alternatives and Technical Appendix 2.1: Design Statement.

7.3.11 Following the Scoping Refresh, further consultation regarding viewpoint selection, study areas and site for the inclusion in the cumulative assessment (CLVIA) was undertaken with THC and NatureScot by email and letter in March to June 2021. Additional issues raised at this stage are summarised below:

- Further consultation was undertaken with THC and NatureScot to confirm the locations of VPs. The final list of VPs is included in Table 7.10.1.
- Further consultation was undertaken with THC and NatureScot to confirm the baseline sites for inclusion in the CLVIA. THC requested the inclusion of all sites within 40km with the inclusion of a cluster of sites at Lochluichart: Lochluichart, Lochluichart Extension, Corriemollie, Kirkan and Lochluichart Extension 2, including a current Scoping proposal for increased turbine heights at Lochluichart Extension 2. In addition, four Scoping sites within 20km were requested for inclusion by THC: Garvary, Sallachy, Chleansaid and Braelangwell. Of these, Braelangwell was scoped

out, as no formal layout was available. Naturescot confirmed that they were content with the approach agreed with THC.

- Further consultation was undertaken with THC to confirm the size of the study areas for the LVIA due to confusion between the Scoping and Scoping Refresh responses. A study area of 40km, in line with best practice (SNH 2017g) was agreed as appropriate. A 20km detailed study area was also confirmed, although THC suggested that significant effects may not always be confined to 20km as this depends on a range of factors (note: no significant effects beyond 20km have been identified in the LVIA).
- Further consultation was undertaken with NatureScot on the scope and assessment locations for the WLA Assessment for WLA 34. Reay – Cassley.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

7.3.12 The LVIA and CLVIA has been subject to the following assumptions and limitations:

- The prominence of the Proposed Development in the landscape and views will vary according to the prevailing weather conditions. The LVIA has been carried out, as is best practice, by assuming the 'worst case' scenario i.e. on a clear, bright day in winter, when neither foreground deciduous foliage nor haze can interfere with the clarity of the view obtained.
- The assessment of operational effects assumes that all disturbed areas not required for the operation of the Proposed Development (laydown areas, temporary construction compounds, excavations for wind turbine foundations and borrow pits) would be successfully reinstated to reflect pre-construction vegetation types and appearance.
- ZTVs are used to inform the landscape, visual and cumulative assessments. The limitations and technical specifications for production of ZTVs are included in Technical Appendix 7.1: Technical Methodology for Visual Representation.
- The field assessment of visual effects has been undertaken from public roads, footpaths or open spaces. For residential receptors, assumptions have been made, about the types of rooms and about the types and importance of views from these rooms. For there to be a visual effect, there is the need for a viewer and therefore only buildings that are in use have been considered in the visual assessment.
- The assessment of effects on visual receptors occupying buildings such as residences and public buildings includes consideration of potential for views from exterior areas associated with the building including gardens where appropriate. These effects are referenced where relevant.
- A number of existing wind farms are operational within the wider study area. It should be noted that the baseline for the LVIA considers all existing operational wind farms, as identified on Figure 7.7.2: Cumulative Sites included within the Assessment. However, the baseline for the LVIA does not include consented or application sites which are considered within the baseline for the CLVIA.
- In line with best practice, the CLVIA considers wind energy sites which are operational and consented and the subject of a current valid planning application or appeal. Some sites at Scoping stage have been included at the request of THC as it is understood that layouts are fixed and applications are due to be submitted prior to the application for the Proposed Development. Other Scoping sites have

not been considered (in agreement with THC) due to the uncertainty as to whether these sites would progress and their likely nature and scale.

- Due to the uncertainty of construction activity timing for the Proposed Development and other such activity, temporary structures, tracks and activity relating to construction have not been considered within the cumulative assessment. The cumulative assessment therefore focuses on the potential effects during operation relating to the main permanent structures (wind turbines).
- Since the number of wind energy development applications made or withdrawn changes frequently, a cumulative cut-off date of 5<sup>th</sup> March 2021 has been applied to the collection of data. All new applications, applications withdrawn and addendums to current projects taken place since this period have therefore not been considered in this assessment.
- The cumulative search has considered only those wind turbine developments of 50m tip height or greater comprising groups of two or more turbines, as it is considered that smaller turbines and single turbine developments would be unlikely to result in significant cumulative effects in association with the Proposed Development.
- Two cumulative sites (Lairg 2 and Lochluichart Extension 2) were noted to be consented, but with applications to vary the consent with taller turbines (application for Lairg 2, Scoping for Lochluichart Extension 2). For these sites, both the consented and application/scoping layouts have been considered in the cumulative assessment but only the taller turbine options have been included on cumulative wirelines, as this represents the worst case scenario.

#### **Issues Scoped out of the Assessment**

- 7.3.13 Effects arising from the process of decommissioning the Proposed Development have been scoped out since they are of a similar nature to construction issues, but of a smaller scale and shorter duration. Where the assessment refers to potential construction effects these are also considered representative of predicted decommissioning effects.
- 7.3.14 Where individual landscape and visual receptors have been scoped out of detailed assessment, these are referenced in sections 7.6 and 7.10 as relevant with further detail provided in Technical Appendix 7.2: Landscape and Visual Scoping Appraisal.

## **7.4 Policy and Guidance**

- 7.4.1 The assessment has taken account of national, regional and local policy and guidance relating to landscape character and visual amenity relevant to the Proposed Development. Detailed information on planning policy is contained within the Planning Statement accompanying the application for the Proposed Development and Chapter 6: Planning Policy. The following provides a summary with respect to Landscape Character and Visual Amenity.
- 7.4.2 The following policy documents and statements have been referred to in carrying out this assessment:

### **National**

- 7.4.3 National planning policy and guidance relevant to landscape and renewable energy includes:
- National Planning Framework for Scotland 3 (NPF3);

- Scottish Planning Policy (SPP);
- Scottish Government Online Planning Guidance for Onshore Wind Turbines (last updated May 2014);
- Planning Advice Note 60 – Planning for Natural Heritage (PAN 60), 2000;
- Scottish Energy Strategy: The future of energy in Scotland (2017);
- Renewable Energy and the Natural Heritage, SNH (NatureScot) Policy Document, 2010; and
- Wildness in Scotland’s Countryside, SNH (NatureScot) Policy Statement 02/03.

### Regional

- The Highland-wide Local Development Plan, 2012 (HwLDP);
- The Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan, 2018 (CaSPlan); and
- The Highland Council Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance, November 2016 (with addendum, December 2017) (OWESG).

### Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP)

- 7.4.4 As the Proposed Development site falls within the THC Planning Authority area, the HwLDP forms the key element of spatial planning policy for The Proposed Development. Policy 61: Landscape concerns the protection of landscape qualities. This states that:

*“New developments should be designed to reflect the landscape characteristics and special qualities identified in the Landscape Character Assessment of the area in which they are proposed. This will include consideration of the appropriate scale, form, pattern and construction materials, as well as the potential cumulative effect of developments where this may be an issue. The Council would wish to encourage those undertaking development to include measures to enhance the landscape characteristics of the area. This will apply particularly where the condition of the landscape characteristics has deteriorated to such an extent that there has been a loss of landscape quality or distinctive sense of place. In the assessment of new developments, the Council will take account of Landscape Character Assessments, Landscape Capacity Studies and its supplementary guidance on Siting and Design and Sustainable Design, together with any other relevant design guidance.”*

- 7.4.5 Policy 57: Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage is also of relevance in relation to the protection of designated areas. With respect to areas of national importance (such as NSA’s and WLA’s), Part 2 of the policy states:

*“...we will allow developments that can be shown not to compromise the natural environment, amenity and heritage resource. Where there may be any significant adverse effects, these must be clearly outweighed by social or economic benefits of national importance. It must also be shown that the development will support communities in fragile areas who are having difficulties in keeping their population and services”.*

- 7.4.6 With respect to areas of local/regional importance (e.g. SLA) Part 1 of this policy states:

*“...we will allow developments if it can be satisfactorily demonstrated that they will not have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment, amenity and heritage resource.”*

The Highland Council Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance

- 7.4.7 The OWESG provides further guidance on measures to be considered for the design and assessment of onshore wind farms. In relation to landscape and visual amenity it identifies ten criteria to be used by the Council as a framework and focus for assessing proposals as outlined in Table 7.4.1.

**Table 7.4.1: OWESG Criteria for the Consideration of Onshore Wind Farm Proposals**

Criterion	Threshold
<p><b>Criterion 1.</b> <b>Relationship between Settlements / Key locations and wider landscape are respected.</b> (the extent to which the proposal contributes to perception of settlements or key locations being encircled by wind energy development)</p>	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where turbines are not visually prominent in the majority of views within or from settlements / key locations or from the majority of its access routes.
<p><b>Criterion 2.</b> <b>Key Gateway locations and routes are respected.</b> (the extent to which the proposal reduces or detracts from the transitional experience of key Gateway Locations and routes)</p>	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.
<p><b>Criterion 3.</b> <b>Valued natural and cultural landmarks are respected</b> (the extent to which the proposal affects the fabric and setting of valued natural and cultural landmarks)</p>	The development does not, by its presence, diminish the prominence of the landmark or disrupt its relationship to its setting.
<p><b>Criterion 4.</b> <b>The amenity of key recreational routes and ways is respected.</b> (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.))</p>	Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of key routes and ways.
<p><b>Criterion 5.</b> <b>The amenity of transport routes is respected.</b> (the extent to which the proposal affects the amenity of transport routes (tourist routes as well as rail, ferry routes and local road access))</p>	Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of transport routes.

Criterion	Threshold
<p><b>Criterion 6.</b> <b>The existing pattern of Wind Energy Development is respected.</b> (the degree to which the proposal fits with the existing pattern of nearby wind energy development. Considerations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turbine height and proportions,</li> <li>• density and spacing of turbines within developments;</li> <li>• density and spacing of developments;</li> <li>• typical relationship of development to the landscape;</li> <li>• previously instituted mitigation measures;</li> <li>• Planning Authority stated aims for development of area)</li> </ul>	<p>The proposal contributes positively to existing pattern or objectives for development in the area.</p>
<p><b>Criterion 7.</b> <b>The need for separation between developments and / or clusters is respected.</b> (the extent to which the proposal maintains or affects the spaces between existing developments and/ or clusters).</p>	<p>The proposal maintains appropriate and effective separation between developments and/ or clusters</p>
<p><b>Criterion 8.</b> <b>The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected.</b> (the extent to which the proposal maintains or affects receptors' existing perception of landscape scale and distance).</p>	<p>The proposal maintains the apparent landscape scale and/or distance in the receptors' perception</p>
<p><b>Criterion 9.</b> <b>Landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is respected.</b> (the extent to which the landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is affected by the proposal).</p>	<p>Proposal relates well to the existing landscape setting and does not increase the perceived visual prominence of surrounding wind turbines.</p>
<p><b>Criterion 10.</b> <b>Distinctiveness of Landscape character is respected.</b> (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).</p>	<p>Integrity and variety of Landscape Character Areas are maintained.</p>

7.4.8 An analysis of the Proposed Development in relation to these criteria is presented in Technical Appendix 7.11: Appraisal of The Highland Council's Criteria for the Consideration of Onshore Wind Proposals and summarised in section 7.14.

7.4.9 A proposed appraisal of landscape sensitivity and key views for the East and Central Sutherland area which would form part of the OWESG has not yet been completed and therefore is not available for consideration in this LVIA.

## 7.5 Landscape Assessment: Methodology

### Key Stages of the Assessment

7.5.1 The GLVIA3 methodology for landscape assessment involves an appreciation of the existing landscape resource, the susceptibility of its key components to accept the change proposed, and an understanding of the potential effects which could occur and how these could affect these key components. The potential to mitigate adverse effects should also be considered.

7.5.2 There are five key stages to the landscape assessment:

- Establishment of the baseline;
- Appreciation of the development proposed;
- Identification of key landscape receptors;
- Identification of potential effects; and
- Assessment of effect significance.

### Establishment of the Baseline

7.5.3 Establishment of the baseline conditions has been undertaken through combination of desk study and site appraisal.

#### Desk Study

7.5.4 The following publications and resources have been referred to:

- Relevant development plans and supplementary planning guidance as described in section 7.4;
- The Special Qualities of the National Scenic Areas (SNH, 2010);
- Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas (Horner + MacLennan and Mike Wood, 2011);
- NatureScot Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and Descriptions (SNH, 2019 [online]);
- NatureScot Map of Relative Wildness and Attribute Mapping datasets (SNH, Natural Spaces [online]);
- NatureScot Wild Land Area Maps and Descriptions (SNH, Natural Spaces [online]; and
- Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes (Historic Environmental Scotland [online]).

#### Site Appraisal

7.5.5 Site visits were undertaken by Chartered Landscape Professionals in August 2020, October 2020 and April 2021, to familiarise with the landscape baseline and context. Information gathered during the desk study was verified on-site and further information gathered where appropriate. The site visits fed into an appraisal of landscape designations, protected areas and LCTs and an understanding of their key characteristics and components, and Special Qualities.

Relative Landscape Value

7.5.6 The relative value of the landscape is an important consideration in informing judgement of the significance of effects. Value concerns the perceived importance of the landscape, when considered as a whole and within the context of the study area. Landscape Value is established through consideration of the following factors:

- Presence of landscape designations, other inventory or registered landscapes/landscape features or identified planning constraints;
- The scenic quality of the landscape;
- Perceptual aspects such as wildness or tranquillity;
- Conservation interests such as cultural heritage features or associations, or if the landscape supports notable habitats or species;
- Recreational value; and
- Rarity, either in the national or local context, or if it is considered to be a particularly important example of a specific landscape type.

7.5.7 It should be noted that absence of a designation does not necessarily mean that a landscape or component is not highly valued as factors such as accessibility and local scarcity can render areas of nationally unremarkable quality, highly valuable as a local resource. Criteria for the allocation of perceived landscape value are outlined in Table 7.5.1:

**Table 7.5.1: Landscape Value Criteria**

Landscape Value	Criteria
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The landscape is closely associated with features of international or national importance which are rare within the wider context;</li> <li>• The landscape is of high scenic quality and forms a key part of an important designated landscape or planning constraint; and/or</li> <li>• The landscape is an example of a scarce resource within the local context and is of considerable local importance for its, scenic quality, recreational opportunities or cultural heritage associations.</li> </ul>
Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The landscape is associated with features of national or regional importance which are relatively common within the wider context;</li> <li>• The landscape forms part of a designated landscape or is associated with other features of importance but is not rare or distinctive within the local context; and/or</li> <li>• The landscape is one of a number within the local context appreciated for its scenic quality, recreational opportunities or cultural heritage associations.</li> </ul>
Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The landscape characteristics are common within the local and regional context and the landscape is not associated with any particular features or attributes considered to be important; and/or</li> <li>• The landscape is of poor scenic quality and is not appreciated for any recreational or cultural associations.</li> </ul>

### **Appreciation of the Proposed Development**

7.5.8 Appreciation of the Proposed Development involves the accumulation of a thorough knowledge of the proposal, its nature, scale and location within the baseline landscape,

and any peripheral or ancillary features proposed, as detailed in Chapter 3: Description of Development. Analysis of the proposed activities and changes which would take place leads to an understanding of the potential effects that may occur on the landscape resource. As part of this process, the ZTV (see Figure 7.1.1) has been consulted to inform the potential range of effects.

**Identification of Key Landscape Receptors**

7.5.9 The identification of landscape receptors is the first step in the analysis of the potential for significant landscape effects to take place. Landscape receptors comprise key characteristics or individual features which contribute to the value of the landscape and have the potential to be affected by the Proposed Development. Landscape receptors are identified through analysis of baseline characteristics when considered in relation to the impacts which might result from a development of the type proposed.

Landscape Sensitivity

7.5.10 Landscape sensitivity considers the nature of the landscape and its ability to accommodate development of the type proposed without compromising its key characteristics and components. The appraisal of landscape sensitivity involves consideration of the sensitivity of individual landscape receptors. There are two aspects which are considered when establishing the landscape sensitivity:

- Value: The baseline value of the landscape and the contributory value of individual landscape receptors to the landscape as a whole; and
- Susceptibility to change: The ability of landscape receptors to accommodate development of the type proposed without changing the intrinsic qualities of the landscape as a whole.

7.5.11 Landscape sensitivity has been evaluated with reference to the subject areas above. A three-point scale is used as detailed in Table 7.5.2:

**Table 7.5.2: Landscape Sensitivity Criteria**

Landscape Sensitivity	Criteria
High	A highly valued landscape of particularly distinctive character susceptible to relatively small changes of the type proposed.
Medium	A reasonably valued landscape with a composition and characteristics tolerant of some degree of change of the type proposed.
Low	A relatively unimportant landscape which is potentially tolerant of a large degree of change of the type proposed.

**Identification of Potential Effects**

7.5.12 The second step in the assessment process involves the identification of potential effects which may occur as a result of the interaction of the impacts of the Proposed Development with the identified landscape receptors. The assessment takes into account direct effects upon existing landscape elements, features and key characteristics and also indirect effects which may occur secondary to changes affecting another landscape component or area. The ZTV is used as a tool to gauge the extent of potential indirect change, supported by targeted field surveys.

7.5.13 Magnitude is categorised on a four point scale detailed in Table 7.5.3:

**Table 7.5.3: Criteria for Magnitude of Landscape Change**

Magnitude of Landscape Change	Criteria
High	Notable change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area ranging to a very intensive change over a more limited area.
Medium	Perceptible change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area ranging to notable change in a localised area.
Low	Virtually imperceptible change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area or perceptible change in a localised area
Negligible	No discernible change in any landscape characteristics or components.

- 7.5.14 In recognition of the differing changes that would occur over time, two ratings for magnitude of change have been included: during the construction of the Proposed Development, and during operation.

#### Assessment of Effect Significance

- 7.5.15 Evaluation of the predicted significance of effect has been carried out through analysis of the anticipated magnitude of change in relation to the identified landscape sensitivity and using a degree of professional judgement. The assessment takes into account identified effects upon existing landscape receptors and assesses the extent to which these would be lost or modified, in the context of their importance in determining the existing baseline character.
- 7.5.16 Effect significance has been evaluated using a four point scale and using the following criteria:

**Table 7.5.4: Landscape Effect Significance Criteria**

Landscape Effect Rating	Criteria
Major	The Proposed Development is at considerable variance with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape and would be a dominant feature, resulting in considerable reduction in scenic quality and large scale change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.
Moderate	The Proposed Development is out of scale with the landscape, or inconsistent with the local pattern and landform and may be locally dominant and/or result in a noticeable reduction in scenic quality and a degree of change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.
Minor	The Proposed Development does not quite fit with the scale, landform or local pattern of the landscape and may be locally intrusive but would result in an inappreciable reduction in scenic quality or change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.
Negligible	The Proposed Development sits well within the scale, landform and pattern of the landscape and would not result in any discernible reduction in scenic quality or change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.

- 7.5.1 As for magnitude of change, two ratings for landscape effect have been included: during the construction of the Proposed Development, and during operation. For the purposes of the LVIA, effects with a rating of Moderate or greater are considered to be significant in terms of the EIA Regulations.

## 7.6 Landscape Assessment: Baseline

### Site Description and Context

- 7.6.1 The location of the Proposed Development comprises an upland plateau area which lies in a transitional area of central Sutherland.
- 7.6.2 Within the western and north-western parts of the study area, the landscape is defined by extensive areas of mountain, moorland and lochs with habitation and development, mostly limited to nucleus settlements and crofting townships around the coastline of rocky inlets, cliffs and bays, and remote isolated shooting lodges within the moorland interior. This complex landscape of the west, opens out and simplifies in the north and north-east of the study area where extensive open moorlands provide long reaching views towards isolated mountains which provide a striking focal point. Remote glens hosting long, single-track roads provide access through these landscapes and there are occasional large tracts of forest plantation.
- 7.6.3 To the south and east, the landscape is characterised by lower rolling hills and moorland plateaux divided by broad glens, with a more frequent pattern of forest plantation. There is a greater degree of habitation within this part of the study area and more established transport routes, with scattered properties and small communities through the major inland glens and around the lower lying coastal landscapes, although the uplands and smaller glens away from these areas remain largely undeveloped. Wind turbines are an established feature within parts of this central and eastern area, mostly focussed around the lower lying ridges and plateaux that flank the main inhabited glens, inland from the immediate coastal ridges.

### Landscape Designations

- 7.6.4 Landscapes can be ascribed an international, national, regional or local designation that recognises the importance of the landscape for its scenic interest or attractiveness. Areas of landscape may also be protected by planning policy at either a national or regional level. Designated and protected landscapes within the wider study area are shown on Figures 7.2.1. An initial scoping exercise was undertaken to review all designated and protected landscapes within the wider study area to identify those where there may be potential for significant effects. This exercise is summarised in Technical Appendix 7.2: Landscape and Visual Scoping Appraisal. Those areas identified as having the potential to be affected by the Proposed Development and therefore included in the detailed assessment are listed in Table 7.6.1.
- 7.6.5 All areas scoped out of further assessment were considered very unlikely to receive significant effects as a result of the Proposed Development.

**Table 7.6.1: Designated and Protected Landscapes Included in the Assessment**

Designation Type	Scoped into Detailed Assessment	Scoped out of Detailed Assessment
<b>National Context</b>		
National Scenic Area (NSA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assynt – Coigach NSA; and</li> <li>Dornoch Firth NSA.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kyle of Tongue NSA; and</li> <li>North-west Sutherland NSA.</li> </ul>
Gardens and Designed Landscapes (GDL)	(none)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ardross Castle GDL;</li> <li>Balnagown Castle GDL;</li> </ul>

Designation Type	Scoped into Detailed Assessment	Scoped out of Detailed Assessment
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dunrobin Castle GDL;</li> <li>• Leckmelm GDL;</li> <li>• Novar GDL; and</li> <li>• Skibo Castle GDL.</li> </ul>
Wild Land Area (WLA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WLA 34. Reay - Cassley; and</li> <li>• WLA 37. Foinaven – Ben Hee.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WLA 29: Rhiddoroch – Beinn Dearg – Ben Wyvis;</li> <li>• WLA 32: Inverpolly – Glen Canisp;</li> <li>• WLA 33: Quinag; and</li> <li>• WLA 35: Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest.</li> </ul>
<b>Regional / Local Context</b>		
Special Landscape Area (SLA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA; and</li> <li>• Fannichs, Beinn Dearg and Glencalvie SLA.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ben Wyvis SLA</li> <li>• Bens Griam and Loch nan Clar SLA; and</li> <li>• Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA.</li> </ul>

7.6.6 Those areas which have been scoped into the detailed assessment are described below. Detailed baseline evaluation of the Special Qualities and values of each area is included in Technical Appendix 7.4: Assessment of Designated and Protected Landscapes.

#### National Context

##### *National Scenic Areas*

7.6.7 National Scenic Area (NSA) is a national, statutory designation and comprises areas that have been designated as having outstanding scenic value in a national context. There are 40 NSAs in Scotland.

7.6.8 Two NSAs within the Study Area (see Figure 7.2.1) have been identified as potentially being affected by the Proposed Development as follows:

- **Assynt – Coigach NSA:** Located approximately 9.8km to the west of the Proposed Development (nearest turbine) and comprising an expansive area covering 86,540 hectares (ha) of rugged complex moorland, rocky knolls and lochans with distinctive, isolated mountains which form well-recognised silhouettes. It includes a high remote mountain massif to the east, and a complex coastline of cliffs, sea stacks, islands and sandy bays to the west. The Special Qualities of the NSA are described in the publication 'The Special Qualities of the National Scenic Areas' (SNH, 2010) as follows:
  - Spectacular scenery of lone mountains;
  - Rocky topography of great variety;
  - Settlements nestled within a wider landscape of mountain peaks, wild moorlands, and rocky seascapes;
  - Extensive cnochan landscapes;
  - A coastline of endless drama;
  - An intricate multitude of lochs and lochans;

- A landscape of vast open space and exposure;
- Significant tracts of wild land;
- Unexpected and extensive tracts of native woodland; and
- A still, quiet landscape under a constantly changing sky.
- **Dornoch Firth NSA:** Located approximately 20.3km to the south-east of the Proposed Development and comprised of a long, sinuous firth, enclosed by abrupt, rounded granitic hills clad in heather moor and scree and encompassing a surprising variety of landscapes, including oak, coniferous and policy woodland, pasture and arable lands and innumerable bays, sands, flats and promontories which provide a constantly changing picture with the movements of the tide. The Special Qualities of the NSA (SNH, 2010) are described as follows:
  - The contrast between the enclosed west and the expansive east;
  - Inhabited surrounds within a wilder backdrop of hills and moors;
  - A wide diversity of woodland cover;
  - A rich variety of alluvial lands, dunes and links;
  - The ever-changing firth;
  - The tranquillity of an undeveloped coastline; and
  - Migdale, a microcosm of the wider Dornoch Firth.

#### *Wild Land Areas*

- 7.6.9 Wild Land Areas (WLA) have been defined by NatureScot as those areas comprising the greatest and most extensive areas of wild characteristics within Scotland. Although not a designation, these areas are given protection within the Planning System through Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) (Scottish Government, 2014b).
- 7.6.10 The presence of wildness is based on the presence and strength of four perceptual attributes identified in NatureScot Policy Statement ‘Wildness in Scotland’s Countryside’ (SNH, 2002) as follows:
- A sense of sanctuary or solitude;
  - Risk or, for some visitors, a sense of awe or anxiety, depending on the individual’s emotional response to the setting;
  - Perceptions that the landscape has arresting or inspiring qualities; and
  - Fulfilment from the physical challenge required to penetrate into these places.
- 7.6.11 Because these responses are very much dependant on an individual’s perceptions, five physical attributes are identified as considered likely to lead to these perceptual responses being present. These are:
- A high degree of perceived naturalness in the setting, especially in its vegetation cover and wildlife, and in the natural processes affecting the land;
  - The lack of any modern artefacts or structures;
  - Little evidence of contemporary human uses of the land;
  - Landform which is rugged, or otherwise physically challenging; and
  - Remoteness and/or inaccessibility.
- 7.6.12 Two WLAs (see Figure 7.2.1) have been identified as having potential to be affected by the Proposed Development as follows:

- **WLA 34. Reay – Cassley:** The Proposed Development would be within this WLA which covers an area of over 560km<sup>2</sup> and is one of the larger WLAs identified. Situated between Inchnadamph and Loch Shin, it is comprised of a central core area, which includes the mountain mass of Ben More Assynt and Conival, and surrounding mountains Beinn Leoid and Braebag, with three narrower protruding arms to the north of Loch Glendhu, and to the south on either side of Glen Cassley.
- **WLA 38. Foinavan – Ben Hee:** Located around 11.6km to the north of the Proposed Development and stretching over 45km to the north to cover a tract of land of 569km<sup>2</sup>, this WLA is comprised of extensive open peatlands in its southern half whilst its northern area is characterised by a remote and rugged mountainous landscape.

7.6.13 Detailed analysis of the baseline for these WLAs is included in Technical Appendices 7.5: Wild Land Area Assessment – Wild Land Area 34: Reay - Cassley and 7.6: Wild Land Area Assessment – Wild Land Area 37: Foinaven - Ben Hee.

#### Regional / Local Context

##### *Special Landscape Areas*

7.6.14 Planning authorities are able to designate particular landscapes considered to be of regional or local importance through the development planning process. Such areas are not considered to be statutory designations but are a material consideration to planning decisions. Within the Highland area, landscapes identified of regional importance are entitled Special Landscape Areas (SLAs). Two SLAs within the wider study (see Figure 7.2.1) area have been identified for inclusion within the detailed assessment in Technical Appendix 7.4: Assessment of Designated and Protected Landscapes:

- **Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA:** Located from 17.2km to the north-east of the Proposed Development this SLA includes the prominent lone mountain of Ben Klibreck and surrounding hills which enclose the secluded glen accommodating Loch Choire and Loch a' Bhealaich.
- **Fannichs, Beinn Dearg and Glencalvie SLA:** Situated 15.1km to south-west of the Proposed Development and covering an extensive area of mountains and moorland on both sides of the main Garve-Ullapool road along the Dirrie More. This SLA is characterised by a complex sequence of hill ranges with rugged terrain, high tops, lonely glens and upland lochans, and a strong sense of remoteness.

#### **Landscape Character**

7.6.15 NatureScot has undertaken detailed review and classification of various landscape areas and types of Scotland (SNH, 2019 [online]). Nine individual LCTs are identified within the detailed study area.

7.6.16 An initial scoping exercise was undertaken to review all LCTs within the detailed study area to identify those where there may be potential for significant effects. This exercise is summarised in Technical Appendix 7.2: Landscape and Visual Scoping Appraisal. Those identified as having the potential to be affected by the Proposed Development and therefore included in the detailed assessment are listed in Table 7.6.2.

**Table 7.6.2: LCTs Included in the Assessment**

Grouping	Scoped into Detailed Assessment	Scoped out of Detailed Assessment
NatureScot LCTs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LCT 134: Sweeping Moorland and Flows;</li> <li>• LCT 135: Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland;</li> <li>• LCT 138: Lone Mountains;</li> <li>• LCT 139: Rugged Mountain Massif – Caithness and Sutherland;</li> <li>• LCT 142: Strath – Caithness and Sutherland;</li> <li>• LCT 145: Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting; and</li> <li>• LCT 329: Rounded Mountain Massif.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LCT136: Rocky Hills and Moorland; and</li> <li>• LCT 330: Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes – Ross and Cromarty.</li> </ul>

7.6.17 Detailed baseline description of these LCTs is included in Technical Appendix 7.3: Assessment of Landscape Character Types and Areas including descriptions of key characteristics and appraisal of landscape value. LCTs within the wider study area are shown on Figure 7.3.1 and LCTs in the detailed study area are shown on Figures 7.2.2 and 7.2.3.

## 7.7 Landscape Assessment: Assessment of Effects

7.7.1 The extent to which the Proposed Development would affect the existing landscape varies depending on the individual components of the project and the ability of the existing landscape to accommodate these various components.

7.7.2 This section provides an assessment of the effects that the Proposed Development would have on the LCTs, designated and protected landscapes during the construction and operational phases, in accordance with the effects criteria outlined in section 7.5.

7.7.3 The detailed assessment of effects for each LCT or designated landscape is provided in Technical Appendix 7.3: Assessment of Landscape Character Types and Areas, and Technical Appendix 7.4: Assessment of Designated and Protected Landscapes, with the key points being summarised in paragraphs 7.7.4 to 7.7.51 below. The detailed assessment of WLA 34 (Reay – Cassley) and WLA 37 (Fionavan – Ben Hee) is provided in Technical Appendices 7.5: Wild Land Area Assessment – Wild Land Area 34: Reay - Cassley and 7.6: Wild Land Assessment – Wild Land Area 37: Foinaven - Ben Hee. The assessment discusses effects on LCTs first, as these conclusions form the basis for the understanding of effects on designated and protected landscapes.

### Assessment of Effects on Landscape Character Types

7.7.4 The detailed assessment of LCTs has considered seven separate LCTs. Of these, most were identified as likely to have effects which would be not significant. Significant effects were identified for two LCTs: LCT 135: Rounded Hills - Caithness & Sutherland; and LCT 142: Strath - Caithness & Sutherland (localised to the Glen Cassley sub-area). These effects would be localised to parts of the landscape up to 10km from the Proposed Development (see Technical Appendix 7.3: Assessment of Landscape Character Types and Areas) and are summarised as follows:

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Effects Likely to be Significant*LCT 135: Rounded Hills - Caithness & Sutherland*

- 7.7.5 This LCT comprises the most common landscape type within the detailed study area and occurs extensively across Caithness and Sutherland. It is characterised by mostly heather clad broad hills with rounded summits which provides a backdrop to straths and coastal lands. Existing wind farm development is present, usually associated with the more subtly undulating and lower hills set within the interior of the uplands. However, a sense of wild character can be experienced in the more remote and less modified parts of the LCT. Sensitivity ranges from Low, within areas already strongly characterised by wind development, to Medium where there is a closer association with settlement and communities, and High in areas where wild land characteristics predominate.
- 7.7.6 The Proposed Development would be located entirely within this LCT and would therefore directly affect it. The southern part of the site would be within an area already strongly characterised by the wind turbines of the Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms, and to some extent, the Lairg Wind Farm, and therefore has a lower sensitivity. However, the northern part of the site, to the north of Càrn nam Bò Maola and particularly in Coire Buidhe, would be located in a localised area where there is no influence from existing wind turbines and therefore, in this area the effect would be greater.
- 7.7.7 The increased influence of wind turbines as a feature in the landscape would also extend up to around 8km of the Proposed Development in a north and north-westerly direction where the turbines would appear closer, and larger than existing wind turbines, or would become a new characteristic of the surrounding landscape where existing wind turbines are not apparent, and would affect qualities of wildness in very localised areas up to 10km from the Proposed Development on the western side of Glen Cassley. However, the significance of the effect would diminish with distance and would be substantially reduced in the southern range of this zone of influence where the turbines of the existing wind farms are more influential.
- 7.7.8 During construction, there would also be an increase in activity within the localised part of the LCT occupied by the Proposed Development which would interrupt the existing remote qualities, but this is not anticipated to lead to a greater degree of landscape effect than the operational development.
- 7.7.9 These changes are anticipated to lead to a variable magnitude of change, anticipated to be High within areas directly affected and to north, east and west of the more northerly turbines within around 2km of the Proposed Development and more widely, Medium. This would result in localised significant effects to this LCT comprising:
- A *very localised Major (significant)* effect within the immediate confines of the Proposed Development at its northern end within Coire Buidhe where the wind turbines would become the main character defining feature of the landscape; and
  - A *localised Moderate (significant)* effect, more widely within the surrounding context up to 8km from the Proposed Development where it is considered that the Proposed Development would form a new focus within the landscape to a sufficient degree to influence landscape character, and very locally up to 10km to the west of Glen Cassley where wild land characteristics may be affected by intervisibility of the Proposed Development in areas otherwise unaffected by development.

- 7.7.10 These levels of effect are anticipated to occur during both the construction and operational phases.
- 7.7.11 Beyond these areas, the Proposed Development may continue to form a focus within some views and locally affect the sense of remoteness and wildness. However, it is considered unlikely to be sufficiently noticeable to alter any of the key characteristics of the LCT. In these areas, the effect would range from **Minor** (not significant) to **Minor – Moderate** (not significant) and **Negligible** in areas where there would be little or no intervisibility.

*LCT 142: Strath - Caithness & Sutherland (Glen Cassley Sub-Area)*

- 7.7.12 This LCT covers a variety of Strath Areas throughout the Detailed Study area featuring various characteristics of openness and enclosure, woodland, agricultural improvement or otherwise and degrees of development. In relation to the Proposed Development, a significant effect has been identified to the landscape character of the Glen Cassley sub-area only. This is a remote glen, with notable areas of woodland cover in its lower reaches, and a more open, broad character in its upper reaches. Scattered properties are present, mostly in the lower glen but also occasionally forming a focus within the upper glen where a few ruined properties are also present. There is some influence from existing turbines of the Rosehall Wind Farm on the eastern valley-side around the bottom of the glen.
- 7.7.13 The sensitivity of the Strath LCT is considered to be High for direct change, due to the small scale of the landscape but Medium for indirect change which would occur within the context.
- 7.7.14 The Proposed Development is anticipated to appear noticeably on the south-east skyline of a localised section of upper Glen Cassley between Badintagairt and Glenmuick. There is also the potential for tracks and some continued evidence of borrow pit reinstatement to remain perceptible in this area. This may distract from the remote qualities and features of the upper glen which is largely undeveloped and tranquil in nature, and could diminish the perceived scale of the hills enclosing the eastern side of the glen, leading to a landscape somewhat characterised by wind turbines. However, the Proposed Development would not affect the sense of enclosure on the west side of the glen, or the connection that exists to the mountainous landscape that is experienced up the glen to the north-west.
- 7.7.15 Construction and borrow pit activities would also be likely to be experienced in this localised area during construction. Whilst this would lead to a greater degree of distraction, it is not considered to lead to an increased level of landscape effect during construction compared to operation.
- 7.7.16 Intervisibility of a small number of turbines would also be experienced very infrequently from some other localised parts further down the glen but would occur in areas where a greater diversity of character is experienced and greater coverage of woodland is present.
- 7.7.17 The magnitude of change on the Glen Cassley section of the Strath LCT is anticipated to be Medium, reflecting a notable change within a localised area between Badintagairt and Glenmuick, and perceptible change within other parts of the glen where fewer numbers of turbines are partially obscured by landform and vegetation or existing turbines are already influential.

- 7.7.18 The effect on landscape character is anticipated to be **Moderate** (significant) but *localised* affecting a small area of Glen Cassley between Badintagairt and Glenmuick. Whilst individual views in the lower parts of the glen may lead to significant visual effects being present, this is not anticipated to lead a significant landscape effect as the presence of the Proposed Development is not anticipated to notably alter the existing key characteristics of the landscape. Therefore, elsewhere in Glen Cassley, the effect on landscape character is anticipated to be **Minor** (not significant).
- 7.7.19 The effect would be not significant in all other parts of the LCT 142 (Strath) as described in paragraph 7.7.24.

#### Effects Likely to be Not Significant

##### *Minor to Moderate Landscape Effects*

- 7.7.20 A *localised* **Minor to Moderate** (not significant) landscape effect has been identified for a group of LCTs situated to the north-west of the Proposed Development beyond around 8km. This is anticipated to affect LCT 134: Sweeping Moorland and Flows within the western sub-area of this LCT which covers a small area of plateau to the east of Ben More Assynt (generally somewhat atypical of the description for this LCT being more sloping and enclosed within the valley) and some parts of LCT 135: Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland beyond around 8 - 10km (as described in paragraph 7.7.11), which shares similar characteristics within the surrounding area with a lack of clear transition between these two LCTs. Within these areas, the Proposed Development would be seen within the south-easterly context and its closer proximity in comparison to the existing turbines of Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms is anticipated to a slightly increase the role of wind turbines as a characteristic of the landscape, as well as contribute to a localised reduction in perceived remoteness. However, this is considered insufficient to lead to any notable change in the key characteristics associated with these LCTs in these areas which would retain their sense of expansive exposure and wild or remote characteristics which, at this distance, are more closely associated with the more extensive landscape context experienced to the north and east.
- 7.7.21 A *localised* **Minor to Moderate** effect is also anticipated to nearby parts of LCT 139: Rugged Mountain Massif - Caithness & Sutherland, at its most south-easterly point around Meall an Aonaich. In this area the Proposed Development would be seen within the context of existing turbines, particularly from the more elevated parts of the landscape, but would bring wind turbines noticeably closer to the LCT. This would lead to a greater influence of wind turbines on this part of the LCT anticipated to affect the sense of wild character to some degree by reducing the perception of distance between the mountains and the developed landscape, and to form a focus within some views. However, this is a very small part of the LCT overall and one that is already influenced in places by outside development and contemporary land use.

##### *Minor Landscape Effects*

- 7.7.22 **Minor** (not significant) effects are anticipated for LCT 134: Sweeping Moorland and Flows (eastern sub-area, lying to the north-east of Loch Shin), LCT 138: Lone Mountains and LCT 145: Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting (Lairg sub-area) where the Proposed Development would form a more distant, less noticeable feature of the surrounding landscapes, usually within a context where wind turbines already form a feature.

- 7.7.23 A **Minor** (not significant) effect is also anticipated for parts of LCT 139: Rugged Mountain Massif - Caithness & Sutherland and LCT 135: Rounded Hills - Caithness & Sutherland lying to the north and north-west in areas beyond 8-10km and up to around 15km at the head of Glen Cassley and around Ben More Assynt where the Proposed Development would form a less noticeable feature of the landscape context to the south-east where other turbines and contemporary land use is already influential.
- 7.7.24 A **Minor** (not significant) effect would also occur within LCT 142: Strath - Caithness & Sutherland, in the lower part of Glen Cassley, the transitional area between Glen Cassley, Strath Oykel and Kyle of Sutherland, and Strath Tirry where the appearance of the Proposed Development in the surrounding context would be limited by trees and vegetation and where other existing wind turbines already characterise the surrounding hills and skyline.

#### *Negligible Landscape Effects*

- 7.7.25 All remaining LCTs or parts of LCTs would experience a **Negligible** landscape effect from the Proposed Development as it is considered that any potential intervisibility would lead to no perceptible change to landscape characteristics or scenic quality.

#### **Assessment of Effects on Designated and Protected Landscapes**

- 7.7.26 The detailed assessment of effects on designated and protected landscapes is included in Technical Appendix 7.4: Assessment of Designated and Protected Landscapes. These effects are summarised in the following paragraphs with an emphasis on potential significant effects.

#### National Scenic Areas (NSAs)

- 7.7.27 Two NSAs were identified for inclusion within the assessment. No significant effects were identified for either of these areas.

#### *Assynt - Coigach NSA*

- 7.7.28 This is a very large NSA and potential intervisibility with the Proposed Development would be extremely localised, affecting a relatively small area of elevated ground and summits, mostly around Ben More Assynt and Braebeg on the eastern edge of the NSA, and locally and more distantly on the more southerly of the Assynt mountains and Ben More Coigach.
- 7.7.29 Within the areas of the Assynt and Coigach mountains theoretically affected the Proposed Development would appear very small within the easterly context, similar to other existing turbines and likely to have an inappreciable effect on the experience of the landscape which is more influenced by the mountains and coastal landscapes to north, south and west.
- 7.7.30 From the Ben More Assynt area, the Proposed Development would appear in the south-easterly context, away from the NSA but would affect the expansive easterly views from these areas. However, this part of the surrounding context already features wind turbines and forestry areas and comprises a wider setting of a more developed and managed landscape. The Proposed Development would appear slightly closer and larger than existing turbines and this is anticipated to result in visual effects which may be significant from some of the closer isolated summits in this area such as VP21, Meall an Aonaich (see paragraph 7.11.19). However, this is not anticipated to lead to a significant effect on the

NSA because the expansive vistas experienced to north, west and south-west across the mountains of the NSA which form a greater contribution to the Special Qualities of the NSA would be unaffected.

- 7.7.31 In the Ben More Assynt area, the reduced distance to the wind turbines in the surrounding landscape which would result from the Proposed Development would lead to a reduction in the perceived scale of surrounding undeveloped peatlands outwith the NSA. This is anticipated to lead to limited, localised changes to the Special Qualities: “*Rocky topography of great variety,*” “*A landscape of vast open space and exposure*” and “*Significant tracts of wild land*” (see also paragraphs 7.7.35 to 7.7.41 below). However, given the very localised nature of these changes, and the fact that the landscape context to north and west of this area, which shows the greater strength of characteristics such as wildness would be unaffected, the effect on all Special Qualities is anticipated to be not significant.
- 7.7.32 Overall, a **Minor** (not significant) effect is predicted for the Assynt - Coigach NSA and it is considered that the integrity of the designated landscape would not be affected.

#### *Dornoch Firth NSA*

- 7.7.33 The Proposed Development would be theoretically intervisible with parts of the western end of this NSA including low lying coastal areas and some of the surrounding hills. However, it would always be seen to the rear of existing turbines at Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms. From lower areas around the firth, this would be likely to comprise a barely distinguishable number of additional tips within this context. From some higher surrounding hills, a few additional turbines or blades may be perceptible but given the existing context of turbines in this area, this is not likely to lead to any distinguishable change in landscape characteristics. Overall, this is considered likely to lead to an indiscernible level of change to landscape characteristics and Special Qualities of the NSA and the effect would therefore be **Negligible**.

#### Wild Land Areas (WLAs)

- 7.7.34 Two out of six WLAs were identified for inclusion within a detailed WLA Assessment (see Technical Appendix 7.5: Wild Land Area Assessment – Wild Land Area 34: Reay – Cassley and Technical Appendix 7.6: Wild Land Area Assessment – Wild Land Area 37: Foinaven Ben Hee). A *localised* significant effect was identified to one of these Areas: WLA 34. Reay - Cassley.

#### *WLA 34. Reay Cassley*

- 7.7.35 The turbines of the Proposed Development would be sited just within the south-eastern tip of WLA 34 and would therefore directly affect it. There would also be indirect effects to surrounding areas due to intervisibility with the Proposed Development. This would largely affect an area to the north and north-west of the Proposed Development covering localised areas of plateau ridge to the east and west of Glen Cassley and the south easterly slopes and summits of the mountain area surrounding Ben More Assynt, Meall and Aonaich and Breabag. This part of the WLA is more influenced by hydro development in Glen Cassley, forested landscapes to the south and east and existing wind turbines at Achany, Rosehall and Lairg Wind Farms leading to a reduced strength of wildness in these areas, particularly to the east of Glen Cassley where the narrowness of the ridge limits the extent of area where other land uses do not influence the character of the landscape, and existing features within the glen, including pipelines and tracks of the Duchally hydro

scheme and small areas of forest, create a sense of disconnect between this and the wider WLA. The greater strength of wildness is considered to be present in areas further to the north-west of these areas where the mountains shield the views towards the more human influenced easterly landscapes and the more mountainous landscapes of the north and west which feature little evidence of human interventions have greater influence.

- 7.7.36 The WLA Assessment for this WLA (see Technical Appendix 7.5: Wild Land Area Assessment – Wild Land Area 34: Reay – Cassley) has identified that potential significant effects to strength of wildness within the WLA may occur within a localised area to the east and west of Glen Cassley, potentially affecting some parts at the southern extremity of the mountain core. This is anticipated to be **Moderate - Major** (significant) within a very localised area within the immediate site boundary and up to around 2km of the Proposed Development. A **Moderate** (significant) effect to the strength of wildness is anticipated to extend to around 5-6km from the Proposed Development on the east side of Glen Cassley, and up to 8-10km from the Proposed Development to the west of Glen Cassley. This would be limited to localised parts of the plateaux above the immediate confines of Glen Cassley where the influence of existing contemporary land use is less prevalent. Within the more mountainous core at the head of Glen Cassley, up to a distance of around 15-17km, a **Minor** (not significant) effect on the strength of wildness is anticipated as the Proposed Development would normally be seen within a context of existing contemporary land use and human influenced landscapes, having no effect on the context to the north and west where the greater sense of wildness is experienced. Effects in all other areas would be **Negligible**.
- 7.7.37 The above effects are anticipated to lead to a potential localised significant effect on the WLA Key Quality of *“Extensive, elevated peatland slopes whose simplicity and openness contribute to a perception of awe, whilst highlighting the qualities of adjacent mountains,”* mostly limited to within around 2km of the Proposed Development where the more direct effects would occur. However, within the footprint of the Proposed Development this WLA Key Quality is considered to be already less strongly expressed due to the proximity to existing wind turbines on the edge of the WLA, and the confining topography of the corries which limits the extent to which perceptions openness and of awe are experienced. A limited, localised significant effect on this WLA Key Quality is also anticipated to extend to some small areas on the upper plateaux up to 5-6km to the east of Glen Cassley and 8-10km on the western side, due to a reduction in perceived scale of the peatlands in the south-east of the WLA. However, this effect would be localised to relatively small areas of the upper plateaux where existing features and contemporary land use in Glen Cassley cannot be perceived, and would be experienced only where intervisibility with the Proposed Development would occur. It would therefore be very limited in its extent.
- 7.7.38 Whilst significant effects are anticipated within very small areas of this localised part of the WLA, outwith the immediate confines of the Proposed Development site, because the Proposed Development has been confined to the far southern tip of the WLA, the sense of expansiveness, naturalness and locally experienced solitude would still be perceived in connection with the northerly and westerly landscape. The WLA Special Quality would therefore continue to be experienced in these areas, though may be slightly reduced in strength within very localised areas.
- 7.7.39 Very localised effects to the Key Quality: *“A variety of spaces created by irregular landforms in which there is perceived naturalness, as well as a strong sense of sanctuary*

*and solitude,*” are also anticipated in the area to the east of Glen Cassley within 2km and locally within some of the more isolated hollows and depression which are not already affected by existing development up to around 5km. However, given the highly localised nature of these effect on a WLA Key Quality which is experienced to a much greater degree elsewhere in the WLA, it is considered that the effect on this WLA Key Quality would be not significant.

- 7.7.40 No significant effects are anticipated to WLA Key qualities: *“A range of large, irregular, rocky mountains with steep, arresting slopes and a variety of lochs and lochans, possessing a strong sense of naturalness, remoteness and sanctuary,”* and *“An awe-inspiring, broad scale expanse of cnocan in which there is a complex pattern of features at a local level that contribute to the sense of naturalness and sanctuary,”* and no discernible effects to any of the WLA key Qualities are anticipated beyond a distance of around 15-17km.
- 7.7.41 Overall, it is concluded that locally significant effects would occur to the WLA but that the vast majority of the WLA would remain unchanged. Within the southern tip, around the more immediate confines of the Proposed Development (up to around 2km) and within a very small area to the east of the Proposed Development, some of the physical and perceptual attributes of wild land may be less likely to be experienced. However, this would be a very minimal and peripheral part of the WLA overall where the WLA Key Qualities are only partially present. Beyond the close confines of the Proposed Development, whilst localised significant effects may occur to the WLA Key Quality, *“Extensive, elevated peatland slopes whose simplicity and openness contribute to a perception of awe, whilst highlighting the qualities of adjacent mountains,”* it is considered that all of the physical attributes and perceptual qualities which are required to establish the presence of wild land would remain, due to the continued association with the main body of the WLA to the north and west. All of the WLA Key Qualities would therefore continue to be well expressed within the WLA. Therefore, despite the potential reduction in the portrayal of some attributes and key qualities within a small peripheral area, it is considered that the integrity of WLA 34 would be retained.

*WLA 37. Foinaven – Ben Hee*

- 7.7.42 The closest turbines of the Proposed Development would be located approximately 11.5km to the south of WLA 37 and would generally appear on the southerly skyline when viewed from open and elevated parts within 10-11km of the southern and south-western boundaries. This includes areas of flat, low lying peatland to the west of Crask and undulating areas which surround it to the north, and to the west around Loch Fiag. There would also be intervisibility with the facing slopes and summits of Ben Hee, and surrounding lower hills, and to a lesser extent, some of the peaks further north. Existing turbines of the Achany, Rosehall and Lairg Wind Farms are already perceptible within this context. Therefore, although the Proposed Development would appear slightly larger and closer, there would be few areas where they would appear within the surrounding context of the WLA where existing wind turbines are not already seen.
- 7.7.43 There are existing influences on many of these parts of the WLA. In addition to the wind turbines on the southerly skyline, buildings at Crask, commercial plantation forest, shelterbelt planting and traffic on the A836 affect the eastern edge of the WLA up to around 2km from the boundary, whilst commercial forest planting in Glen Fiag is also influential in other areas. Extensive forest planting to the south and east is particularly

influential on elevated areas around the summit of Ben Hee, leading to a limited extent of wild land being perceived in this direction from these areas.

- 7.7.44 The WLA Assessment for WLA 37 (see Technical Appendix 7.6: Wild Land Assessment – Wild Land Area 37: Foinaven – Ben Hee), has concluded that the effects to this WLA would be not significant. A **Minor** (not significant) effect has been identified to parts of the southern WLA in areas where existing features and contemporary land use such as forest plantation at Crask and in Glen Fiag are not already influential, localised to areas of higher or more open ground which are beyond around 1-2km from the boundary of the WLA. More secluded areas towards the central part of the southern WLA where a higher sense of wildness is experienced would be unlikely to be affected to this degree as these areas are usually more concealed by local landform which would often result in the Proposed Development being entirely or largely concealed. Across the remaining parts of this extensive WLA the effect would be Negligible.
- 7.7.45 A limited and localised effect is anticipated to the WLA Key Quality “*Extensive peatland slopes that appear awe-inspiring in their simplicity and contrast to neighbouring mountains, and allow wide open views of the surrounding area,*” due to a potential small reduction in the perceived scale of the open peatlands in localised areas, where the slightly increased scale of the Proposed Development in relation to existing wind turbines in the southern context would be perceived.
- 7.7.46 A very localised effect is also anticipated to the WLA Key Quality “*Towering, rugged mountains, highlighted by their prominent rock covering, that appear awe-inspiring and contribute to a strong sense of naturalness,*” across high ground around Ben Hee, due to the slightly increased focus of turbines within the extensive southerly views obtained from this area.
- 7.7.47 Neither of the effects on these WLA Key Qualities would be significant as they would be limited in their extent and occurrence and would not result in any material change. There would be no perceptible effect to any other WLA Key Qualities. Overall, due to the localised and distant nature of the areas likely to be affected by the Proposed Development, and the lack of significant effects, no risk to the integrity of any part of the WLA is anticipated.

#### Special Landscape Areas (SLAs)

- 7.7.48 Two out of five SLAs within the wider study area were identified for inclusion within the assessment. No significant effect was identified for either of these SLAs.
- 7.7.49 A **Minor** effect was identified for the Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA due to localised intervisibility with the Proposed Development which is anticipated to lead to perceptible but not significant effect on views from summit areas of Ben Klibreck. This may lead to a marginal effect on the sense of remoteness experienced from these localised areas by bringing wind turbines slightly closer within the very extensive context and potentially a perceptible effect on Special Qualities of “*Distinctive mountains*” and “*Extensive views from peaks and summits*”.
- 7.7.50 A **Negligible** effect was identified for the Fannichs, Beinn Dearg and Glencalvie SLA where distant and very localised intervisibility is not anticipated to lead to any perceptible changes to the characteristics or Special Qualities of the SLA.

**Summary of Landscape Effects**

7.7.51 A summary of the effects on LCTs and designated and protected landscapes is outlined in Table 7.7.1 and Table 7.7.2.

**Table 7.7.1: Summary of Landscape Character Effects**

LCT	Potential Effect (Not Significant)				Potential Effect (Significant)		
	Scoped out	Negligible	Minor	Minor - Moderate	Moderate	Moderate - Major	Major
LCT 134: Sweeping Moorland and Flows			X(L)	X(L)			
LCT 135: Rounded Hills - Caithness & Sutherland					X(L)		X(L)
LCT 136: Rocky Hills and Moorland	X						
LCT 138: Lone Mountains			X				
LCT 139: Rugged Mountain Massif - Caithness & Sutherland			X(L)	X(L)			
LCT 142: Strath - Caithness & Sutherland			X(L)		X(L)		
LCT 145: Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting		X(L)	X(L)				
LCT 329: Rounded Mountain Massif		X					
LCT 330: Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes - Ross & Cromarty	X						

L – denotes that the effect would be localised to only part of the landscape resource within the detailed study area.

**Table 7.7.2: Summary of Effects on Designated and Protected Landscapes**

Designated / Protected Landscape	Potential Effect (Not Significant)				Potential Effect (Significant)		
	Scoped out	Negligible	Minor	Minor - Moderate	Moderate	Moderate - Major	Major
<b>National Scenic Area (NSA)</b>							
Assynt - Coigach NSA			X				
Dornoch Firth NSA		X					
Kyle of Tongue NSA	X						
North - West Sutherland NSA	X						

<b>Wild Land Area (WLA)</b>							
WLA 29: Rhiddoroch – Beinn Dearg – Ben Wyvis	X						
WLA 32: Inverpolly – Glen Canisp	X						
WLA 33: Quinag	X						
WLA 34: Reay – Cassley			X(L)		X(L)	X(L)	
WLA 35: Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest	X						
WLA 37: Foinaven – Ben Hee			X (L)				
<b>Gardens and Designed Landscapes (GDLs)</b>							
Ardross Castle GDL	X						
Balnagown Castle GDL	X						
Dunrobin Castle GDL	X						
Leckmelm GDL	X						
Novar GDL	X						
Skibo Castle GDL	X						
<b>Special Landscape Areas</b>							
Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA			X				
Ben Wyvis SLA	X						
Bens Griam and Loch nan Clar SLA	X						
Fannichs, Beinn Dearg and Glencalvie SLA		X					
Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA	X						

L – denotes that the effect would be localised to only part of the resource within the detailed study area.

## 7.8 Cumulative Landscape Assessment

7.8.1 Cumulative landscape effects may result where a number of wind energy developments combine, increasing the prevalence of wind turbines within a landscape to an extent where they may become a defining characteristic. The likely significance of these effects relates to the number of wind developments affecting the landscape, their scale, the inter-relationship between their respective visual envelopes and the sensitivity and capacity of the particular landscape to accommodate this type of development.

### Cumulative Landscape Methodology

7.8.2 The methodology for the cumulative landscape assessment is based on that described in NatureScot guidance: Assessing the Cumulative Impact of Onshore Wind Energy proposed development (SNH, 2012). The assessment considers the potential for combined effects to designated landscapes and LCTs resulting from the addition of the Proposed Development to the baseline wind energy development scenario, which may

be experienced both from static locations and whilst moving through the landscape (sequentially).

- 7.8.3 The cumulative assessment considers all those LCTs and designated / protected landscapes identified for inclusion in the detailed landscape assessment. However, areas identified as likely to have a negligible effect in the landscape assessment have not been included, as a negligible effect could not contribute to a significant cumulative effect.
- 7.8.4 The cumulative landscape assessment has involved five key stages:
- Evaluation of the capacity of the identified landscape to accommodate wind farm development;
  - Identification and analysis of the baseline wind energy development scenario;
  - Evaluation of the cumulative landscape sensitivity to change;
  - Evaluation of the potential magnitude of landscape change to the baseline scenario resulting from the Proposed Development; and
  - Assessment of the potential cumulative landscape effects arising from the addition of the Proposed Development to the baseline scenario.

#### Evaluation of Landscape Capacity

- 7.8.5 NatureScot guidance on cumulative assessment (SNH, 2012) describes the need for an understanding of whether the proposed wind farm crosses the threshold of acceptability for the total number of wind farms in an area. The capacity of the landscape to accommodate multiple wind farms has been evaluated using baseline data collected during the landscape assessment. Consideration has been given to the scenic quality, value and sensitivity to change of the relevant designated / protected area or LCT. The cumulative capacity value considers the landscape without the effect of the existing baseline sites.
- 7.8.6 A cumulative capacity value has been attributed to each area based on a three point scale from High to Low as detailed in Table 7.8.1.

**Table 7.8.1: Cumulative Capacity Value**

Cumulative Capacity Value	Description
High	The landscape has the potential to accommodate multiple wind farms / wind turbines without significant loss of key characteristics or features.
Medium	The landscape has the potential to accommodate some wind farms / wind turbines but there is the potential for key characteristics or features to be locally dominated or eroded by the presence of wind turbines.
Low	The landscape would have few opportunities for wind farm / wind turbine development which would not dominate or erode key characteristics or features.

#### Appraisal of the Baseline Wind Energy Development Scenario

- 7.8.7 Baseline information on operational, consented and proposed (application and appeal) wind energy developments within the 60km cumulative search area has been collected from THC and ECU planning databases and is illustrated on Figure 7.7.1. The baseline scenario has then been refined to identify those sites considered to have greater

potential to result in significant effects in combination with the Proposed Development, as detailed in section 7.8.14.

- 7.8.8 The baseline scenario is described for each landscape area and considers wind farms / turbines which affect the landscape both directly and indirectly.

#### Evaluation of the Cumulative Sensitivity to Change

- 7.8.9 An evaluation of sensitivity to change has been attributed to each landscape designation / protected area and LCT based on analysis of the actual baseline scenario in relation to the identified capacity value of the landscape to accommodate wind farm development. This is based on a three point scale from High to Low as detailed in Table 7.8.2.

**Table 7.8.2: Cumulative Landscape Sensitivity Criteria**

Cumulative Landscape Sensitivity	Criteria
High	The baseline wind farm / wind turbine scenario is very close to or achieves the identified capacity of the area resulting in little opportunity for additional development without significant effects occurring.
Medium	The baseline wind farm / wind turbine scenario leaves some opportunity for additional development within the landscape without significant effects resulting.
Low	The baseline wind farm/wind turbine scenario leaves considerable opportunity for additional development within the landscape without significant effects resulting.

#### Identification of Cumulative Magnitude of Change

- 7.8.10 Magnitude of change concerns the degree of change which would occur as a result of the introduction of the proposed development into the baseline scenario. This is identified based on the consideration of the potential nature, size, scale and location of the proposed change within the context of the existing baseline scenario. The evaluation of the magnitude of change is based on the criteria outlined in the main landscape assessment (see Table 7.5.3).

#### Assessment of Potential Cumulative Landscape Effects

- 7.8.11 Assessment of potential cumulative effects is based on analysis of the relationship between the cumulative sensitivity to change and the magnitude of change and is made using a degree of professional judgement. It should be noted that the cumulative effect assessed is the result of the addition of the Proposed Development to the existing baseline scenario. The cumulative assessment is based upon a four point scale as detailed in Table 7.8.3.

**Table 7.8.3: Criteria for Assessment of Cumulative Landscape Effects**

Cumulative Landscape Effect	Criteria
Major	The addition of the Proposed Development to the cumulative baseline scenario would result in the capacity of the landscape to accommodate wind energy development being overreached and the combined

Cumulative Landscape Effect	Criteria
	appearance of wind turbines in the landscape becoming a dominant and character defining feature.
Moderate	The addition of the Proposed Development to the cumulative baseline scenario would increase the appearance of wind turbines in the landscape to the extent that they may become locally dominant, but the proposed development would not exceed the overall capacity of the landscape to accommodate wind energy development.
Minor	The addition of the Proposed Development to the cumulative baseline scenario would add to the appearance of wind turbines in the landscape but would not result in a noticeable change to key landscape characteristics.
Negligible	The addition of the Proposed Development to the cumulative baseline scenario would not result in any discernible increase in the appearance or dominance of wind turbines in the landscape.

- 7.8.12 For the purposes of the CLVIA, effects with a rating of Moderate or greater are considered to be significant in terms of the EIA Regulations.

#### Cumulative Baseline Scenario

- 7.8.13 The cumulative baseline scenario comprises 44 operational, consented / under construction and proposed (application / appeal / scoping) wind developments, within 60km of the Proposed Development, as illustrated on Figure 7.7.2 and detailed in Technical Appendix 7.7: Existing and Proposed Wind Energy Developments within 60km. This represents the baseline situation as of March 5<sup>th</sup> 2021.
- 7.8.14 An initial appraisal of these sites in relation to the Proposed Development suggested that the potential for significant cumulative effects would be most likely to occur in relation to the Proposed Development seen in combination with sites within around 40km. Therefore, the assessment has focused on sites within or partly within this area. The sites selected for inclusion are detailed in Table 7.8.4 and shown on Figure 7.7.2. This list of sites for inclusion in the CLVIA has been agreed with THC and NatureScot.

**Table 7.8.4: Cumulative Baseline Sites Included in the CLVIA**

Site Name	Number of Turbines	Turbine Dimensions (m)		Location and Distance from Proposed Development
		Hub Height	Tip Height	
Operational Sites				
Achany Wind Farm	19	59	100	1.8km to south-east.
Beinn nan Oighrean	2	64	99.5	27.9km to south-east.
Beinn Tharsuinn	17	47	80	28.4km to south-east.
Coire na Cloiche	13	64	99.5	28.3km to south-east.
Corriemoillie Wind Farm	17	73.5	125	40.5km to south-west.
Gordonbush Wind Farm	35	69	110	39.5km to east-north-east.

Site Name	Number of Turbines	Turbine Dimensions (m)		Location and Distance from Proposed Development
		Hub Height	Tip Height	
Gordonbush Extension Wind Farm	11	82.3	149.9	37.8km to east-north-east.
Kilbraur Wind Farm	19	70	115	30.4km to east.
Kilbraur Wind Farm Extension	8	80	125	30.2km to east.
Lairg Wind Farm	3	60	99.5	13.6km south-east.
Lochluichart Wind Farm	17	68.5	125	42.1km south-south-west.
Lochluichart Wind Farm Extension	6	68.5	125	41.0km south-south-west.
Novar Wind Farm	34	42	61	34.0km south-south-east.
Novar Wind Farm Extension	16	70	106	35.4km south-south-east.
Rosehall Wind Farm	19	59	90	2.1km south-east.
<b>Consented / Under Construction Sites</b>				
Braemore Wind Farm	18	80	126	7.5km south-east.
Creag Riabhach Wind Farm	22	75	125	17.4km north-east.
Lairg Wind Farm Extension	10	112	180	13.3km south-east.
Lochluichart Wind Farm Extension II	5	76	133	40.2km south-south-west.
<b>Application / Appeal Sites</b>				
Kintradwell Wind Farm	15	81.9	149.9	42.0km to east.
Kirkan Wind Farm	17	100	175	39.7km to south-south-west.
Lairg Wind Farm Extension	10	82/122/132	150/190/200	13.6km to south-east.
Meall Buidhe Wind Farm	9	86	149.5	10.4km to south.
South Kilbraur Wind Farm	7	82	149.9	29.2km to east.
Strathroy Wind Farm	7	83	149.9	31.9km to south-east.
Strath Tirry Wind Farm	4	77.8	135	12.1km to north-east.
<b>Scoping Sites</b>				
Chleansaid Wind Farm	20	125	200	16.0km to north-east.
Garvary Wind Farm	37	105	180	13.5km to south-east.
Sallachy Wind Farm	9	83.4	149.9	8.4km to north.

Site Name	Number of Turbines	Turbine Dimensions (m)		Location and Distance from Proposed Development
		Hub Height	Tip Height	
Lochluichart Wind Farm Extension II	5	83	149.9	40.2km south/south-west

7.8.15 The cumulative assessment assesses effects resulting from the potential addition of the Proposed Development to two baseline scenarios:

- Where all operational and consented sites included in the assessment would be in place and operational; and
- Where relevant (and a different cumulative effect is anticipated) where all operational, consented, application/appeal and scoping sites included in the assessment would be in place and operational.

#### Analysis of the Cumulative ZTV

7.8.16 Cumulative ZTVs showing the theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development and those of the cumulative baseline wind developments have been produced to identify areas of combined and sequential visibility (see Figures 7.8.1 – 7.8.18). These demonstrate that the cumulative baseline scenario is one of relatively widespread visibility of wind turbines within central, southern and eastern parts of the wider study area, but that theoretical intervisibility with wind turbine is relatively sparse across western and eastern parts of the study area. However, review of the Cumulative ZTV for Operational and Under Construction sites shows that much of this intervisibility relates to developments which are not currently in existence, with the majority of intervisibility of sites currently in existence being focussed with in the central and south-eastern parts of the wider study area.

7.8.17 When consented sites are added to this, intervisibility is seen to increase in the northern and some central areas. Greater influence of wind farm development within the northern part of the wider study area and more northerly central parts is largely attributable to Creag Riabhach Wind Farm whilst increased intervisibility in central areas, particularly through Strath Oykel, mostly relates to the Braemore and Lairg Extension sites.

7.8.18 The addition of application sites adds a further concentration of intervisibility through central and south-east areas with fewer areas being seen in these parts of the study area that are not affected by some degree of wind farm development. The addition of Meall Buidhe leads to additional intervisibility into western areas whilst the combination of Meall Buidhe, Strath Tirry and the increased size of turbines at Lairg Extension leads to further predominance of through the detailed study area. Greater ZTV coverage along the east coast is also seen due to the addition of Kintradwell.

7.8.19 The cumulative baseline sites can be largely grouped into five distinct clusters as follows:

- Lairg grouping: Operational sites, Achany, Rosehall and Lairg, the consented Braemore and consented / application for variation Lairg Extension along with application site Meall Buidhe and scoping site Garvary are all located on hills surrounding the village of Lairg and nearby Achany Glen. All these sites tend to have intervisibility focussed within the central part of the wider study area and mainly within the detailed study area though some hills to the east and isolated summits to the north and west are also shown to be intervisible to some degree.

The more recent application site of Meall Buidhe and scoping site of Garvary would extend theoretical visibility of this grouping somewhat to the south-east and west.

- **Strath Brora Grouping:** The operational sites of Gordonbush and Kilbraur (plus extension) and Gordonbush Extension which is under construction, along with the application/appeal sites of Kilbraur South and Kintradwell. The ZTV indicates that intervisibility with these sites would be principally focussed within the eastern half of the wider study area with some of the higher ridges towards the central parts of the study area also obtaining more distant theoretical intervisibility.
- **Beinn Tharsuinn Grouping:** Comprising the operational sites of Beinn Tharsuinn, Beinn nan Oighrean, Coire na Cloiche and Novar (plus extension) and the application site Strathrory, set on the hills between the Dornoch and Cromarty Firths. These sites show intervisibility mostly focussed around the south-east of the wider study area, covering the flats around the Cromarty Firth and high ground and hills to the north and to some extent, the west. However, distant intervisibility is also shown to extend through Achany Glen and Lairg to an area to the east of Loch Shin.
- **Lochluichart Cluster:** A distinct cluster of turbines including the operational sites of Lochluichart (plus extension) and Corriemoillie with the consented / and scoping Lochluichart Extension 2, and the application site Kirkan. Intervisibility of these sites is very much focussed on the southern fringe of the wider study area with very limited combined intervisibility shown with the Proposed Development.
- **Northern Sites:** The consented site of Creag Riachach, application site of Strath Tirry and scoping sites of Chleansiad and Sallachy create a disparate grouping to the north of the Proposed Development. These sites show a more variable and changing picture of intervisibility focussed across the landscapes to the north and south of Loch Shin with a greater degree of intervisibility illustrated through the western hills for Chleansaigh and particular expanse of intervisibility for Creag Riabhach alone across the northern part of the wider study area.

7.8.20 The cumulative ZTVs show that the Proposed Development would share a fairly similar extent of intervisibility as the operational sites of Achany and Rosehall which lie closest to it, though with a greater degree of intervisibility across the northern part of the site and areas further to the north-east, on the east and west side of Glen Cassley. Review of the ZTV with all operational and constructed sites shows that additional intervisibility would be limited to these areas along with a small number of elevated areas to the north and south-east and very small areas to the east. There is little change to this picture when consented sites area added, with the exception of the areas to the north which would be likely to be greater affected by the closer Creag Riabhach Wind Farm. However, the addition of the application/appeal and scoping sites reduces the areas within which the Proposed Development would result in wind farm development being newly intervisible, particularly around Glen Cassley. This is due to a combination of the Meall Buidhe and Sallachy Wind Farms which would increase intervisibility in these areas.

### **Cumulative Landscape Effects Evaluation**

7.8.21 The detailed cumulative assessment of LCTs and protected and designated landscapes is presented in Technical Appendix 7.8: Cumulative Landscape Assessment Tables. The following section provides a summary of the results and key issues highlighted by the assessment.

Landscape Character*Effects Likely to be Significant*

- 7.8.22 Potential localised significant effects were identified for two of the LCTs: LCT 135: Rounded Hills - Caithness & Sutherland; and LCT 142: Strath - Caithness & Sutherland (localised to the Glen Cassley sub-area). These effects would occur across an area, broadly consistent with that identified for the Proposed Development alone.

*LCT 135: Rounded Hills - Caithness & Sutherland*

- 7.8.23 The Proposed Development would be located within this LCT and would therefore lead to an increase in wind turbine development within the LCT. However, the majority of areas potentially affected would already be influenced by the operational and consented turbines of Achany, Rosehall, Lairg and Braemore, and application and scoping sites of Meall Buidhe and Sallachy would further increase the influence of the cumulative baseline in this area. Cumulative sensitivity to additional change is considered to be generally Medium but High in areas where wild land characteristics predominate and locally around Lairg where the baseline scenario of application and scoping sites would lead to a notable focus of development.
- 7.8.24 The baseline scenario would result in only a few small areas of new intervisibility due to the Proposed Development. This would include a small area in the northern half of the Proposed Development site to the north of Càrn nam Bò Maola, and other very small areas around Strath Mulzie to the south-west of Strath Oykel. However, the Proposed Development would lead to a noticeable increase in the influence of wind turbines closer to the site leading to a more direct presence of wind turbines within the landscape where the baseline sites would appear more in the middle distance. This would occur in localised parts of the hills around Glen Cassley, within the Proposed Development site, and to the west and north of the Proposed Development and may affect qualities of remoteness. This effect would be anticipated to occur locally up to 6-10km from the Proposed Development when considering a baseline scenario of only operational and consented sites but would be reduced to around 6-8km if the scoping site of Sallachy were constructed, as this site would create a greater precedent for wind turbines to the north. However, there would be limited effect on the wider landscape characteristics of the LCT, as the Proposed Development would reflect the existing pattern of wind development created by the baseline scenario.
- 7.8.25 Magnitude of change would be variable, anticipated to be Medium within the area surrounding the Proposed Development to the north and west up to 6-8km (or 6-10km without the inclusion of application and scoping sites to the baseline) and Low elsewhere. The resultant cumulative effect is anticipated to be **Minor** (not significant) for the LCT in general, throughout the detailed study area, but *locally Moderate* (significant) for an area to the east and west of Glencassley, up to 6-8km from the Proposed Development (or locally up to 10km if application and scoping sites were not included in the baseline).

*LCT 142: Strath - Caithness & Sutherland (Glen Cassley sub-area)*

- 7.8.26 The baseline cumulative scenario would have considerable influence on the straths with turbines frequently seen sited on the surrounding and enclosing hills. However, the influence of these sites on Glen Cassley would be lesser than the other strath areas, limited to intervisibility with Rosehall Wind Farm and Meall Buidhe Wind Farm in its lower

reaches and across the glen-sides. The cumulative sensitivity to additional change is considered to be Medium.

- 7.8.27 In Glen Cassley, the Proposed Development turbines may appear noticeable on the eastern glen side of a section between Badintagairt and Glenmuick (see VP12, Figures 7.20.1 – 7.2-.4) and a small area south of Glencassley Castle (see VP11, Figures 7.19.1 – 7.19.4) and would generally influence western glen-side areas. Whilst there would already be some influence of wind turbines on parts of the glen, the effect of the Proposed Development would be more immediate and would affect areas not already influenced by wind farm development. This would lead to an increased sequential effect from wind turbines when moving through the glen, although because of the relatively limited effect from other sites on Glen Cassley cumulative effects would be more experienced when moving from the other glen areas of Glen Oykel / Kyle of Sutherland, into Glen Cassley. The Proposed Development would lead to some loss of distinction for Glen Cassley, which, unlike neighbouring glen areas, would have limited influence of wind turbines under the baseline scenario. However, the upper glen beyond Glenmuick and parts of the lower glen where woodland predominates would continue to have little effect from wind turbines.
- 7.8.28 Magnitude of additional change would be Medium for the Glen Cassley sub-area leading to a *locally Moderate* (significant) effect. This level of effect is anticipated to be consistent for both cumulative baseline scenarios (operational and consented sites only, and all cumulative baseline sites).

*Effects Likely to be Not Significant*

- 7.8.29 A **Moderate to Minor** (not significant) cumulative landscape effect was identified for the western sub-area of LCT 134: Sweeping Moorlands and Flows for a baseline scenario featuring operational and consented sites only. In this area, the Proposed Development would appear in combination with Achany and Rosehall, but as a slightly closer cluster, thereby having greater influence on the character of this area. However, the addition of the scoping site of Sallachy to the baseline scenario would mean that wind turbines would already be seen at closer proximity and have a greater influence on the character of this LCT, reducing the level of effect to **Minor** (not significant). A **Minor** (not significant) effect was also identified for the eastern sub-area of LCT 134: Sweeping Moorlands and Flows, for both baseline scenarios.
- 7.8.30 **Minor** (not significant) effects were also identified for the wider resource of LCT 134: Sweeping Moorlands and Flows, and LCT 231: Strath – Caithness and Sutherland for both cumulative baseline scenarios, as it is considered that the localised effects of the Proposed Development would lead to a perceptible increase in the influence of turbines on these landscape types as a whole, but would be broadly consistent with a character whereby wind turbines already form a characteristic of the surrounding landscape.
- 7.8.31 **Minor** (not significant) effects were also identified for the cumulative baseline scenario of operational and consented sites only for LCT 138: Lone Mountains, LCT 139: Rugged Mountain Massif – Caithness and Sutherland, and LCT 145: Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting where it was considered that the addition of the Proposed Development would lead to a perceptible increase in wind turbine development within the surrounding landscape, although it would not lead to wind turbines becoming a more noticeable characteristic of the landscape. However, for these LCTs, with the addition of application and scoping sites to the baseline, the cumulative effect is anticipated to be **Negligible** because the additional baseline sites would accentuate the prominence of wind turbine

development in the affected landscape setting to a level whereby the addition of the Proposed Development would lead to very little perceptible increase in the influence of wind turbines on the landscape.

#### Designated and Protected Landscapes

- 7.8.32 Four designated or protected landscapes were identified for inclusion in the cumulative assessment (see Technical Appendix 7.2: Landscape and Visual Scoping Appraisal). Cumulative effects to these areas are discussed in the following paragraphs with an emphasis on potential significant effects.

#### *Assynt Coigach NSA*

- 7.8.33 A **Minor** (not significant) cumulative effect is anticipated to the Assynt – Coigach NSA for the baseline scenario featuring operational and consented sites only. In the part of the NSA around Ben More Assynt the Proposed Development would be seen in the south-easterly context in combination with baseline cumulative sites in this area (Achany, Rosehall, Braemore, Lairg and Lairg Extension) but slightly closer which may locally affect wild land characteristics and expansive views. However, it would not introduce a new feature to this context as operational and consented sites would already exert widespread influence on this eastern edge of the NSA, leading to a clearly perceived context of wind farm development in the south-east and easterly landscape.

- 7.8.34 With the addition of application and scoping sites, the role of wind turbines as a characteristic of the eastern and south-eastern context would be increased and the additional effect of the Proposed Development in this context would be reduced. As this comprises an extremely localised part of the NSA, with very limited other intervisibility, the effect of the Proposed Development as an addition to the full baseline scenario is anticipated to be **Negligible**.

- 7.8.35 No further effects, other than those identified for the Proposed Development alone, are anticipated to the Special Qualities of the NSA and it is considered that the integrity of the NSA would not be affected by the introduction of the Proposed Development to either baseline scenario.

#### *WLA 34: Reay – Cassley*

- 7.8.36 The operational and consented cumulative baseline scenario would lead to influence from a group of sites to the south-east of the WLA, including Achany, Rosehall, Braemore, Lairg and Lairg Extension, affecting areas of high ground to east and west of Glen Cassley, and slopes and summits in the south-eastern part of the mountain core around Ben More Assynt. Creag Riabhach, in the north-eastern context would also affect higher ground around Ben More Assynt and Beinn Leòid as well as north-eastern slopes to the west of Loch Shin. With the addition of application and scoping sites to this baseline, the cluster around Achany would be increased and consolidated by Garvary, and Chleansaigh and Strath Tirry, and Meall Buidhe would create new clusters in the eastern and southern context. In addition, Sallachy which would be located within the WLA, would lead to a more established presence of wind turbines in the northern part of the area to the east of Glen Cassley, and would increase the influence of wind turbines on some of the eastern slopes and summits of Ben More Assynt and neighbouring hills to the west of Glen Cassley.

- 7.8.37 Overall, the cumulative baseline scenario would result in the most southerly parts of the WLA to east and west of Glen Cassley and around the Ben More Assynt massif being more

strongly influenced by wind turbine development within the near to mid-ground context to east and south, and directly in relation to Sallachy. This would be likely to reduce the baseline strength of wildness in these areas. However, given the protected nature of the landscape and high susceptibility of wild land to development, the sensitivity to additional change is still considered to be High.

- 7.8.38 The Proposed Development would be located in the south-eastern tip of the WLA and would therefore directly affect it. Across the plateau areas to the east and west of Glen Cassley and north-west of the Proposed Development, the Proposed Development would appear as part of the cluster of sites featuring Achany, Rosehall, Braemore, Lairg and Lairg Extension. However, it would appear slightly closer, leading to a more immediate influence of wind turbines in the south-east of the WLA, whilst the baseline sites appeared more distant. On the higher slopes and summits around Ben More Assynt, the Proposed Development would still appear slightly closer than existing cluster of sites but would have a more limited effect, due to the increased distance and greater evidence of baseline cumulative sites in the easterly context.
- 7.8.39 With the inclusion of all cumulative baseline sites, the strength of wildness would be less influenced by the Proposed Development in some areas, because built artefacts and contemporary land use would already appear as a more established feature of the context, particularly in relation to Sallachy Wind Farm, which would be within the WLA. However, the cumulative ZTV for the Proposed Development with Sallachy (Figure 7.8.18) shows that to the east of Glen Cassley, intervisibility of the two sites is quite distinct, whilst to the west of Glen Cassley, both sites would be intervisible from similar areas. This suggests that the Proposed Development would be less influential on the wild land attributes to the west of Glen Cassley, but may increase the area where these attributes would be reduced to the east of Glen Cassley. Nevertheless, with the presence of the other baseline sites in the northern, eastern and southern landscape context, there would be few areas where the Proposed Development would lead to wind turbines forming a new feature of the WLA.
- 7.8.40 For a baseline considering operational and consented sites only: a localised significant effect on the WLA Key Quality, A Medium cumulative magnitude of change on localised areas to the east and west of Glen Cassley, is anticipated to lead to a **Moderate** (significant) effect to the east of Glen Cassley within localised areas up to 5-6km and locally across a few areas of the high plateau to the west of Glen Cassley up to 8km and very occasionally to 10km.
- 7.8.41 When application and scoping sites are added to the baseline, the **Moderate** (significant) effect is anticipated to extend slightly to localised areas up to 7-8km to east of Glen Cassley, because it would lead to fewer areas within this part of the WLA where wind turbines would not form a noticeable feature. However, this effect would be offset by a likely reduction in the extent of significant effects, to the west of Glen Cassley, limited to areas within around 7-8km, due to the existing effect of Sallachy on more northerly areas which would be further from the Proposed Development.
- 7.8.42 A **Minor** (not significant) effect of the Proposed Development added to the operational and consented baseline is anticipated across mountain summit areas around Ben More Assynt, Meall an Aonaich Breabag and Beinn Leòid where the Proposed Development would be seen at greater distance within a wider context of baseline sites. With the addition of all application and scoping sites, this effect would be similar, but reduced in

areas around Beinn Leòid due to the closer proximity of Sallachy to these areas. The effect on all other areas, comprising the vast majority of the extensive WLA would be **Negligible**.

- 7.8.43 For both cumulative baseline scenarios, a corresponding significant effect within localised parts of the high plateaux to east and west of Glen Cassley, would be anticipated for the WLA Key Quality, *“Extensive, elevated peatland slopes whose simplicity and openness contribute to a perception of awe, whilst highlighting the qualities of adjacent mountains,”* due to a perception of reduced scale to the open peatland landscape setting in the south-eastern context. However, this is anticipated to be less obvious than that occurring from the Proposed Development alone because the cumulative baseline, in particular the sites to the north such as Creag Riabhach, and Chleansaid and Sallachy would already lead to a perceived loss of scale across these areas. The direct effect of Sallachy on the WLA would also result in a slightly smaller baseline area where the physical attributes and perceptual responses of wild land would be more apparent. However, in general, a lower baseline strength of these attributes already occurs within the area to the east of Glen Cassley (see Technical Appendix 7.5, section 3). Nevertheless, the addition of the Proposed Development would influence areas not already affected by Sallachy and would contribute to a perceived reduction in scale of the peatland landscape, one of the factors contributing to the WLA Key Quality of *“Extensive elevated peatland slopes...”*. However, as the Proposed Development would be located at the far southern tip of the WLA whilst Sallachy would be located further north, it is considered that this reduction in scale would already have occurred in large part due to the introduction of Sallachy.
- 7.8.44 There would be no significant cumulative effects to any of the other three WLA Key Qualities.
- 7.8.45 The area to the east of Glen Cassley is peripheral to the main body of the WLA and its relationship to the landscapes to the west and north-west is therefore considered key in terms of its integrity as part of the WLA. From areas to the north of the Proposed Development and west of Sallachy, the connection to the wider WLA would still be maintained and the WLA Key Quality of *“Extensive elevated peatland slopes...”* would still be experienced. It is therefore considered that the integrity of the WLA would be retained.

*WLA 37: Fionaven – Ben Hee*

- 7.8.46 The cumulative baseline scenario would result in direct effect on WLA 37 by Creag Riabhach Wind Farm on the eastern boundary of the WLA which would noticeably reduce the baseline strength of wildness across eastern parts of its southern section. However, the Proposed Development would appear to bring wind turbines slightly closer in the southern context which may affect the perceived extent of the WLA in this direction. This is anticipated to lead to small, non-significant effects to the WLA Key Qualities, *“Extensive peatland slopes that appear awe-inspiring in their simplicity and contrast to neighbouring mountains, and allow wide open views of the surrounding area,”* on parts of the southern WLA, and *“Towering, rugged mountains, highlighted by their prominent rock covering, that appear awe-inspiring and contribute to a strong sense of naturalness,”* experienced in some areas around Ben Hee. However, with the addition of the application and scoping sites to the baseline, there would be a much greater sense of wind farm development at closer proximity and this effect would therefore be reduced. The cumulative effect is therefore anticipated to be **Minor** (not significant) for a cumulative baseline scenario

featuring only operational and consented sites, and **Negligible** when application and scoping sites are added to the cumulative baseline scenario.

#### *Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA*

- 7.8.47 The effect on the Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA is anticipated to be **Minor** (not significant) for the operational and consented cumulative baseline scenario and **Negligible** with the addition of application and scoping sites. The Proposed Development would appear in the south-western context of this SLA to the west of the Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms. This would draw out the appearance of wind turbines in this direction, but similar to the operational and consented baseline sites, would appear relatively distant and separate from the SLA. A small degree of change to the Special Quality “*Extensive views from peaks and summits,*” is anticipated. With the addition of application and scoping sites to the baseline, Chleansaid and Strath Tirry would form closer groupings of turbines, with a more direct influence on parts of the SLA and Sallachy would create a precedent of wind farm development further west within the more distant context. In this scenario, the addition of the Proposed Development is considered unlikely to noticeably affect the characteristics of the SLA as wind turbines would be an established feature of the south and south-easterly context.

#### Summary of Cumulative Landscape Effects

- 7.8.48 Table 7.8.5 and Table 7.8.6 provide a summary of predicted cumulative landscape effects on those LCTs / LCAs and designated and protected landscapes included in the CLVIA.

**Table 7.8.5: Summary of Cumulative Landscape Effects – Operational and Consented Baseline Scenario**

Landscape Areas included in the CLVIA	Potential Effect (Not Significant)			Potential Effect (Significant)		
	Negligible	Minor	Minor - Moderate	Moderate	Moderate - Major	Major
<b>Landscape Character Types</b>						
LCT 134 – Sweeping Moorlands and Flows		X (L)	X (L)			
LCT 135 – Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland		X		X (L)		
LCT 138 – Lone Mountains		X				
LCT 139 – Rugged Mountain Massif – Caithness and Sutherland		X				
LCT 231 – Strath – Caithness and Sutherland		X		X (L)		
LCT 145 – Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting		X				
<b>Designated and Protected Landscapes</b>						
Assynt – Coigach NSA		X				

Landscape Areas included in the CLVIA	Potential Effect (Not Significant)			Potential Effect (Significant)		
	Negligible	Minor	Minor - Moderate	Moderate	Moderate - Major	Major
WLA 34. Reay – Cassley		X (L)		X (L)		
WLA 37. Foinaven – Ben Hee		X				
Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA		X				

**Table 7.8.6: Summary of Cumulative Landscape Effects – Operational, Consented Application and Scoping Baseline Scenario**

Landscape Areas included in the CLVIA	Potential Effect (Not Significant)			Potential Effect (Significant)		
	Negligible	Minor	Minor - Moderate	Moderate	Moderate - Major	Major
<b>Landscape Character Types</b>						
LCT 134 – Sweeping Moorlands and Flows		X				
LCT 135 – Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland		X		X (L)		
LCT 138 – Lone Mountains	X					
LCT 139 – Rugged Mountain Massif – Caithness and Sutherland	X					
LCT 231 – Strath – Caithness and Sutherland		X		X (L)		
LCT 145 – Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting						
<b>Designated and Protected Landscapes</b>						
Assynt – Coigach NSA	X					
WLA 34. Reay – Cassley		X (L)		X (L)		
WLA 37. Foinaven – Ben Hee	X					
Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA	X					

## 7.9 Visual Assessment: Methodology

- 7.9.1 The GLVIA3 methodology for visual assessment identifies familiarity with the site and the extent, nature and expectation of existing views as a key factor in establishing the visual sensitivity in terms of the development proposed. The guidelines require evaluation of magnitude of change to views experienced by sensitive receptors, comprising individuals

living, working, travelling and carrying out other activities within the landscape, and subsequent evaluation of effect significance. The potential to mitigate adverse effects should also be considered.

7.9.2 There are four key stages to the visual assessment:

- Establishment of the baseline;
- Appreciation of the development proposed;
- Analysis of visual receptors and potential effects; and
- Assessment of effect significance.

#### **Establishment of the Baseline**

7.9.3 Establishment of the baseline conditions has been undertaken through a combination of desk study, consultation and site appraisal.

#### Identification of Visual Receptors

7.9.4 For there to be a visual effect, there needs to be a viewer. Individuals experiencing views from locations such as buildings, recognised routes and popular viewpoints used by the public have been considered in this assessment. Those experiencing views are referred to as visual receptors.

7.9.5 The ZTV was reviewed to aid identification of visual receptors with the potential to experience visual effects from the Proposed Development, informed by review of a range of desk resources, and supplemented by ASH's existing knowledge of the study area. The following resources were used to enhance understanding of the use of the study area by potential visual receptors:

- Relevant development plans and supplementary planning guidance as described in section 7.4;
- OS mapping resources and aerial photography;
- Citations and descriptions of landscape designations and protected areas, as outlined in paragraph 7.5.4; and
- Other web-based tourism, recreation and information resources (see list of references in section 7.16).

7.9.6 The list of representative viewpoints (VPs) was refined and approved through post-Scoping consultation with THC and NatureScot. A full list of VPs considered for inclusion in the visual assessment is included in Technical Appendix 7.2: Landscape and Visual Scoping Appraisal, along with the rationale for those selected.

#### Site Appraisal

7.9.7 Site visits were undertaken between August 2020 and March 2021 by Chartered Landscape Professionals to verify the visual receptors identified through desk study, identify any further potential receptors which had been missed and collate information on baseline visual amenity. Site recording involved the completion of standardised recording forms and annotation of 1:25,000 and 1:50,000 Ordnance Survey plans, supported by a photographic record of views from key receptor locations.

### Appreciation of the Proposed Development

- 7.9.8 Appreciation of the Proposed Development involves the accumulation of a thorough knowledge of the proposal (as detailed in Chapter 3: Description of Development), and its location, scale and potential appearance within the visual amenity context. To aid this process, ZTVs and wirelines of the Proposed Development were consulted, along with use of TrueView Visuals, ipad-based specialist software which uses augmented reality to show how the Proposed Development may appear within the view. The limitations of these resources are discussed in Technical Appendix 7.1: Technical Methodologies for Visual Representation.

### Analysis of Visual Receptors and Potential Effects

- 7.9.9 Preparation of the visual baseline is followed by the systematic identification of likely effects on potential visual receptors. This is a two-fold process, giving consideration to how effects may arise from aspects of the Proposed Development, and how these changes may be accommodated in the existing baseline view.
- 7.9.10 Visual receptors and representative viewpoints identified for inclusion in the assessment were visited and key information on the nature, composition and characteristics of the existing view experienced recorded. Consideration is given to the likely perceived value of a particular view to the viewer, taking into account the nature of the receptor and the potential activity they may be involved in, and factors such as elevation, extent and key features or attractions which may feature in the view.

### Visual Receptor Sensitivity

- 7.9.11 The evaluation of visual sensitivity considers both the perceived value of the existing view and the susceptibility of the visual receptor to change. It is important to note that the judgement of visual sensitivity is considered in relation to an understanding of both the existing view obtained by the receptor and the development proposed and therefore perceived value of the area of change as a part of the view as a whole contributes to the sensitivity evaluation.
- 7.9.12 Visual sensitivity to the change proposed has been evaluated using a three-point scale as shown in Table 7.9.1.

**Table 7.9.1: Visual Sensitivity Criteria**

Visual Sensitivity	Criteria
High	Visual receptors obtaining views from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dwellings and publically accessible buildings where the changed aspect is an important element in the view and there are no detracting features present; and</li> <li>• recreational routes and locations where the changed aspect is an important element in the view and there are no detracting features present.</li> </ul>

Visual Sensitivity	Criteria
Medium	Visual receptors obtaining views from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dwellings and publically accessible buildings where the changed aspect is a less important element in the view and / or where some detracting features are present;</li> <li>• recreational routes and locations where the changed aspect is a less important element in the view and / or where some detracting features are present;</li> <li>• roads and transport routes where the changed aspect is an important element in the view and there are no detracting features present; and</li> <li>• workplaces where the changed aspect is an important element of the view and there are no detracting features present.</li> </ul>
Low	Visual receptors obtaining views from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dwellings and publically accessible buildings where the changed aspect is an unimportant element in the view and / or numerous detracting features are present;</li> <li>• recreational routes and locations where the changed aspect is an unimportant element in the view and / or where numerous detracting features are present;</li> <li>• roads and transport routes where the changed aspect is a less important element in the view and / or where some detracting features are present; and</li> <li>• workplaces where the changed aspect is a less important element in the view and / or where some detracting features are present.</li> </ul>

### Magnitude of Change

7.9.13 Magnitude of change concerns the extent to which the existing view would be altered by the Proposed Development. The evaluation of magnitude gives consideration to factors such as the scale or extent of the changes within the view, the extent to which this may alter the composition or focus of the view and the duration and reversibility of these changes. Magnitude of change has been evaluated using a four-point scale, detailed in Table 7.9.2.

**Table 7.9.2: Criteria for Magnitude of Visual Change**

Magnitude of Visual Change	Criteria
High	Where the proposed development would cause a very noticeable change in the existing view.
Medium	Where the proposed development would cause a noticeable change in the existing view.
Low	Where the proposed development would cause a perceptible change in the existing view.
Negligible	Where the proposed development would cause a largely imperceptible change in the existing view.

7.9.14 In recognition of the differing changes that would occur over time, two ratings for magnitude of change have been included: during the construction of the Proposed Development, and during operation.

**Assessment of Effects Significance**

- 7.9.15 The level of visual effect identified concerns the importance of changes resulting from the Proposed Development. Evaluation of the effect and determination of significance is based on consideration of the magnitude of change in relation to sensitivity, taking into account proposed mitigation measures, and is established using professional judgement. The assessment takes into account likely changes to the visual composition, including the extent to which new features would distract or screen existing elements in the view or disrupt the scale, structure or focus of the existing view.
- 7.9.16 Significance has been evaluated using a four-point scale, as detailed in Table 7.9.3 below.

**Table 7.9.3: Visual Effect Significance Criteria**

Visual Effect Rating	Criteria
Major	The Proposed Development would become a prominent and very detracting feature and would result in a very noticeable deterioration to an existing highly valued and well composed view.
Moderate	The Proposed Development would introduce some detracting features to an existing highly valued view or would be more prominent within a pleasing or less well composed view, resulting in a noticeable deterioration of the quality of view.
Minor	The Proposed Development would form a perceptible but not detracting feature within a pleasing or valued view or would be a prominent feature within a poorly composed view of limited value, resulting in a small deterioration to the existing view.
Negligible	The Proposed Development would form a barely perceptible feature within the existing view and would not result in any discernible deterioration to the view.

- 7.9.17 As for magnitude of change, two ratings for visual effects have been included: during the construction of the Proposed Development, and during operation. For the purposes of the LVIA, effects with a rating of Moderate or greater are considered to be significant in terms of the EIA Regulations.

**7.10 Visual Assessment: Baseline****Visual Context**

- 7.10.1 As described in section 7.6 settlement and roads are sparse across the study area and largely limited to straths and glens through central and western parts and more concentrated towards the east. This leads to a sense of containment to many views, particularly from the main routes. However, the open landscapes to the north of the Proposed Development lead to more wide-reaching and expansive views being obtained across vast distances. Scattered crofting properties elevated on the ridges and plateaux and high level routes also present more extensive vistas.
- 7.10.2 The wider area is popular for recreation and therefore more open views are often obtained by users of longer distance paths and hill-walkers ascending the surrounding mountains which provide extremely expansive, elevated views across the entire study area.
- 7.10.3 Wind farms are already a noticeable feature within many views, predominantly throughout the eastern central parts of the study area, often seen from within the straths

and glens on the skyline above the surrounding hills, and also in the wider views from upland areas.

### Potential Receptors

#### Interpretation of the ZTV

- 7.10.4 The ZTV (see Figure 7.1.1) indicates that the majority of theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development would occur relatively close to the Proposed Development, affecting plateau areas and slopes to either side of Glen Cassley, south of Strath Oykel and to the north-east of Loch Shin within 15-20km of the Proposed Development. Beyond this distance, theoretical visibility is more limited, predominantly confined to areas of facing slopes and higher ground with the main areas being around Strath Mulzie, Beinn Tharsuinn, Ben Hee, Ben Klibreck and Rhilochan. From the highest areas 15-20 turbines would potentially be visible but lower lying areas, particularly around Loch Shin would typically have theoretical visibility of fewer numbers of turbines.
- 7.10.5 Most of the straths and glens which contain the majority of settlement show limited ZTV coverage. However, theoretical visibility is indicated in small sections of Glen Cassley, where a few properties and a minor road are present. At the southern end of Glen Cassley, where it joins with Strath Oykel and Kyle of Sutherland, theoretical visibility is shown to affect properties and routes around Rosehall including the A837 and ZTV coverage is also shown to affect further scattered properties, routes and settlements down the Kyle of Sutherland to the south-east including Invershin, Rosehall and the A836. Extensive areas of theoretical visibility across areas to the north of Loch Shin also affect settled areas including Shinness and Achnairn and Crask and the A836 and A838 roads. Elsewhere, a number of rural properties and minor routes on the western outskirts of Lairg, and higher ground around Rogart are shown to be potentially affected, as are a few remote lodge properties situated in some of the rural glens.

#### Representative Viewpoints

- 7.10.6 Twenty-one viewpoints have been selected throughout the wider study area to represent the range of views which would be obtained of the Proposed Development. These viewpoints form the basis of the visual assessment. Viewpoints selected are all within areas shown to have theoretical visibility by the ZTV. The selection of viewpoints has been an iterative process in consultation with THC and NatureScot, with a greater number of VPs considered than those included in the final list. Detail of all those considered and the rationale for those selected is included in Technical Appendix 7.2: Landscape and Visual Scoping Appraisal.
- 7.10.7 The viewpoints selected are detailed in Table 7.10.1 and shown on Figure 7.4.1. A larger version of the viewpoints plan is included as Figure 7.4.2.

**Table 7.10.1: Viewpoints**

Ref.	Location	OS Grid Reference	Reason for Selection
VP1	A836 above the Crask Inn	NC 52294 25050	Overlooking local stopping point on otherwise undeveloped route. Also illustrative of cumulative effects.

Ref.	Location	OS Grid Reference	Reason for Selection
VP2	A836 bridge by Dalnessie entrance	NC 57475 13940	Request for inclusion by THC. Representative of views obtained by travellers on the A836.
VP3	Saval	NC 59173 08273	Representative of views from scattered residential properties. Also illustrative of cumulative effects.
VP4	Rhilochan	NC 74824 06805	Representative of views from residential area to east of Proposed Development. Also illustrative of cumulative effects (VP reintroduced to ensure adequate representation of views from this area)
VP5	Ben Hee	NC 42655 33931	Popular summit and Corbett within WLA 37 – Foinaven – Ben Hee. Also illustrative of cumulative effects.
VP6	Rosehall	NC 47028 02032	Representative of views from small settlement and A837 'A' road, close to the site (VP position adjusted slightly to ensure a clear view of turbines).
VP7	High Road	NC 60226 04804	Representative of scattered residential properties. Also illustrative of cumulative effects. (VP position adjusted slightly as recently built house obscures view from original location).
VP8	A836 - A838 Junction	NC 57326 09947	Views from public road junction and representative of scattered residential properties.
VP9	Achnairn caravan and camping site entrance	NC 55793 12701	Visitor gathering location and representative of scattered residential properties.
VP10	Ben More Assynt	231833, 920148	Popular summit and Munro within Assynt – Coigach NSA and WLA 34 – Reay – Cassley. Also illustrative of cumulative effects.
VP11	Glencassley road to south of Castle	NC 44489 06224	Representative of views from minor road and Glen Cassley (VP moved from position north of castle due to change in theoretical visibility).
VP12	Glencassley road by Langwell Hill	NC 40664 12269	Representative of views from minor road and Glen Cassley.
VP13	Ben Klibreck	NC 58527 29902	Popular summit and Munro located on the edge of the Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA and within WLA 35 – Ben Klibreck - Armine Forest. Also illustrative of cumulative effects.
VP14	A838 near West Shinness	NC 52823 15428	'A' road and representative of views from scattered residential properties.

Ref.	Location	OS Grid Reference	Reason for Selection
VP15	B9176, Struie Viewpoint	NC 65267 85756	Stopping point and viewing location for travellers on the B9176 public road within Dornoch Firth NSA
VP16	Minor road at Inveroykel forest access	NC 47391 00319	Minor road and representative of scattered residential properties. Also illustrative of cumulative effects.
VP17	A836 at Allt na Fearnà	NC 58238 01712	Representative of views from section of A road and Moray Firth National Tourist Route (VP position adjusted due to recent growth of tree and to ensure it is representative of views from the road).
VP18	Carn Chuinneag	NH 48364 83325	Popular summit and Corbett within WLA 29 – Rhiddoroch - Beinn Dearg - Ben Wyvis and on edge of Fannichs, Beinn Dearg and Glencalvie SLA. Also illustrative of cumulative effects (VP reintroduced to ensure representation of the southerly view.)
VP19	Seana Bhràigh	NH 28181 87872	Popular summit and Munro within WLA 29 – Rhiddoroch - Beinn Dearg - Ben Wyvis and Fannichs, Beinn Dearg and Glencalvie SLA. Also illustrative of cumulative effects.
VP20	Cul Mòr	NC 16208 11909	Popular Corbett summit in Assynt Coigach NSA and WLA 32 – Inverpolly – Glencanisp.
VP21	Meall an Aonaich	NC 33603 16417	Summit within Assynt Coigach NSA and WLA 34 – Reay – Cassley.

### Settlements and Routes

- 7.10.8 The visual assessment of settlements / residential areas and routes has been limited to those where the ZTV for the detailed study area (Figure 7.1.1) indicates potential for effect. However, the potential for views of site access, site compounds and laydown has also been considered. The rationale for the inclusion of residential areas and routes in the visual assessment is included in Technical Appendix 7.2: Landscape and Visual Scoping Appraisal.
- 7.10.9 Thirty-nine residential receptor locations (RRLs) within 20km have been identified by the ZTV as receiving theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development as illustrated on Figures 7.5.1 to 7.5.3. These locations comprise individual and groups of properties, settlements and associated outdoor areas and are summarised as follows:
- Strath Tirry: **RRL1 to RRL4** comprise a number of remote properties in Stath Tirry off the A836 (excluding RRL2 which is accessed from Achnairn). Visual receptors in these locations obtain generally open views across the broad strath and surrounding moorland, being particularly extensive from RRL1 (Crask) but more enclosed from RRL3 (Rhian) which is surrounded by trees. Existing turbines may be seen on the skyline in southerly views at varying distances.
  - North-east of Loch Shin: **RRL5 to RRL9** comprise a grouping of properties set close to the loch-side and elevated above Loch Shin. Properties in these areas have a mixed orientation with those further to the south-east tending to take advantage

of views towards the south-east over Lairg and Achany Glen whilst those further north-west tend to be more orientated across Loch Shin to the south-west. Wider views are available from some garden areas and minor roads although trees, garden vegetation and outbuildings limit some views. Existing turbines are seen on the skyline in views to the south-east and south.

- West and north-west of Lairg: **RRL11 to RRL17** comprise a range of houses, farming and crofting properties, mostly elevated above Lairg village. Views obtained from these locations are generally elevated across Lairg and the surrounding valleys. Views are mostly open although from some of the lower areas such as RRL12, RRL14 and RRL15, trees reduce the extent of the available view somewhat. Views tend to be orientated more to the south and west, although views from RRL16 are more northerly in aspect. Existing Achany and Rosehall wind turbines are seen in westerly views and Lairg Wind Farm is present in southerly views from most of these locations.
- Strath Fleet and Rogart: **RRL18 to RRL21** comprise a small number of isolated properties on the valley-sides of Strath Fleet and the rural plateau to the north. RRL18 and RRL19 have views generally channelled along and across Strath Fleet with those from RRL19 being elevated. Wide and expansive views are obtained in all directions from RRL20 but particularly southwards across Loch Preas nan Sgiathanach and existing distant turbines are seen in the southerly and easterly views from this location.
- Kyle of Sutherland: **RRL22 – RR25** comprise a range of properties and public areas set around the settlements of Invershin and Bonar Bridge, including Carbisdale Castle. Views from these properties are usually contained within the valley of the Kyle but are more expansive from elevated areas around RRL24 and Carbisdale Castle. Views directed up the Kyle feature existing Achany and Rosehall turbines on the skyline.
- Upper Kyle of Sutherland: **RRL26 to RRL28** comprise a grouping of scattered properties comprising cottages and larger lodges, stretched along the south side of the Kyle of Sutherland. The existing turbines of Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms are very noticeable in the generally northerly views obtained from these properties across the Kyle. Trees and forest filter views from some areas.
- Rosehall and Altass: **RRL29 and RRL30**, and **RRL33 to RRL36** comprise a range of residential properties and public areas set on the north side of the Kyle of Sutherland. Views from these locations are generally orientated southwards across the Kyle of Sutherland with surrounding woodland and forest limiting views in other directions. From Rosehall village (RRL29), a more mixed aspect to the view is obtained across and up Glen Cassley to the north-east as well as south-east across and down the Kyle of Sutherland. Existing turbines of Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms are seen in some views from this area, although they are often hidden by the surrounding forest and woodland.
- Glencassley: **RRL31 and RRL32** comprise a small number of estate properties with views contained and channelled along Glen Cassley. Trees limit the extent of the view from RRL31 while a more open, mostly southerly view down the glen can be obtained from in and around RRL32.
- Remote Lodges and Bothies: **RRL10 and RRL21** and **RRL37 to RRL39** comprise a range of remote lodge and bothy properties located at Glen Einig, Strath Mulzie, Loch Fiag and Dalnessie. These properties have a range of views towards

surrounding mountains, lochs and glens with some trees and forest limiting views in some directions. Existing turbines are seen in some of these views but are not very noticeable.

7.10.10 Routes considered in the assessment include public roads and other public transport routes, Core Paths and routes included in the ‘Scottish Hill Tracks’ (Scotways, 2011), as shown on Figure 7.6.1 and 7.6.2. As for residential receptors, the ZTV (see Figure 7.1.1) shows many routes as unlikely to receive views of the Proposed Development and therefore a scoping exercise was undertaken to identify those most likely to be affected and therefore included in the assessment (see Technical Appendix 7.2: Landscape and Visual Scoping Appraisal). Eighteen routes were identified with the potential for effect and therefore included in the assessment. These include:

- Various sections of public A and B roads: The A836 between Dornoch Bridge and Altnaharra (Routes R1, R2 and R3), the A837 between Invershin and Oykel Bridge (Route R6), the A838 between Dalchork and Corrykinloch (Route R4), the A839 between Pittentrail and Lairg (Route R5) and the B9176 between Edderton Junction and the Junction with the A836 (Route R7);
- Minor roads: The C1136 between Ardgay and Brae (Route R8), and the U2117 Cassley Bridge – Duchally Road (Glen Cassley) (Route R9);
- The Far North Railway Line between Tain Station and Rogart Station (Route R10);
- Core Paths: SU16.02: Gunn’s Wood (Route R11), SU21.03: Allt an Tuir Burn Walk (Route R12), SU21.08: Rosehall Estate (Route R13), SU21.09: Achness Waterfall (Route 14) and SU21.10: Oykel Bridge – Glen Einig (included as part of Route R15); and
- Scottish Hill Tracks: Track 319 a and b between Strath Rusdale and Ardgay (Route R16), Track 332 between Kylesky and the A837 near Benmore Lodge (Route R17), Track 341 between Dalnessie and Crask via Loch Choire (Route R18) and Tracks 321 between Strath Rusdale and Oykel Bridge, 323 between Inverlael and Oykel Bridge and 324 between Ullapool and Oykel Bridge (all included as part of Route R15).

7.10.11 Detailed descriptions of the baseline views from viewpoints, residential areas and routes included in the assessment are provided in Technical Appendix 7.9: Visual Assessment Tables.

## 7.11 Visual Assessment: Assessment of Effects

7.11.1 A detailed assessment of effects on views from VPs, RRLs and Routes is presented in Technical Appendix 7.9: Visual Assessment Tables which includes an analysis of the visual receptor sensitivity and magnitude of change resulting from the Proposed Development. Potential effects identified are summarised below with an emphasis on potential significant effects.

### Viewpoints

7.11.2 Of the 21 representative VPs selected for inclusion within the visual assessment (see Figure 7.4.1 or 7.4.2), the majority were identified as likely to have no significant effect to the view. Potential significant effects were identified to views from six VPs:

- VP6 – Rosehall;
- VP9 – Achnairn Caravan and Camping Site Entrance;
- VP11 – Glencassley Road to South of Castle;

- VP12 – Glencassley Road by Langwell Hill;
- VP14 – A838 near West Shinness; and
- VP21 – Meall an Aonaich.

#### Effects Likely to be Significant

##### *VP6 – Rosehall*

- 7.11.3 This VP (see Figure 7.14.1 - 7.14.4) is located 4.79km to the south of the Proposed Development and is representative of views obtained by residents and visitors to Rosehall village. It is located adjacent to the A837 public road on the slightly elevated western side of the village, representative of a worst case view from the village. The view is relatively contained featuring buildings interspersed with trees and woodland, with a backdrop of containing hills clad by forest on their slopes but with clear summits. Some existing turbines of Rosehall Wind Farm are seen prominently from this location on the summit of the enclosing hill to the north-east. Although representative of residential visual receptors, due to the prominence of existing wind turbines, sensitivity is considered to be Medium.
- 7.11.4 The southerly turbines of the Proposed Development would appear on the skyline, slightly oblique to the main focus of the view as blades and hubs. These would appear very noticeable, though similar to existing turbines which are visible, and would extend the field of view occupied by wind turbines. Further oblique, within the northerly view, more distant turbines may be perceptible up Glen Cassley, but filtered or screened by trees.
- 7.11.5 A Medium - High magnitude of change to the view from this VP is considered to lead to a **Moderate** (significant) visual effect during construction and operation.

##### *VP9 – Achnairn caravan and camping site entrance*

- 7.11.6 This VP (see Figure 7.17.1 - 7.17.4), located 9.65km to the east of the Proposed Development, is representative of views obtained by residents and visitors to a small linear settlement area and a small campsite in an elevated position to the north-east of Loch Shin. Elevated views are obtained to south-east, down Loch Shin and Achany Glen and south-west across Loch Shin, partially reduced by trees and roadside vegetation. Existing turbines of Achany Wind Farm are present as blades and hubs on the skyline to the south-west and those of Lairg Wind Farm are present to the south-east. The sensitivity for this viewpoint is considered to be Medium, due to the existing turbine blades and tips which are seen which create a precedent for wind turbines within the view.
- 7.11.7 Turbines of the Proposed Development would be seen to the west-south-west, generally slightly oblique within the main orientation of the view. Blades and hubs of turbines would appear in a low point on the skyline between two hills with a few additional tips likely to be barely perceptible. Hubs would be below the height of the adjacent skyline hills which provide some containment, reducing prominence of the turbines to some extent. The Proposed Development would be seen to extent the presence of existing wind turbines further to the west within the main view, thereby increasing their prominence as a feature of the view.
- 7.11.8 A Medium magnitude of change is anticipated to the view from this VP which is predicted to lead to **Moderate** (significant) visual effect during construction and operation.

*VP11 – Glencassley road to south of Castle*

- 7.11.9 This VP (see Figure 7.19.1 - 7.19.4) is located 2.42km to the west of the Proposed Development and is representative of views obtained by travellers and recreational users of the rural road through Glen Cassley. The view from this location is from low vantage, enclosed and directed by steep heather-clad and forested glen sides to north and south, but filtered or screened by riverside trees to the north. A few tips and one turbine of the Rosehall Wind Farm appear above the glen-side to the south-east. The sensitivity of the view in this location is considered to be Medium, reflective of the use of the route by recreational visual receptors mitigated by the position of the site outwith the main focus of the view, and the presence of some existing distracting features in the view.
- 7.11.10 Two turbines and two blades of the Proposed Development would appear above the easterly glen-side and would appear larger than the existing visible turbines. However, these turbines would not distract from the main, funnelled views down the glen from this location. Construction works such as cranes would also be visible in this view but given the proximity of the turbines, are not expected to lead to a different level of visual effect compared to operational effects.
- 7.11.11 The magnitude of change would be Medium to High anticipated to lead to a **Moderate** (significant) visual effect during construction and operation.

*VP12 – Glencassley road by Langwell Hill*

- 7.11.12 This VP (see Figure 7.20.1 - 7.20.4), located 4.15km to the north-east of the Proposed Development, is also representative of views obtained by travellers and recreational users of rural road through Glen Cassley, located in the upper glen. The view from this location is low vantage, framed by low valley sides to north and south, up and down the open glen floor and interrupted by occasional mid-ground trees and stands of coniferous trees and native woodland on glen slopes. Ben More Assynt forms a particular focus when looking up the glen. Sensitivity is considered to be Medium, reflecting the recreational use of this route and open view, and the position of the Proposed Development site in comparison to the main focus of the view.
- 7.11.13 Turbines of the Proposed Development would appear above the skyline of the easterly glen-side between enclosing hills, with a few tips appearing above the skyline of the more distant glen side. Turbines would appear moderately large and form a focus within this part of the view, though would not intrude into the glen and would not affect the open views down the glen, or up towards the mountains which form the main focus of the view.
- 7.11.14 A High magnitude of change is anticipated to lead to a **Moderate** (significant) effect during construction and operation to the view from this VP.

*VP14 – A838 near West Shinness*

- 7.11.15 This VP (see Figure 7.22.1 - 7.22.4) is located 8.29km to the north-east of the Proposed Development and is representative of views obtained by residents and visitors to nearby properties at Shinness and West Shinness, and road users on the A838. This location affords slightly elevated views with the prevailing direction of views from properties in this area being south-west, across Loch Shin to the ridge line on far side which has forest and woodland on the lower slopes but a smooth heather-clad skyline. Panoramic views, looking south-east down Loch Shin and west towards Ben More Assynt, slightly filtered by roadside trees and woodland are more representative of those perceived by road

users. Existing wind turbines of Achany Wind Farm appear as blades above the skyline to the south-south-west. Visual sensitivity for this VP is considered to be Medium to High due to the principal aspect of the view being towards the Proposed Development site, though existing turbines are present within the slightly more oblique view.

- 7.11.16 The Proposed Development would feature within the main view (representative of the view from properties) looking across Loch Shin. Turbines would appear above the skyline though would be positioned on a low point between hills which would lead to some containment in the view, reducing prominence slightly. The Proposed Development would increase the numbers of turbines visible in the view and move these further into the main view from properties leading to a noticeable change to the view.
- 7.11.17 Magnitude of change for this VP would be Medium which is anticipated to lead to a **Moderate** (significant) visual effect during construction and operation.

*VP21 – Meall an Aonaich*

- 7.11.18 Comprising a mountain summit located 12.27km to the north-west of the Proposed Development, the VP (see Figure 7.29.1 - 7.29.4) is representative of views obtained by hillwalkers in this area, at closer proximity. Elevated 360° views are obtained from this summit, most extensive and open to the south with distant mountains seen beyond a forest plantation mid-ground. Westerly views are more restricted by nearby summits. Craggy summits and slopes of Ben More Assynt are striking to the north, and to north-east, the lone mountains of Ben Klibreck, Ben Hope and Ben Loyal are seen. Existing Achany, Rosehall and Lairg turbines are perceptible within the south-easterly view which is limited in extent by the nearby ridge. The visual sensitivity at this location is considered to be Medium, due to the presence of the existing wind turbines in the view
- 7.11.19 Turbines and tracks of the Proposed Development would be seen in the south-easterly view from this location, affecting a similar area to the existing Rosehall, Achany and Lairg Wind Farms but closer and slightly extending the part of the view affected. The Proposed Development would not affect any particular mountain views but would form a noticeable new feature in the view which could be somewhat distracting. During construction, borrow pits and other works would also appear within the view and may draw slightly greater focus but are considered unlikely to increase the level of visual effect.
- 7.11.20 The magnitude of change to the view is anticipated to be Medium leading to a **Moderate** (significant) visual effect during construction and operation.

Effects Likely to be Not Significant

*Minor to Moderate Effects*

- 7.11.21 A **Minor to Moderate** (not significant) effect is anticipated for four of the twenty-one VPs during construction and operation. These VPs comprise:
- VP2 – A836 bridge by Dalnessie entrance (see Figure 7.10.1 - 7.10.4);
  - VP10 – Ben More Assynt (see Figure 7.18.1 - 7.18.4);
  - VP13 – Ben Klibreck (see Figure 7.21.1 - 7.21.4);
  - VP16 – Minor road at Inveroykel forest access (see Figure 7.24.1 - 7.24.4);

- 7.11.22 This comprises two hill summits where the Proposed Development is either out of the main focus of the view and seen in a context of other turbines (VP10) or more within the focus of the view but small and distant (VP13).
- 7.11.23 VP2 and VP16 comprise lower lying locations on public roads where the view would be typically passing in nature, and therefore of slightly reduced sensitivity. At both VPs, turbines are already a feature within the view. From VP2, the Proposed Development turbines would be clearly seen within the view, but would not distract from the existing panoramic qualities of the view. At VP16, the Proposed Development would also be clearly seen within the view, but within a setting where existing turbines are already very noticeable.
- 7.11.24 For all these VPs it was concluded that, although the Proposed Development may form a noticeable or fairly noticeable feature within the view, it would not lead to a noticeable deterioration to the quality of the view experienced, or to the visual amenity of the visual receptors at these locations. The visual effect is therefore considered to be not significant.

#### *Minor Effects*

- 7.11.25 **Minor** effects have been identified for seven of the twenty-one VPs as follows:
- VP1 – A836 above the Crask Inn (see Figure 7.9.1 - 7.9.4);
  - VP3 – Saval (see Figure 7.11.1 - 7.11.4);
  - VP5 – Ben Hee (see Figure 7.13.1 - 7.13.4);
  - VP7 – High Road (see Figure 7.15.1 - 7.15.4);
  - VP8 – A836 - A838 Junction (see Figure 7.16.1 - 7.16.4);
  - VP18 – Carn Chuinneag (see Figure 7.26.1 - 7.26.4); and
  - VP19 – Seana Bhràigh (see Figure 7.27.1 - 7.27.4).
- 7.11.26 These VPs comprise a range of higher and lower level VPs. From these VPs the Proposed Development would comprise either a more distant feature in the view which would be perceptible but small within the context, would be mostly obscured by land form or vegetation, or would be out of the main focus of the view where other existing wind farm developments are more noticeable. This would lead to only a minimal reduction in the quality of the view experienced from these VPs and therefore the effect would be not significant.

#### *Negligible Effects*

- 7.11.27 The effect on the visual amenity of all other VPs not discussed is considered to be **Negligible** as the Proposed Development is not anticipated to lead to any perceptible reduction in the quality of the view obtained.

#### **Residential Receptor Locations (RRLs)**

- 7.11.28 Thirty-nine RRLs were included in the visual assessment (see Figure 7.5.1 and 7.5.2), being residential properties or groups of properties where the potential for views of the Proposed Development was identified. Visual effects were identified as being not significant for the majority of these locations. Significant effects were identified to five RRLs, comprising three groups of properties on the north-east side of Loch Shin, and two groups of properties located at the transition between Glen Cassley and Strath Oykel as follows:

- RRL7 – Achnairn (upper);
- RRL8 – Achnairn (lower);
- RRL9 – Shinness Lodge and West Shinness;
- RRL28 – Ochtow and Inveroykel Lodge; and
- RRL29 – Rosehall village.

#### Effects Likely to be Significant

##### *RRL7 – Achnairn (upper), RRL8 – Achnairn (lower) and RRL9 – Shinness Lodge and West Shinness*

- 7.11.29 Visual receptors at these RRLs comprise residents and visitors of around forty properties located to the north-east of Loch Shin. This grouping of receptors is also represented by VP9 and VP14. The existing views obtained from this area include views from houses, gardens and other outdoor areas including small minor roads which access the properties. Views are elevated and predominantly to south-east, down Loch Shin towards Lairg and south-west across Loch Shin, partially reduced by trees, vegetation and out-buildings for some properties. Existing turbines are present as blades and hubs on the skyline to the south-west and south-south-west, usually oblique within the main view. Sensitivity for these visual receptors is considered to be Medium for RRL7 and RRL8 due to the presence of existing wind turbines within the view and the slightly oblique nature of the site to the main view. The more direct angle of the site to the main view from RRL9 is considered to increase visual sensitivity to Medium to High.
- 7.11.30 The Proposed Development would appear within the views across Loch Shin. This would be generally slightly oblique within the main view from RRL7 and RRL8, but more directly within the centre of the main view for RRL9 which is located further to the west. Blades and hubs of turbines would generally appear in a low point on the skyline between two hills with a few additional tips theoretically visible but likely to be barely perceptible from some properties. The appearance of existing wind turbines which are visible further obliquely within the main view would therefore be extended further into the main view. The position between two high points on the ridge would result in hubs of turbines always appearing below the level of the adjacent landform which would slightly reduce the prominence of turbines. Therefore, whilst the turbines would be noticeable in the main view, they are not anticipated to dominate the view.
- 7.11.31 Magnitude of change for all three RRLs is anticipated to be Medium and the visual effect is anticipated to fall within the threshold of **Moderate** (significant) for all three RRLs during the construction and operational phases.

##### *RRL28 – Ochtow and Inveroykel Lodge and RRL29 – Rosehall village*

- 7.11.32 Visual receptors at these RRLs comprise a range of residential properties and a small café / shop, and associated outdoor areas including a small playpark and outdoor eating areas at the café, set around the confluence of the River Cassley and the River Oykel. RRL28 (Ochtow and Inveroykel Lodge) is located in a slightly elevated position on the south side of the River Oykel and RRL29 (Rosehall village) is located on the north side of the River Oykel, and west side of the River Cassley. Varying views are obtained from these areas, with some being enclosed by surrounding woodland and buildings. Main orientations of views are: south or south-east from parts of RRL29 (Rosehall), across and down Glen Oykel / Kyle of Sutherland; and north or north-east across the River Cassley from parts of

RRL29 and from RRL28. A few existing turbines of Rosehall Wind Farm are seen on the hill top to the north-east, oblique within views from RRL28 but not always visible from RRL29 due to trees and woodland. The visual sensitivity for receptors in these locations is considered to be Medium.

7.11.33 The Proposed Development would appear on the skyline in the north to north-westerly view affecting the views from RRL28 and parts of RRL29 including properties on the west side of Cassley Drive, properties to the north of Cassley Drive and other garden and outdoor areas at a distance of between 4 and 5km. These would be seen in combination with the existing Rosehall Wind Farm turbines but would extend the visibility of turbines further across and into the main view. From RRL28, the Proposed Development would appear separate to the existing wind farm, forming a new feature in the view up Glen Cassley which forms the focus of the view from this location. From RRL29, turbines and blades would appear closer, on the nearby skyline, less separated from existing turbines but generally slightly oblique to the main view. Turbines may also be seen in more northerly views up Glen Cassley from RRL29 but often filtered by trees and therefore contributing less to the significant effect.

7.11.34 The magnitude of change is anticipated to be Medium for RRL28 and Medium – High for RRL29. The significance of effect is anticipated to be **Moderate** (significant) for both RRLs.

#### Effects Likely to be Not Significant

##### *Minor to Moderate Effects*

7.11.35 A **Minor to Moderate** (not significant) effect is anticipated for one RRL: RRL4 – Dalmichy. From this location, turbine blades and hubs would be visible on the skyline of the south-westerly view at a distance of 11.39km but would be seen through a stand of pine trees which surround the property. Existing turbines can already be seen in a similar part of the view from this location, and would be extended through the main view as a result of the Proposed Development, though filtered through the surrounding pine trees. It is considered that, although the turbines may be seen from some parts of this property they would not be noticeably detrimental to the views obtained by visual receptors.

##### *Minor Effects*

7.11.36 Nine RRLs were identified as likely to receive a **Minor** (not significant) visual effect as follows:

- RRL1 – Crask;
- RRL5 – Collaboll, Dalchork and Tirryside;
- RRL6 – Achfrish;
- RRL12 – Saval and Savalbeg;
- RRL13 – Culmaily, Culbuie, Balcharn and Balnadelson;
- RRL16 – Tomich and Rhian Breck;
- RRL20 – Achnaluaichrach and Preas nan Sgiathanach;
- RRL27 – Birchfield, Kilmachalmack and Wester Achnahanat; and
- RRL37 – The Schoolhouse Bothy, Duag Bridge.

7.11.37 From these locations, the Proposed Development would either appear distant, and therefore small within the context, unlikely to be detracting in the view, or would be seen out of the main focus of the view or in the context of existing wind turbines, leading to a

perceptible change to the view, but one that would not be noticeably detrimental within the context.

#### *Negligible Effects*

- 7.11.38 The effect on the visual amenity of all other RRLs not discussed above is considered to be **Negligible** as the Proposed Development is not anticipated to lead to any perceptible reduction in the quality of the view obtained. The greater majority of Negligible visual effects occur due to the Proposed Development being seen either to the rear of, or in combination with, the existing Achany and Rosehall turbines, thereby resulting in no perceptible change to the view.

#### **Routes**

- 7.11.39 Users of eighteen routes within the detailed study area were identified as having the potential for views of the Proposed Development (see Figure 7.6.1 and 7.6.2). Of these, significant effects were identified for 4 routes as follows:
- R4 – A838 Dalchork to Corrykinloch;
  - R9 – U2117 Cassley Bridge – Duchally Road;
  - R12 – SU21.03: Allt an Tuir Burn Walk; and
  - R17 - Scottish Hill Track 332 (localised to part of the route).

#### Effects Likely to be Significant

##### *R4 – A838 Dalchork to Corrykinloch*

- 7.11.40 This route comprises a main, but single track road alongside Loch Shin. Visual receptors using this route comprise commuters, travellers and recreational users such as tourers and cyclists. Views from the road are predominantly across, up or down Loch Shin, depending on the direction of travel, sometimes restricted by roadside trees or woodland. Existing turbines at Achany, and Lairg Wind Farms are seen on the skyline to the south and south-east when travelling and viewing south-east along the route between Fiag Bridge and Dalchork. Sensitivity for visual receptors using the route is considered to be Medium.
- 7.11.41 The Proposed Development would be theoretically visibly for approximately 17.5km of the route between Dalchork and Fiag Bridge and would appear on the skyline on the opposite side of Loch Shin at distances of between 8.3km and 10.6km. When travelling north-west, this would be likely to affect views roughly between Dalchork and Shinness (around 7km) and when travelling south-east, would affect views between around Fiag Bridge and Shinness (around 11.5km). There would be no visibility between Fiag Bridge and Corriekinloch. Particularly when travelling south-east along the road, the Proposed Development would be seen in a context of existing turbines, but it would generally appear closer and larger. A worse case example of the view from the road is presented by VP14 (see Figure 7.22.1 - 7.22.4). When travelling north, the turbines would more often be seen on their own, though the viewer may be to some extent desensitised to further turbines after passing the existing turbines earlier. Nevertheless, the Proposed Development is anticipated to lead to a noticeable change to the view.
- 7.11.42 Magnitude of change to the views obtained from this route is considered to be Medium, leading to a **Moderate** (significant) affect on the visual amenity of the route as a whole.

*R9 – U2117 Cassley Bridge – Duchally Road*

- 7.11.43 This route comprises a narrow and rough, dead-end single track road which leads up Glen Cassley. It is used by estate workers, a few residents and visitors and recreational users such as walkers, cyclists, fishermen and those accessing walking routes into the hills. Views from this route are variable when travelling up or down the glen. In the lower section south of Glen Rossal the view is generally more enclosed around the river by woodland but occasional breaks in the trees give views of surrounding glen-side hills. The views become increasingly open after Glen Rossal and north of Glencassley Castle, views are panoramic across, up and down the flat glen floor. Ben More Assynt is seen to the north-west, framed through Gleann na Muic. Visibility of existing Rosehall turbines is limited due to the trees in the lower glen and screening landform in the upper glen but These are occasionally seen on the southern skyline from the lower part of the road, through trees. Sensitivity for visual receptors using this route is considered to be High.
- 7.11.44 Intermittent visibility of the Proposed Development would occur between Rosehall and Glencassley Castle though it would be frequently hidden or filtered by trees. In general, visibility along this section of the route would be limited to an approximate 1km section just to the south of Glencassley Castle where turbines would be seen above the eastern glen-side at a distance of between 2.1km and 2.4km. This is illustrated by VP11 ((see Figure 7.19.1 - 7.19.4)). More consistent visibility would be obtained from a 3.8km section between Badintagairt and Glenmuick with turbines being more noticeable and potentially distracting on the eastern side-slopes of the glen when travelling south at a distance of between 1.9km and 4.9km. However, the open views up and down the glen, in particular those towards Ben More Assynt, would be unaffected (see VP12 ((see Figure 7.20.1 - 7.20.4)). Some construction works may also be visible from this section of the route but are not anticipated to increase the level of the effect.
- 7.11.45 Magnitude of change to the view from this route is considered to be Medium, and the effect on the visual amenity would be **Moderate** (significant) during both construction and operation.

*R12 – SU21.03: Allt an Tuir Burn Walk*

- 7.11.46 This Core Path is routed to the west of the River Cassley across field areas and through felled forest, and used by recreational users. From Invercassley stores, the route initially crosses open fields to the rear of housing with views across the river and glen, somewhat reduced by trees and riverside woodland. The northern part of the route is within forest plantation, though felling has opened up elevated views within this part of the route, to east and west and partly to the north from the most northerly section. Existing Rosehall Wind Farm turbines are visible to the north-east, particularly from the more elevated parts of the route. Sensitivity is therefore considered to be Medium.
- 7.11.47 Turbines would be present on the skyline within the easterly view at a distance of between 3.6km and 4.5km around from the lower and more elevated parts of the path, and also to the north from the most northerly elevated section. The turbines would be very noticeable in this view and, though similar to the existing turbines would increase the occupied area of the view. Trees would screen some or all of the turbines from some parts of the route.
- 7.11.48 Magnitude of change is anticipated to be Medium - High from this route with a resultant **Moderate** (significant) effect on visual amenity during construction and operation.

*R17 - Scottish Hill Track 332*

- 7.11.49 This route is approximately 30km in length crossing upland areas between Kylesku and the A837 near Benmore Lodge. Visual receptors using this route comprise hill-walkers and potentially mountain bikers. The route offers varying views along its length but predominantly open views of surrounding hills, mountains and moorland. Elevated and panoramic views to the east are obtained as the route rises over the shoulder of Meall an Aonaich and traverses the lower slopes of Ben More Assynt where existing Achany, Rosehall and Lairg wind turbines are perceptible to the south-east. Towards the northern end through the cnocan landscape the views are constantly changing, being more enclosed as the path winds through the cnocan and more expansive as it rises up over small hills. Visual sensitivity for users of this route is considered to be Medium to High, given the presence of existing wind turbines within the easterly view.
- 7.11.50 The Proposed Development would appear in the south-easterly view as the route crosses the lower slopes of Ben More Assynt and Meall an Aonaich between around 11.2km and 14.1km, comprising an approximate 6km section. It would be seen in the context of existing Achany and Rosehall turbines but would appear larger and closer. At the closest point, around the base of Meall and Aonaich this would be more prominent, anticipated to lead to a significant effect on the view. However, moving further away it's prominence would recede within the expansive surrounding view. The effect would be experienced more when travelling south, with the sense of travelling closer towards the Proposed Development. However, this would affect a small part of an otherwise expansive view where wind turbines are already perceptible.
- 7.11.51 A Medium magnitude of change is anticipated for approximately 3km of the route as it crosses the lower slopes below Meall an Aonaich between Loch Sail an Ruathair and Loch Carn nan Conbhairean where the Proposed Development is between 11.2km and 11.6km from the Proposed Development. This is anticipated to lead to a localised **Moderate** (significant) visual amenity during construction and operation. However, the contribution of this effect on this short section to the visual amenity of the route overall would be limited. The overall effect on the visual amenity of visual receptors travelling this route is therefore considered to be **Minor** (not significant) during construction and operation.

Effects Likely to be Not Significant*Minor Effects*

- 7.11.52 A **Minor** (not significant) effect during construction and operation was identified for six of the eighteen routes included in the assessment:
- R3 – A836 Lairg to Altnaharra;
  - R6 – A837 Invershin to Oykel Bridge;
  - R8 – C1136 Ardgay – Culrain – Doune – Brae Road;
  - R14 – SU21.09: Achness Waterfall;
  - R15 – Group of paths around Duag Bridge; and
  - R17 – Scottish Hill Track 332 (as described in paragraph 7.11.51).
- 7.11.53 These routes, comprising four roads and three recreational routes, are either far from the Proposed Development where it would only appear as a small feature of the view, or would have only limited sections of potential visibility along their length. It is noted that there are parts of routes R3, R6, R8 and R17 from which the Proposed Development may

be more visible, and from Route R17 this is anticipated to lead to a locally experienced significant effect, due to greater sensitivity of visual receptors using this route (see paragraph 7.11.51). However, for other routes, this would comprise a briefly experienced view and is not anticipated to lead to an overall significant effect on visual amenity.

#### *Negligible Effects*

- 7.11.54 Visual effects on the view obtained from the nine remaining routes comprising four roads, four recreational routes and the Far North Railway Line are predicted to be **Negligible**. From these routes, the Proposed Development is anticipated to be barely perceptible or perceptible from only very short sections of the route which are unlikely to lead to any discernible reduction in the overall visual amenity of the route.

#### Long Distance Routes and Trails

- 7.11.55 Three longer distance routes or trails, comprising a combination of different road or path routes considered individually in the assessment, were identified for inclusion in the detailed assessment. This includes:

- The Moray Firth Tourist Route;
- National Cycle Route 1; and
- The Cape Wrath Trail / Scottish National Trail.

- 7.11.56 The North Coast 500 was not included in the detailed assessment as there would be no visibility of the Proposed Development from any part of it.

#### *The Moray Firth Tourist Route*

- 7.11.57 The Moray Firth Tourist Route comprises an alternative driving route between Evanton and The Mound via the B816, A836 and A839, passing through Bonar Bridge, Invershin, Lairg and Pittentrail. These routes have been considered in the assessment as routes R2, and R5 and parts of the routes R1 and R7. A **Negligible** effect has been identified for all these routes and therefore no significant effect is anticipated for users of the Moray Firth Tourist Route.

#### *National Cycle Route 1*

- 7.11.58 Part of a UK-wide route, National Cycle Route 1 passes through the study area along the A836 from Tain via Lairg to Alltnaharra, taking a brief diversion via part of the C1136 between Ardgay and Carbisdale Castle before crossing back to the A836 over the Kyle of Sutherland via a bridge adjacent to the railway viaduct, and then taking a further, diversion between Invershin and Lairg via the minor Shin Falls road which has not been included in the assessment due to a lack of visibility. These routes have been considered in the assessment as routes R1 (A836 Dornoch Bridge to Bonar Bridge (via Ardgay)), R3 (A836 Lairg to Alltnaharra) and small parts of routes R2 (A836 Bonar Bridge to Lairg) and R8 (C1136 Ardgay – Culrain – Doune – Brae Road).

- 7.11.59 The effect has been identified as **Negligible** for routes R1 and R2 and **Minor** for routes R3 and R8, although the part of route R8 covered by the National Cycle Route would not have any visibility of the Proposed Development. The Minor visual effect for route R3, is anticipated to lead to a localised **Minor** visual effect for cyclists on National Cycle Route 1, but comprises a very minimal part of this route through the study area as a whole. It is therefore considered that the visual effect for users of National Cycle Route 1 would not be significant.

*The Cape Wrath Trail / Scottish National Trail*

- 7.11.60 The Cape Wrath Trail comprises an advertised long distance walking route through the western Highlands from Fort William to Cape Wrath. The route passes through the western part of the wider study area for the Proposed Development covering four stages of the route: Stage 9 – Inverlael to Oykel Bridge, Stage 10 – Oykel Bridge to Inchnadamph; Stage 11 – Inchnadamph to Glendhu and Stage 12, Glendhu to Rhiconich. However, only Stage 9 (Inverlael to Oykel Bridge) would have theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development. This part of the trail partially follows the trail of two Scottish Hill Tracks: 323 and 324 which are included in the assessment together as a group of tracks which pass through Glen Einig: route R15 (Group of paths around Duag Bridge).
- 7.11.61 A **Negligible** effect has been identified for route R15 from which the Proposed Development would be perceptible in north-easterly views through Glen Einig or from elevated parts of the other routes, but would appear small within the context. This is not anticipated to lead to any significant visual effect for walkers on the Cape Wrath Trail.

**Summary of Visual Effects**

- 7.11.62 A summary of the effects on visual receptors is outlined in Table 7.11.1.

**Table 7.11.1: Summary of Visual Effects**

LCT / LCA	Effect During Construction						Effect During Operation					
	Not Significant			Significant			Not Significant			Significant		
	Negligible	Minor	Minor-Moderate	Moderate	Moderate - Major	Major	Negligible	Minor	Minor - Moderate	Moderate	Moderate - Major	Major
Viewpoints	4	7	4	6	0	0	4	7	4	6	0	0
Residential Receptor Locations	24	9	1	5	0	0	24	9	1	5	0	0
Routes	9	6	0	3 1L	0	0	9	6	0	3 1L	0	0
<b>Total Effects</b>	37	22	5	14 1L	0	0	37	22	5	14 1L	0	0

**7.12 Cumulative Visual Assessment****Methodology**

- 7.12.1 The methodology for the cumulative visual assessment is based on that described in NatureScot guidance (SNH, 2012). The assessment considers the potential for combined views of wind developments from receptors at selected viewpoints and on routes. Combined views of wind energy development are expressed as either 'in combination'

(where turbines from different developments would be observable at the same time<sup>2</sup>) or 'in succession'<sup>3</sup> (where an observer would be required to turn to experience multiple developments).

7.12.2 The assessment also considers the potential for sequential effects experienced from receptors on routes where different wind developments become visible whilst moving through the landscape. Sequential effects may be occasional, frequent or constant.

7.12.3 The cumulative visual assessment has involved four key stages:

- Identification and analysis of the baseline wind energy development scenario from receptors at each viewpoint/ route;
- Evaluation of the cumulative visual sensitivity to change;
- Evaluation of the potential magnitude of visual change to the baseline scenario resulting from the proposed development; and
- Assessment of the potential cumulative visual effects arising from the introduction of the proposed development to the baseline scenario.

#### Identification and Analysis of the Baseline Wind Energy Development Scenario

7.12.4 Analysis of the baseline involves an appreciation of the existing view within the context of the baseline wind development scenario, which assumes that all consented and proposed (application) wind developments, as detailed in Table 7.8.4, have been constructed.

7.12.5 The identification of the baseline cumulative visual context involves consideration of the scale, location and nature of the baseline wind developments within the view, the proportion of the view which is occupied by wind turbines and the potential importance of this part of the view to the viewer.

#### Evaluation of the Cumulative Visual Sensitivity to Change

7.12.6 The evaluation of sensitivity to change concerns the nature of the existing view in the context of the baseline wind development scenario, and the potential for further wind turbines to be accommodated within that view without significantly altering, obstructing or dominating the view. An evaluation of sensitivity to change has been attributed to each receptor based on a three-point scale detailed in Table 7.12.1.

**Table 7.12.1: Criteria for Cumulative Visual Sensitivity to Change**

Cumulative Visual Sensitivity to Change	Criteria
High	Where wind energy developments within the cumulative baseline scenario are well accommodated within a valued or well composed view and/or the proposed changed landscape forms an important part of the view.

<sup>2</sup> Sites visible in combination with the Proposed Development refer to those that are visible within the observer's arc of vision with the Proposed Development. That is, within a 90° field of view of the Proposed Development. Where sites may be on the edge of the 90° field of view (within 60-90°) these would be within the observer's peripheral field of view and are marked accordingly.

<sup>3</sup> Sites visible in succession with the Proposed Development refer to those that are visible when the observer turns their head away from the Proposed Development and are therefore within a greater than 90° field of view.

Cumulative Visual Sensitivity to Change	Criteria
Medium	Where wind energy developments within the cumulative baseline scenario are present but not prominent in the existing view, and/or the proposed changed landscape forms a less important part of the view.
Low	Where wind energy developments within the cumulative baseline scenario are either prominent in an existing view and/or the changed landscape forms an unimportant part of the view; or Where wind energy developments within the cumulative baseline scenario are barely discernible within the view.

#### Evaluation of the Cumulative Magnitude of Visual Change

- 7.12.7 Magnitude of change concerns the measurement of change which would occur as a result of the introduction of the Proposed Development into the baseline wind development scenario. This is identified based on the consideration of the potential nature, size, scale and location of the proposed change within the existing view, and in relation to the existing wind farms / turbines within the view. The evaluation of the magnitude of change is based on the criteria outlined in the main visual assessment methodology (see Table 7.9.2).

#### Assessment of Potential Cumulative Visual Effects

- 7.12.8 Assessment of potential cumulative effects is based on analysis of the relationship between the cumulative sensitivity to change and the magnitude of change and is made using a degree of professional judgement. It should be noted that the cumulative effect assessed is the result of the addition of the Proposed Development to the existing baseline scenario. Cumulative visual effects are assessed against the scale detailed in Table 7.12.2 below.

**Table 7.12.2: Criteria for Assessment of Cumulative Visual Effects**

Cumulative Visual Effect	Criteria
Major	The addition of the Proposed Development to views of the baseline cumulative scenario would result in a very noticeable increase in wind turbines to the extent whereby they would become a dominating or obstructive feature within the view.
Moderate	The addition of the Proposed Development to views of the baseline cumulative scenario would result in a noticeable increase in wind turbines to the extent whereby they would become prominent but would not dominate or obstruct the view.
Minor	The addition of the Proposed Development to views of the baseline cumulative scenario would result in a perceptible increase in wind turbines but would not increase the prominence of wind farms/turbines as a feature in the view.
Negligible	The addition of the Proposed Development to views of the baseline cumulative scenario would not result in any discernible increase in the appearance of wind turbines in the view.

- 7.12.9 For the purposes of the CLVIA, effects with a rating of Moderate or greater are considered to be significant in terms of the EIA Regulations.

- 7.12.10 A cumulative effect requires the Proposed Development to be seen within a context of at least one other wind farm / turbine. If no cumulative baseline turbines are visible or they are barely discernible, then the sensitivity to cumulative change is considered to be Low and both the cumulative magnitude of change and effect would be Negligible.

#### **Cumulative Baseline Scenario**

- 7.12.11 The cumulative baseline scenario is described in section 7.8 of the cumulative landscape assessment. As detailed in paragraph 7.8.15, the cumulative assessment assesses effects resulting from the potential addition of the Proposed Development to two baseline scenarios:

- Where all operational and consented sites included in the assessment would be in place and operational; and
- Where relevant (and a different cumulative effect is anticipated) where all operational, consented, application/appeal and scoping sites included in the assessment would be in place and operational.

- 7.12.12 The cumulative visual assessment has considered VP and route receptor locations where potential for cumulative effects has been identified as follows:

#### Viewpoints

- 7.12.13 Seventeen VPs within the wider study area have been identified for inclusion in the cumulative visual assessment as detailed in Technical Appendix 7.1: Landscape and Visual Scoping Appraisal. These have been selected through analysis of the cumulative ZTVs (see paragraph 7.8.16) and review of the outcome of the visual assessment. The assessment has been limited to those VPs where the cumulative ZTV indicates that the Proposed Development would have combined visibility with another cumulative baseline site. The cumulative visual assessment excludes those VPs where a Negligible effect has been identified during the visual assessment as described in paragraph 7.3.8.

- 7.12.14 The following VPs have been included:

- VP1: A836 above the Crask Inn (see (see Figure 7.9.2);
- VP2: A836 bridge by Dalnessie entrance (see Figure 7.10.2);
- VP3: Saval (see Figure 7.11.2);
- VP5: Ben Hee (see Figure 7.13.2);
- VP6: Rosehall (see Figure 7.14.2);
- VP7: High Road (see Figure 7.15.2);
- VP8: A836 - A838 Junction (see Figure 7.16.2);
- VP9: Achnairn caravan and camping site entrance (see Figure 7.17.2);
- VP10: Ben More Assynt (see Figure 7.18.2);
- VP11: Glencassley road to south of Castle (see Figure 7.19.2);
- VP12: Glencassley road by Langwell Hill (see Figure 7.20.2);
- VP13: Ben Klibreck (see Figure 7.21.2);
- VP14: A838 near West Shinness (see Figure 7.22.2);
- VP16: Minor road at Inveroykel forest access (see Figure 7.24.2);
- VP18: Carn Chuinneag (see Figure 7.26.2);
- VP19: Seana Bhràigh (see Figure 7.27.2); and

- VP21: Meall an Aonaich (see Figure 7.29.2).

### Routes

- 7.12.15 Nine routes within the wider study area where there is potential for views of the Proposed Development and at least one other wind development have been identified and assessed for sequential cumulative effects. As for VPs, only those routes identified as having a minor effect or greater in the main visual assessment have been included in the cumulative assessment.
- 7.12.16 The following routes have been included:
- R3: A836 Lairg to Altnaharra;
  - R4: A838 Dalchork to Corrykinloch;
  - R6: A837 Invershin to Oykel Bridge;
  - R8: C1136 Ardgay – Culrain – Doune – Brae Road;
  - R9: U2117 Cassley Bridge – Duchally Road;
  - R12: SU21.03: Allt an Tuir Burn Walk;
  - R14: SU21.09: Achness Waterfall;
  - R15: Group of paths around Duag Bridge; and
  - R17: Scottish Hill Track 332.
- 7.12.17 The baseline view containing the cumulative baseline scenario sites is described for each VP and route in Technical Appendix 7.10: Cumulative Visual Assessment Tables.

### **Cumulative Visual Effects Evaluation**

- 7.12.18 The detailed cumulative assessment of VPs and routes is presented in Technical Appendix 7.10: Cumulative Visual Assessment Tables. The following section provides a summary of the results and key issues highlighted by the assessment, focussing on potential significant effects.

### Viewpoints

#### *Effects Likely to be Significant*

- 7.12.19 When considered in relation to the cumulative baseline scenario, the addition of the Proposed Development is anticipated to result in a significant cumulative visual effect to six VPs for one or both cumulative baseline scenarios as follows:
- VP6 – Rosehall;
  - VP9 – Achnairn caravan and camping site entrance;
  - VP11 – Glencassley road to south of Castle;
  - VP14 – A838 near West Shinness;
  - VP16 – Minor road at Inveroykel forest access; and
  - VP21 – Meall an Aonaich.

#### *VP6 – Rosehall*

- 7.12.20 Under both cumulative baseline scenarios, the operational turbines of Rosehall Wind Farm are very noticeable in the view to the north-east, appearing on the hill summit with tips and blades of Achany Wind Farm to their rear, largely concealed by forest. Meall

Buidhe Wind Farm would also be seen in views to the south where application and scoping sites are added to the baseline, on the skyline of the hills, partially screened by intervening mature trees. Cumulative sensitivity is considered to be Medium.

- 7.12.21 The southerly turbines of the Proposed Development would appear on the skyline, slightly oblique to the main focus of the view as blades and hubs with further turbines appearing oblique to the main view up Glen Cassley to the north, though filtered or screened by trees. The closer turbines would appear relatively large, though similar in scale to the closer Rosehall turbines and may be perceived as a continuation of the existing cluster. However, the Proposed Development would extend the field of view occupied by turbines and is likely to increase the prominence of wind turbines in the view. The magnitude of change is anticipated to be Medium – High and the cumulative effect would be **Moderate** (significant) for both baseline scenarios.

*VP9 – Achnairn caravan and camping site entrance*

- 7.12.22 Existing views represented by this VP are south-east, down Loch Shin and Achany Glen and south-west across Loch Shin, partially reduced by trees and roadside vegetation. The operational and consented baseline would involve Achany Wind Farm present as blades and hubs on the skyline to the south-west with Braemore, in the framed view down Loch Shin to the south with other distant sites beyond. Lairg and Lairg Extension would form a cluster to the south-east. The addition of application and scoping sites would lead to increased presence of baseline sites with Garvary combining with the Lairg sites to form a larger cluster, Strath Tirry and Chleansaid to the north-east and Sallachy to the north-west, although some of these sites would usually be screened or filtered by buildings and woodland when moving around the VP. The large number of cumulative sites is considered to give a cumulative sensitivity of Low – Medium.
- 7.12.23 The Proposed Development would be seen to the west-south-west, generally slightly oblique within the main orientation of the view with blades and hubs of turbines appearing in a low point on the skyline between two hills with a few additional tips likely to be barely perceptible. The turbines would extend the field of view occupied by wind turbines and would lead to a greater effect on the main, south-west aspect of the view. When considering the full range of cumulative sites, this may be perceived to increase a sense of encirclement by moving the influence of turbines further to the west in the view. The cumulative magnitude of change is anticipated to be Medium and the cumulative effect would be **Moderate** for both baseline scenarios.

*VP11 – Glencassley road to south of Castle*

- 7.12.24 Views from this VP are from low vantage views, framed along Glen Cassley by the valley sides to north and south, but filtered / screened by riverside trees to the north. The cumulative baseline scenario would feature only a few tips and one turbine of the Rosehall Wind Farm above the glen-side to the south-east. There would be no additional visibility from application or scoping sites. The cumulative sensitivity is considered to be Medium, as existing turbines are visible and the proposed area of change is a less important part of the view.
- 7.12.25 Two turbines and two blades of the Proposed Development would appear above the easterly glen-side. These would appear larger than the existing visible turbines and would therefore increase the prominence of turbines as a feature of the view. However, they would not distract from the main, funnelled views down the glen from this location. The increased prominence of wind turbines is anticipated to lead to Medium – High

cumulative magnitude of change and a **Moderate** (significant) cumulative effect for both baseline scenarios.

*VP14 – A838 near West Shinness*

7.12.26 This VP, representative of residents and road users has a main orientation across Loch Shin and more panoramic views up and down Loch Shin, more representative of road users. The operational and application baseline scenario would lead to existing wind turbines of Achany Wind Farm appearing as blades above the skyline to the south-south-west with Lairg and Lairg Extension, theoretically visible in west-south-westerly views, although predominantly filtered or hidden by trees from the VP. The addition of application and scoping sites would result in Garvary increasing the size of the Lairg cluster, leading to it appearing more visible in the south-westerly view along Loch Shin. Sallachy would appear in the north-western view looking up Loch Shin. The sites to west-south-west and north-west are somewhat filtered by trees but would be more visible if moving around the VP position. Cumulative sensitivity is considered to be Medium – High.

7.12.27 The Proposed Development would appear in the south-westerly view across Loch Shin above the skyline, on a low point between hills. This comprises the main view from nearby properties though would be more oblique for road users. The Proposed Development would appear more visible than Achany turbines which are smaller and seen only as blades from this location. It would provide some connection within the view between the Lairg – Garvary Cluster and the Sallachy cluster and would be a noticeable increase in turbines in the central part of the view when considering both baseline scenarios. This is anticipated to lead to a Medium magnitude of change and a **Moderate** (significant) cumulative effect for both baseline scenarios.

*VP16 – Minor road at Inveroykel forest access*

7.12.28 This VP is largely representative of views obtained by travellers on the road. Whilst most open view is to the north, this represents a passing view for travellers. The northerly view across the valley floor features the lower reaches of the River Cassley with a backdrop of forest and heather-clad hills. Existing Rosehall and Achany turbines are prominent on the skyline of the enclosing hills in the north-north-east to easterly view. The baseline scenario of operational and consented sites would also lead to Braemore Wind Farm being clearly visible against the skyline in views to the east. If application and scoping sites are added, a few turbines and tips of the scoping sites of Garvary Wind Farm may perceptibly increase this cluster in the view. Although Meall Buidhe Wind Farm would also be theoretically visible from this location, dense forest to the south of the VP would obscure any view towards it. The prominence of existing wind turbines within this view is considered to lead to a Low – Medium sensitivity.

7.12.29 The Proposed Development would appear on the skyline to the west of the existing Achany and Rosehall turbines, but separated. The turbines would be a similar height in the view but would appear perceptibly larger due to the longer blade length and slightly greater sense of distance. Although cumulative baseline turbines would be very noticeable throughout the view, the Proposed Development would increase the area of the view occupied by turbines leading to little available open view from this location where turbines would not form a focus. Therefore, the magnitude of change is anticipated to be Medium and the effect would be **Moderate** (significant) for both baseline scenarios.

*VP21 – Meall an Aonaich*

- 7.12.30 From this elevated VP, operational and consented baseline sites would form turbine clusters in the mid-ground and distance to the south-east (Achany, Rosehall, Braemore and Lairg Extension Wind Farms) and north-east (Creag Riabhach Wind Farm) with other more distant sites beyond them. The additional application and scoping sites would consolidate these clusters and create a consistent spread of turbine clusters in the middle distance leading to wind turbines forming a highly noticeable feature of the north-easterly to south-easterly view. The cumulative sensitivity is therefore considered to be Low – Medium.
- 7.12.31 The Proposed Development would appear to the forefront of the Rosehall, Achany, Braemore and Lairg Extension clusters of operational and consented sites but would appear larger and somewhat closer than these sites. Therefore, with a baseline scenario featuring operational and consented sites only, it would appear to bring wind farm development closer towards the foreground of the view. This would lead to a Medium magnitude of change and a **Moderate** (significant) cumulative effect.
- 7.12.32 With the addition of application and scoping sites, Garvary Wind Farm would appear to join together the two clusters of operational and consented sites and the Proposed Development would appear to form a part of this larger cluster. Sallachy Wind Farm would also appear closer to the VP and the additional application and scoping sites would lead to a greater presence of wind turbines characterising the north-easterly to southerly view. Therefore, whilst it would form a perceptible addition to this baseline, the effect of the Proposed Development would be reduced. Magnitude of change is anticipated to be Low with this baseline scenario and the cumulative effect would be **Minor – Moderate** (not significant).

*Effects Likely to be Not Significant*

- 7.12.33 A **Minor – Moderate** (not significant) cumulative effect is anticipated to the view from VP10 – Ben More Assynt, when considering the addition of the Proposed Development to the operational and consented baseline scenario. In this view, the Proposed Development would be seen in the south-easterly context to the forefront of established turbine groupings featuring Achany, Rosehall, Braemore, Lairg and Lairg Extension Wind Farms, increasing the appearance of wind turbines in this direction but unlikely to very noticeably increase the prominence within a wide and expansive view. With the addition of application and scoping sites the cumulative effect is anticipated to reduce to **Minor** (not significant) as the Proposed Development would appear as part of a single more consolidated grouping formed by Garvary Wind Farm. Wind turbines would form a very established feature of the baseline context in this direction and the addition of Sallachy to the east, would form a precedent for wind turbines at closer proximity.
- 7.12.34 A **Minor** (not significant) cumulative effect is anticipated to occur under both baseline scenarios to views obtained from VP1 – A836 above the Crask Inn, VP2 – A836 bridge by Dalnessie entrance, VP3 – Saval, VP5 – Ben Hee, VP7 – High Road, VP8 – A836 - A838 Junction, VP13 – Ben Klibreck, VP18 – Carn Chuinneag and VP19 – Seana Bhràigh. These VPs represent locations where the Proposed Development would form a distant addition to the cumulative baseline featuring extensive numbers of turbines, such as from VP1, or the mountain summits of VP5, VP13, VP18 and VP19, or a more peripheral addition where other cumulative baseline sites would be more noticeable, particularly when seen from the east such as at VP2, VP3, VP7 and VP8 where other wind farms would be closer within the view. In these views, the addition of the Proposed Development is anticipated to lead

to a perceptible increase in turbines within the view, but is not predicted to lead to turbines becoming a more prominent feature than they already would be under the baseline scenario.

- 7.12.35 A **Negligible** effect has been identified for one VP, VP12, where the only cumulative baseline site that would appear within the view would be barely perceptible and therefore the Proposed Development would not be seen in combination with any other wind farm sites.

#### Routes

##### *Effects Likely to be Significant*

- 7.12.36 When considered in relation to the cumulative baseline scenario, the addition of the Proposed Development is anticipated to result in a significant cumulative visual effect to three of the nine Routes included in the cumulative visual assessment for one or both cumulative baseline scenarios as follows:

- Route R4 – A838 Dalchork to Corrykinloch;
- Route R12 – SU21.03: Allt an Tuir Burn Walk; and
- Route R17 – Scottish Hill Track 332.

##### *Route R4 – A838 Dalchork to Corrykinloch*

- 7.12.37 Views from this route are predominantly across, up or down Loch Shin, depending on the direction of travel, sometimes restricted by roadside trees or woodland. Turbines and blades of operational Achany wind turbines are seen over the ridge to the south and south-west, whilst Lairg and Lairg Extension would be seen on the skyline when travelling south-eastwards along the route between Fiag Bridge and Dalchork. The scoping site of Garvary would extend this group leading to large numbers of turbines seen down Loch Shin when travelling south-east. Sallachy Wind Farm would appear on the skyline to the north-west and west when travelling northward and would be particularly noticeable to the west of Fiag Bridge and towards the Overscaig Hotel looking across Loch Shin. Trees along the route would filter some views on occasion. Sensitivity to additional change is considered to be Medium.

- 7.12.38 The Proposed Development would be theoretically visible between Dalchork and Fiag Bridge (approximately 17.5km) and would appear on the skyline on the opposite side of Loch Shin. With the exception of very short sections near Fiag Bridge, it would not be visible from any part of the route where existing turbines were not already visible for both baseline scenarios. However, whilst the existing sites would create a precedent for the appearance of wind turbines in the view when travelling along full length of the route, the Proposed Development would contribute to a sequential experience of wind turbines which would frequently be seen and would increase the perceived presence of wind turbines surrounding the route, particularly through the central part between Achnairn and West Shinness for around 6km. This is anticipated to be a Medium magnitude of change, leading to a Moderate (significant) visual effect for both cumulative baseline scenarios.

##### *Route R12 – SU21.03: Allt an Tuir Burn Walk*

- 7.12.39 Comprising a recreational foot path to the west of Rosehall village across a field and through felled forest plantation, views from this route are across the River Cassley and

elevated across and up Glen Cassley. Where there are open views to north-east and east, a few turbines of Rosehall Wind Farm appear at relatively close proximity on the skyline. The application site of Meall Buidhe Wind Farm would also be visible on the skyline in open views southward. The sensitivity to addition change is considered to be Medium.

- 7.12.40 The Proposed Development would be present in views from this route on the skyline from the lower and more elevated parts of the path and also to the north from the most northerly elevated section. Trees would screen some or all of the turbines from some parts of the route, but where visible the turbines would form a separate cluster in the view, would appear very noticeable, and although similar to the cumulative baseline turbines, they would increase the occupied area in the view. This is anticipated to lead to a Medium magnitude of change and a **Moderate** (significant) cumulative effect for both baseline scenarios.

*Route R17 – Scottish Hill Track 332*

- 7.12.41 Users of this 30km route obtain open and variable views of surrounding hills, mountains and moorland. From a short section between Loch na Sròine Luime and Loch Sail an Ruathair (passing below Ben More Assynt and Meall an Aonaich respectively), there would be views of the operational wind farm sites of Achany and Rosehall to the south-east. Other sites such as Braemore, Lairg Extension and Creag Riabhach would be more briefly visible. A greater sense of wind farm development in the easterly context would occur with the addition of application and scoping sites, including Sallachy Wind Farm, at closer proximity, Chleansaid and Garvary Wind Farms as well as other more distant sites. Sensitivity for this route is considered to be Medium – High, given the valued nature of the views obtained and relatively localised baseline visibility of wind turbines.
- 7.12.42 The Proposed Development would appear in the south-easterly view for an approximate 6km section of the route crossing the lower slopes of Ben More Assynt and Meall an Aonaich. It would almost always be seen in the context of existing Achany and Rosehall turbines and other sites which occasionally combine with these but would appear closer to the route and larger in the view, particularly around the base of Meall and Aonaich. Moving further north, the prominence of the Proposed Development would reduce within the expansive surrounding view, whilst Sallachy would become more visible. Without the addition of Sallachy Wind Farm, the effect of the Proposed Development would be experienced more when travelling south with the sense of travelling closer towards it. If Sallachy Wind Farm was already operational, this effect would be less because Sallachy would already create a precedent for closer wind turbines in the view. However, the Proposed Development would combine with Sallachy Wind Farm and contribute to combined, successive and sequential effects to the view from this part of the route featuring turbines at closer proximity. Nevertheless, the effect overall would be on a small part of this very long route and one where turbines would already form feature of the view. A locally Medium magnitude of change through this section is anticipated to lead to a *localised Moderate* (significant) effect for around 7km of the route between Loch na Sròine Luime and Loch Sail an Ruathair for a baseline scenario including application and scoping sites, and specifically Sallachy. This would be reduced to 3km of the route if application and scoping sites were not included in the cumulative baseline. However, given the localised nature of this effect, the magnitude of change on users of the route as a whole would be Low, and the cumulative effect would be **Minor** (not significant).

*Effects Likely to be Not Significant*

7.12.43 A **Minor** (not significant) cumulative visual effect is anticipated for all of the remaining routes included in the cumulative visual assessment as follows:

- R3 – A836 Lairg to Altnaharra;
- R6 – A837 Invershin to Oykel Bridge;
- R8 – C1136 Ardgay – Culrain – Doune – Brae Road;
- R9 – U2117 Cassley Bridge – Duchally Road;
- R14 – SU21.09: Achness Waterfall; and
- R15 – Group of paths around Duag Bridge

7.12.44 For these routes, the Proposed Development would be either only briefly seen where other cumulative developments would be more prominent (Routes R6 and R8), would result in only limited overall visibility of turbines (Route R14 and R15) or would form a limited perceptible increase in wind turbines to sequential views, where there would already be an established presence of wind turbines (Routes R3) or a more noticeable increase but where the visibility of baseline turbines would be very limited.

Summary of Cumulative Visual Effects

7.12.45 Table 7.12.3 provides a summary of predicted cumulative visual effects on those VPs and Routes included in the CLVIA.

**Table 7.12.3: Summary of Cumulative Visual Effects – Operational and Consented Baseline Scenario**

Visual Receptor Locations included in the CLVIA	Potential Effect (Not Significant)			Potential Effect (Significant)		
	Negligible	Minor	Minor - Moderate	Moderate	Moderate - Major	Major
<b>Viewpoints</b>						
VP1: A836 above the Crask Inn		X				
VP2: A836 bridge by Dalnessie entrance		X				
VP3: Saval		X				
VP5: Ben Hee		X				
VP6: Rosehall				X		
VP7: High Road		X				
VP8: A836 - A838 Junction		X				
VP9: Achnairn caravan and camping site entrance				X		
VP10: Ben More Assynt			X			
VP11: Glencassley road to south of Castle				X		
VP12: Glencassley road by Langwell Hill	X					

Visual Receptor Locations included in the CLVIA	Potential Effect (Not Significant)			Potential Effect (Significant)		
	Negligible	Minor	Minor - Moderate	Moderate	Moderate - Major	Major
VP13: Ben Klibreck		X				
VP14: A838 near West Shinness				X		
VP16: Minor road at Inveroykel forest access				X		
VP18: Carn Chuinneag		X				
VP19: Seana Bhràigh		X				
VP21: Meall an Aonaich				X		
<b>Routes</b>						
R3: A836 Lairg to Altnaharra		X				
R4: A838 Dalchork to Corrykinloch				X		
R6: A837 Invershin to Oykel Bridge		X				
R8: C1136 Ardgay – Culrain – Doune – Brae Road		X				
R9: U2117 Cassley Bridge – Duchally Road		X				
R12: SU21.03: Allt an Tuir Burn Walk				X		
R14: SU21.09: Achness Waterfall		X				
R15: Group of paths around Duag Bridge		X				
R17: Scottish Hill Track 332		X				

**Table 7.12.4: Summary of Cumulative Visual Effects – Operational, Consented Application and Scoping Baseline Scenario**

Visual Receptor Locations included in the CLVIA	Potential Effect (Not Significant)			Potential Effect (Significant)		
	Negligible	Minor	Minor - Moderate	Moderate	Moderate - Major	Major
<b>Viewpoints</b>						
VP1: A836 above the Crask Inn		X				
VP2: A836 bridge by Dalnessie entrance		X				
VP3: Saval		X				
VP5: Ben Hee		X				

Visual Receptor Locations included in the CLVIA	Potential Effect (Not Significant)			Potential Effect (Significant)		
	Negligible	Minor	Minor - Moderate	Moderate	Moderate - Major	Major
VP6: Rosehall				X		
VP7: High Road		X				
VP8: A836 - A838 Junction		X				
VP9: Achnairn caravan and camping site entrance				X		
VP10: Ben More Assynt			X			
VP11: Glencassley road to south of Castle				X		
VP12: Glencassley road by Langwell Hill	X					
VP13: Ben Klibreck		X				
VP14: A838 near West Shinness				X		
VP16: Minor road at Inveroykel forest access				X		
VP18: Carn Chuinneag		X				
VP19: Seana Bhràigh		X				
VP21: Meall an Aonaich			X			
<b>Routes</b>						
R3: A836 Lairg to Altnaharra		X				
R4: A838 Dalchork to Corrykinloch				X		
R6: A837 Invershin to Oykel Bridge		X				
R8: C1136 Ardgay – Culrain – Doune – Brae Road		X				
R9: U2117 Cassley Bridge – Duchally Road		X				
R12: SU21.03: Allt an Tuir Burn Walk				X		
R14: SU21.09: Achness Waterfall		X				
R15: Group of paths around Duag Bridge		X				
R17: Scottish Hill Track 332		X		X (L)		

## 7.13 Mitigation

7.13.1 Mitigation for landscape and visual effect has been undertaken through a rigorous and iterative design process, from which the preferred layout evolved. This process is described in further detail in Chapter 2: Site Selection and Design Evolution and the Design Statement (Technical Appendix 2.1). Potential for landscape effects and effects on sensitive views and landscapes, in particular WLA34 and views from the Assynt – Coigach NSA and surrounding settlement areas, has been central to the initial site selection and

iteration of layouts. Site layout options were reviewed repeatedly from a range of key VPs in order to minimise effects as far as possible and maintain a balanced layout which avoids the appearance of turbines which are inconsistent in elevation or visual spread. The final layout presented is considered to be the optimum layout in minimising landscape and visual effects, whilst balancing effects on other areas of environmental constraint and achieving the required technical performance.

7.13.2 The following key measures have been undertaken through the design process to mitigate potential effects:

- The design iterations for the Proposed Development have resulted in the turbine footprint being pushed as far south as possible, to the periphery of the WLA to minimise the extent and range of intervisibility and maximise the distance between the proposed turbines and the NSA and areas exhibiting the greatest degree of wildness.
- The development of the turbine layout has aimed to minimise the presence of turbines on higher ground and maintain a cohesive grouping of turbines to minimise the visual envelope of the Proposed Development as far as possible and the prominence of turbines in views.
- The height of the proposed turbine has been reduced to under 150m in order to avoid the effects of visible aviation lighting and the prominence of turbines in views.
- The use of existing infrastructure has been considered where possible, to minimise the need for new tracks to be built.
- The location of tracks and permanent ancillary features such as the substation and welfare facilities has been given careful consideration in relation to the topography of the site, to minimise their visual extent.

7.13.3 The successful landscape reinstatement of areas disturbed during the construction of the Proposed Development including compounds, working areas and borrow pits is important in minimising the degree of landscape effect. The formation of smooth gradients to tie into adjacent undisturbed areas and the use of Best Practice techniques for the handling and reinstatement of soil and peat as set out in the Outline Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) (Technical Appendix 3.1) and the Design Statement (Technical Appendix 2.1), and monitoring as detailed in the Outline Habitat Management Plan (Technical Appendix 8.10) would assist in the successful reinstatement of disturbed areas and minimise landscape and visual effects to those resulting from the permanent features of the Proposed Development.

**7.14 Review of the Proposed Development in Relation to the THC OWESG Criteria for the Consideration of Onshore Wind Farm Proposals**

7.14.1 A review of the Proposed Development in relation to the criteria for onshore wind farm developments from the THC OWESG is detailed in Technical Appendix 7.11. The key points are summarised in Table 7.14.1 below:

**Table 7.14.1: Summary of Analysis of THC Criteria for the Consideration of Onshore Wind Farm Proposals**

Criteria	Summary of Analysis
Criterion 1. Relationship between Settlements / Key	The Proposed Development would not be visible from the majority of the main settlements within the study area

Criteria	Summary of Analysis
<p>locations and wider landscape are respected.</p> <p><i>(Threshold: Development should seek to achieve a threshold where 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></p>	<p>Significant effects are anticipated at some smaller settlement areas including Rosehall, Achnairn and West Shinness and locally for users of the A838, leading to Lairg from Laxford Bridge. This comprises a minority of views from residential areas and therefore it is concluded that the threshold for this criteria would not be exceeded by the Proposed Development.</p>
<p>Criterion 2. Key Gateway locations and routes are respected.</p> <p><i>(Threshold: 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></p>	<p>The assessment has concluded that there would be a limited effect on the majority of locations which may be considered important gateways. To the south-east, down the Kyle of Sutherland and Dornoch Firth, the Proposed Development would always be seen through existing turbines with minimal perceived increase in effect. From the north and west, the Proposed Development would usually be seen in a context where existing turbines would be visible. A significant effect has been identified for the A838 (route R4 in Technical Appendix 7.9: Visual Assessment Tables) due to views of the Proposed Development, but this is not anticipated to affect the sense of a gateway perceived when looking across Loch Shin. A significant effect has also been identified for VP6 (see Technical Appendix 7.6 and Figure 7.14.1 – 7.14.4). However, this relates to the views towards Glen Cassley, and away from the Kyle of Sutherland where the sense of a gateway is felt. It is therefore concluded that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Proposed Development.</p>
<p>Criterion 3. Valued natural and cultural landmarks are respected.</p> <p><i>(Threshold: The development does not, by its presence, diminish the prominence of the landmark or disrupt its relationship to its setting).</i></p>	<p>The LVIA has identified that there would not be any significant effect to key landmark features which contribute to NSAs or SLAs as a result of the Proposed Development. No mountain Landscape Character Types (LCTs) are anticipated to be significantly affected and significant visual effect are not anticipated to lead to a deterioration of the appreciation of natural heritage landmarks as a feature of the landscape. A significant effect is anticipated to the setting of one Scheduled Monument site: Dail Langwell broch, but it is considered that there would not be an adverse effect upon the integrity of the asset's setting (see Chapter 12: Cultural Heritage). Overall it is therefore considered that the Proposed Development would not diminish the prominence or disrupt the setting to any natural or cultural heritage landmarks and therefore the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Proposed Development.</p>
<p>Criterion 4. The amenity of key recreational routes and ways is respected.</p> <p><i>(Threshold: Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the</i></p>	<p>Significant effects have been identified to a small number of recreational routes within the Study Area within a localised area. These effects would be relatively localised with respect to the available recreational routes within the study area and it is not considered that the effects would be sufficient to overwhelm or significantly detract from their visual appeal. It is therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded.</p>

Criteria	Summary of Analysis
<i>visual appeal of key routes and ways).</i>	
<p>Criterion 5. The amenity of transport routes is respected.</p> <p><i>(Threshold: Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of transport routes).</i></p>	<p>The majority of road routes within the study area would not be significantly affected by the Proposed Development. A significant effect has been identified for one main road route within the study area: the A838 between Dalchork and Corrykinloch (see Technical Appendix 7.9, route R4). Whilst this is anticipated to affect the visual amenity of this route, it is considered that this would not overwhelm or significantly detract from the visual appeal of the route, as open and attractive views would still be retained in areas not affected by the Proposed Development. It is therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded.</p>
<p>Criterion 6. The existing pattern of Wind Energy Development is respected.</p> <p><i>(Threshold: The proposal contributes positively to existing pattern or objectives for development in the area).</i></p>	<p>The Proposed Development turbines would be taller with longer blade length than existing neighbouring turbines at Achany Wind Farm and Rosehall Wind Farm but would be similarly set on the higher plateau between glens in the Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland LCT in an area where existing wind turbines already create a precedent for wind development. The difference in turbine dimensions would not normally be perceived in views as a degree of separation between these existing turbines and the Proposed Development would lead to them being seen alongside, but as a separate cluster to existing turbines. It is considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded, as it is considered that the Proposed Development forms a well-located wind farm site which enables the generation of renewable energy with relatively localised significant landscape and visual effects. The Proposed Development respects the pattern of existing development within the Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland LCT.</p>
<p>Criterion 7. The need for separation between developments and / or clusters is respected.</p> <p><i>(Threshold: The proposal maintains appropriate and effective separation between developments and/or clusters).</i></p>	<p>the Proposed Development would be located close to the existing Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms but would usually be seen to form a separate wind turbine cluster. It is not anticipated to lead to any change in the way existing development clusters are perceived and it is unlikely to be seen to form one large cluster with the existing wind farms from any particular location, due to the difference in turbine size which would usually lead to it appearing as a separate, closer development. The wind turbine cluster would normally be seen as similar in scale to the existing cluster of Achany and Rosehall. It is therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded.</p>
<p>Criterion 8. The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected.</p> <p><i>(Threshold: The proposal maintains the apparent landscape scale and/or distance in the receptors' perception).</i></p>	<p>The Proposed Development would be formed of larger turbines than those used on existing operational sites within the nearby area. This is anticipated to lead to it appearing somewhat closer to the viewer from some locations. From most mountain summit areas where the widest views are obtained across the landscape, this would not lead to a notable effect on the perceived scale of the landscape as the view is already so expansive and the perception of scale is influenced by a greater sense of distance beyond where the Proposed Development would be seen. It is considered that overall, the threshold for this criterion would not be</p>

Criteria	Summary of Analysis
	exceeded by the Proposed Development because the apparent landscape scale and distance perceived by receptors would be generally maintained, other than in very localised locations where the Proposed Development would inevitably be closer than existing wind turbines.
<p>Criterion 9. Landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is respected.</p> <p><i>(Threshold: Proposal relates well to the existing landscape setting and does not increase the perceived visual prominence of surrounding wind turbines).</i></p>	<p>The Proposed Development would be set close to the existing Achany and Rosehall turbines but would almost always appear as a separate cluster. Due to the position of the existing wind turbines at slightly higher elevation, the setting of these wind turbines is unlikely to be noticeably affected by the Proposed Development, other than where the Proposed Development would form a closer feature within the landscape setting to the front of these existing developments. However, in these situations it would still form a clearly separate cluster due to the larger turbine size which would exaggerate the perceived distance between it and the existing wind farms. It is not considered that there would be any locations where the Proposed Development would increase the prominence of existing wind turbines within the landscape setting. It is therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded.</p>
<p>Criterion 10. Distinctiveness of Landscape character is respected.</p> <p><i>(Threshold: Integrity and variety of Landscape Character Areas are maintained).</i></p>	<p>The Proposed Development would lead to some localised effects on landscape character, largely limited to the north of the Proposed Development where existing wind turbines are less influential, including LCT135: Rounded Hills - Caithness &amp; Sutherland and LCT142: Strath - Caithness &amp; Sutherland. A localised significant effect has also been identified to Wild Land Area (WLA) 34– Reay Cassley and one of its Key Qualities: “<i>Extensive, elevated peatland slopes whose simplicity and openness contribute to a perception of awe, whilst highlighting the qualities of adjacent mountains</i>”, but this is not anticipated to affect the integrity of the WLA.</p> <p>No significant effects have been identified to any NSA or SLA designated landscapes.</p> <p>The range of significant effects would be localised and other than within the directly affected confines of the immediate development site, the landscape character would not be fundamentally changed. The integrity of the LCTs is therefore not anticipated to be affected within the study area. Surrounding LCTs would not be significantly affected and as the Proposed Development would be located within the same LCT as existing wind farm development within the surrounding area, no loss to the experience of landscape variety within the study area is anticipated.</p> <p>It is therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Proposed Development.</p>

## 7.15 Summary and Conclusions

### Summary of Landscape Effects

- 7.15.1 The majority of effects to landscape character, landscape designations and other protected landscapes resulting from the Proposed Development would not be significant, largely due to the presence of existing wind turbines within the nearby context which

create a precedent for wind turbines as a characteristic of the landscape. However, significant landscape effects are anticipated to occur within a relatively localised area to the east and west of Glen Cassley, stretching up to around 6km on the east side of the Glen, and locally up to 8-10km on the west side of the Glen. In these areas, the prominence of the existing wind turbines is less and the Proposed Development would appear closer, more directly influencing the character of the landscape. In a small number of areas, where the existing wind turbines are not visible, the Proposed Development would also introduce wind turbines as a new characteristic of the landscape, thereby affecting qualities of wildness.

- 7.15.2 These localised significant effects within this area are therefore anticipated to affect the Landscape Character Types (LCTs):
- LCT135: Rounded Hills - Caithness & Sutherland; and
  - LCT142: Strath - Caithness & Sutherland.
- 7.15.3 The significant effect to LCT135 (Rounded Hills) would be greatest within an area of enclosed corrie in the northern part of the Proposed Development site, where no existing wind turbines currently influence the landscape character. This effect would diminish with distance, and beyond around 8km from the Proposed Development would generally reduce to levels that would be not significant.
- 7.15.4 The significant effect to LCT142 (Strath) would be localised to the area of Glen Cassley, affecting a relatively small area between Badintagairt and Glen Muick. All other parts of Glen Cassley and other areas of LCT142 within the detailed study area are anticipated to experience effects which would be not significant.
- 7.15.5 The significant effects described to landscape character would also result in a locally significant effect to Wild Land Area (WLA) 34 affecting localised areas of the plateaux to the east and west of Glen Cassley. This is anticipated to lead to a localised significant effect to one of four WLA Key Qualities, described as: *“Extensive, elevated peatland slopes whose simplicity and openness contribute to a perception of awe, whilst highlighting the qualities of adjacent mountains”*. However, this effect would be largely limited to the upper plateau areas where existing features and contemporary land use in Glen Cassley, such as buildings and features associated with Duchally hydro scheme, cannot be perceived, and would be experienced only where intervisibility with the Proposed Development would occur. It would therefore be very limited in its extent.
- 7.15.6 Overall, the effects on the WLA would be very localised to small areas within the south-eastern part of the WLA with the vast majority of the area being completely unaffected. Beyond the close confines of the Proposed Development, whilst localised significant effects may occur it is considered that all of the physical attributes and perceptual qualities which are required to establish the presence of wild land would remain due to the continued association with the main body of the WLA to the north and west. All of the WLA Key Qualities would therefore continue to be well expressed within the WLA. Therefore, despite the potential reduction in the portrayal of some attributes and key qualities within a small peripheral area, it is concluded that the integrity of WLA 34 would be retained.
- 7.15.7 The assessment has identified that there would be no significant effects to either the Ben More Assynt National Scenic Area (NSA), the Dornoch Firth NSA or any of the Highland Council Identified Special Landscape Areas (SLAs).

### Cumulative Landscape Effects

- 7.15.8 The CLVIA has considered the potential effect of the addition of the Proposed Development to two baseline cumulative scenarios: operational and consented sites only; and with the addition of application and scoping sites. This has broadly concluded that the cumulative landscape effects of the Proposed Development would be similar in extent to those identified for the Proposed Development alone. This is largely due to the presence of the operational Rosehall and Achany Wind Farms which are located to the south-east of the Proposed Development site and would thereby limit the degree of additional effect in the southerly and easterly landscape.
- 7.15.9 Both baseline scenarios would result in wind turbines forming a well-established feature of the landscape to the south-east and north-east of the Proposed Development, therefore consolidating the influence of the operational sites already present. The Proposed Development would reflect this pattern of development and would therefore usually be seen within this existing context leading only to a perceptual increase in the influence of wind turbines on the landscape and effects which would be not significant. The exception to this would be areas to the north-west of the Proposed Development, within and around Glen Cassley, where closer proximity of the Proposed Development, in comparison to baseline cumulative sites, would lead to an increased characterisation of the landscape by wind turbines. The area affected would be similar to that affected by the Proposed Development alone, extending locally up to 6-10km of the Proposed Development leading to locally experienced significant cumulative effects to LCT 135: Rounded Hills - Caithness & Sutherland, across the plateau ridges to the east and west of Glen Cassley, and LCT 142: Strath - Caithness & Sutherland within Glen Cassley, due to sequential effects and a reduction in the distinctive quality of the glen as undeveloped and unaffected by wind turbines, in comparison to other neighbouring straths and glens.
- 7.15.10 With the inclusion of application and consented sites to the baseline, the significant effects to landscape character across LCT 135 and LCT 142 are anticipated to extend across a slightly smaller area of around 6-8km to the north-west, as the Sallachy Wind Farm would already characterise the more northerly parts of this area.
- 7.15.11 The cumulative effects of the operational and consented baseline to LCT 135 across the upland plateau would also lead to a localised significant cumulative effect to WLA 34. Reay – Cassley across a similar area, and a localised significant effect to one of the four WLA Key Qualities: *“Extensive, elevated peatland slopes whose simplicity and openness contribute to a perception of awe, whilst highlighting the qualities of adjacent mountains”*. With the addition of application and scoping sites, the presence of Sallachy would result in increased existing influence of wind turbines in the northern part of the area to the east of Glen Cassley. This is anticipated to slightly reduce the extent of the significant effect to the west of Glen Cassley, although is anticipated to lead to a slightly greater area of significant effect to the east of Glen Cassley, due to an increased influence of turbines throughout this area and a more noticeable reduction in the extent of the peatland landscape. However, as the Proposed Development would be located at the far southern tip of the WLA whilst Sallachy would be located further north, it is considered that this reduction in scale would already have occurred in large part due to the introduction of Sallachy.
- 7.15.12 Overall, the cumulative effects on the WLA would be very localised and the vast majority of the area would be unaffected. The area to the east of Glen Cassley is peripheral to the main body of the WLA and its relationship to the landscapes to the west and north-west

is therefore considered key in terms of its integrity as part of the WLA. From areas to the north of the Proposed Development and west of Sallachy, the connection to the wider WLA would still be maintained and the WLA Key Quality of “*Extensive elevated peatland slopes...*” would still be experienced. It is therefore considered that the integrity of the WLA would be retained.

- 7.15.13 The cumulative landscape assessment has identified that there would be no significant cumulative effects to any statutory or locally designated landscapes, including the Assynt – Coigach NSA, and no significant cumulative effect to WLA 37. Fionaven – Ben Hee.

#### **Summary of Visual Effects**

- 7.15.14 The majority of visual effects anticipated to result from the Proposed Development are expected to be not significant, including VPs, RRLs and Routes. This is largely due to the presence of existing wind turbines close to the Proposed Development which result in little perceived change from many locations, particularly to the south and south-east of the Proposed Development.
- 7.15.15 Significant effects have been identified to views from six representative Viewpoints (VPs), five Residential Receptor Locations (RRLs) and four routes. These significant effects would be largely focussed within three parts of the study area:
- Around Achnairn and Shinness on the north-east side of Loch Shin;
  - Near the confluence of Glen Cassley with Strath Oykel and Kyle of Sutherland; and
  - In and around Glen Cassley to the west and north-west of the Proposed Development.
- 7.15.16 In the area to the north-east side of Loch Shin, significant effects have been identified to VP9 (Achnairn Caravan and Camping Site Entrance) and VP14 (A838 near West Shinness). These VPs are representative of views obtained by residents and visitors to various scattered properties and a small caravan site in this area, as well as the rural A838 which follows the north-eastern side of Loch Shin. Visual receptors in this area take advantage of principal and secondary views to the north-west, across Loch Shin and towards the Proposed Development. The Proposed Development would appear in these views as a noticeable new feature, set in a low point on the skyline between two hills at a distance of 8-9km. Consequently, visual receptors at three RRLs: RRL7 (Achnairn (upper)), RRL8 (Achnairn (lower)) and RRL9 (Shinness Lodge and West Shinness) are also anticipated to experience significant visual effects, as would users of the short section of the A838 (Route R4) through this area, between Dalchork and Corrykinloch.
- 7.15.17 Around the confluence of Glen Cassley and Strath Oykel, some existing turbines of the Rosehall Wind Farm are already very noticeable on the skyline. However, turbines of the Proposed Development would appear on the north-easterly skyline in this area at distances of between 4-6km and also in northerly views up Glen Cassley, leading to a greater horizontal extent of turbines in the view. This would lead to a significant effect on VP6 (Rosehall) which is representative of residents, visitors and road users in this area and also corresponding RRLs: RRL28 (Ochtow and Inveroykel Lodge) and RRL29 (Rosehall village); and a Core Path: Route R12 (SU21.03: Allt an Tuir Burn Walk). However, this fleeting view is not predicted to lead to a significant effect on road users of the A837 (Route R6).
- 7.15.18 To the west of the Proposed Development, significant effects have been identified to two VPs in Glen Cassley: VP11 (Glencassley Road to South of Castle) and VP12 (Glencassley

Road by Langwell Hill) which lie within 5km of the Proposed Development, which would appear on the easterly skyline. A significant effect is also anticipated for users of the U2117 minor road through Glen Cassley (Route R9). Further to the north-west, a significant effect is also anticipated to the view from VP21 (Meall an Aonaich) and a localised part (3km) of Scottish Hill Track 332 (Route R17) as it passes below this peak. From these locations, the Proposed Development would be seen in a context of other existing wind turbines, but would appear closer, forming a greater focus within the view. However, this effect is not considered sufficient to lead to an overall significant effect on the visual amenity of Route R17 which is 30km in total.

- 7.15.19 Overall, the significant visual effects would be relatively localised, and with the exception of VP21 (Meall an Aonaich) and a localised section of Route R17 (Scottish Hill Track 332) all would be confined within an area of less than 10km from the Proposed Development. The effect on all other visual receptors included in the LVIA including residents, road users and recreational users within the study area was found to be not significant.

#### Cumulative Visual Effects

- 7.15.20 The CLVIA has considered the potential effect of the addition of the Proposed Development to two baseline cumulative scenarios: operational and consented sites only; and with the addition of application and scoping sites. This has concluded that the majority of cumulative effects would be not significant. Significant cumulative visual effects are anticipated to occur to a similar range of VPs as those where significant effects were identified for the Proposed Development alone, affecting the north-east side of Loch Shin (VP9, VP14 and Route R4), the confluence of Glen Cassley with Strath Oykel and the Kyle of Sutherland (VP6 and Route R12) and areas to the west of the Proposed Development (VP11, VP21 and Route R17). However, the minimal perceptibility of cumulative baseline sites in mid and upper Glen Cassley would mean that a significant effect to VP12 (Glencassley Road by Langwell Hill) and the U2117 minor road through Glen Cassley (Route R9) would not be replicated as significant cumulative effects.
- 7.15.21 One additional cumulative effect to a VP is anticipated within the area around the confluence of Glen Cassley, Strath Oykel and Kyle of Sutherland: VP16 (Minor road at Inveroykel forest access) which is located on the south side of Strath Oykel / Kyle of Sutherland, due to the inclusion of Braemore within the cumulative baseline. This would mean that a greater portion of the view from this location would be occupied by turbines and the Proposed Development would therefore lead to a majority part of the view being affected. However, this would be a very localised cumulative effect in an area where potential significant effects have already been identified in relation to the Proposed Development alone.
- 7.15.22 The cumulative visual assessment also identified that a slightly greater portion of Scottish Hill Track 332 (Route R17) up to 7km would be significantly affected by the Proposed Development with a baseline scenario including application and scoping sites due to sequential effects with the proposed Sallachy Wind Farm. However, this would still comprise a localised part of this 30km route and therefore would not be significant in terms of the visual amenity of the route as a whole.
- 7.15.23 Overall, both cumulative baseline scenarios were found to result in few additional significant effects in relation to the Proposed Development compared to the assessment on the basis of the current baseline, and in some areas effects which would be slightly reduced. Cumulative visual effects would remain relatively localised, and with the exception of a localised area around Meall an Aonaich, would be largely confined within

an area of less than 10km from the Proposed Development. The effect on all other VPs and routes included in the CLVIA was found to be not significant.

### **Conclusions**

- 7.15.24 The majority of landscape, visual and cumulative effects relating to the Proposed Development would be not significant. Significant effects would be limited to a relatively limited area, occurring to the north-east of Loch Shin, areas within and to the east and west of Glen Cassley, and a relatively localised area around the confluence of Glen Cassley, Strath Oykel and Kyle of Sutherland. The majority of significant effects would occur within 10km of the Proposed Development and none would be greater than 12.5km from the Proposed Development.
- 7.15.25 The Proposed Development would be located within the southern tip of Wild Land Area (WLA) 34. Reay – Cassley, and would lead to a localised significant effect within this peripheral part of the WLA. The effect would be slightly greater in extent to the east of Glen Cassley if the Proposed Development was added to a baseline whereby the Sallachy Wind Farm was already operational but slightly reduced to the west of Glen Cassley. However, the vast majority of this extensive WLA would not be affected and it is considered that all of the WLA Key Qualities would remain well expressed within the WLA and therefore the integrity of the WLA would be retained.
- 7.15.26 In light of this analysis and these conclusions, from a technical LVIA perspective there is support for the conclusion reached in the planning statement to the effect that any significant effects on the qualities of the WLA have been substantially overcome by siting, design and other mitigation. This is because the mitigation of the effects of the project has resulted in only very localised significant effects on the qualities of the WLA, and the integrity of the WLA would be retained.
- 7.15.27 There would be no significant effects to any statutory or locally designated landscapes and therefore, the integrity of these areas would not be affected.

### **Conclusions on the THC OWESG Criteria**

- 7.15.28 The analysis of the THC criteria for the consideration of onshore wind farm proposals as detailed in Technical Appendix 7.11, has concluded that although some significant effects would occur to localised parts of the landscape and visual resource, the location, design and layout of the Proposed Development is not anticipated to result in the threshold for any of the ten THC criteria being exceeded.
- 7.15.29 The Proposed Development is therefore considered to be in broad conformity with THC's criteria for the consideration of onshore wind farm proposals.

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