

6 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL

6.1 INTRODUCTION

6.1.1 Overview

This Chapter of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIA Report) identifies and assesses the potential effects that the proposed Ackron Wind Farm (the Development) may have on the landscape, views and visual amenity resources of the local environment. This Chapter has been prepared by Beatrice Dower Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI) of MVGLA Ltd who has 19 years' experience of landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA), accompanied by Gavin David CMLI who has over 20 years' experience of LVIA. The Chapter has been reviewed Heather Kwiatkowski, Principal EIA Consultant at Arcus and by Stuart Davidson, Registered EIA Practitioner and Operational Director at Arcus.

Landscape and visual assessments are separate, though related processes. Effects on the landscape as a resource may be caused by changes to the constituent elements of the landscape, its specific aesthetic or perceptual qualities and character. Effects on views and visual amenity, as experienced by people, may be caused by changes in the appearance of the landscape resulting from the Development.

This chapter sets out the baseline for the LVIA, but assesses them separately, followed by an assessment of cumulative effects with other wind farm developments. The assessments focus on likely significant effects that may arise from the Development.

This Chapter is broadly structured as follows:

- Introduction;
- Legislation, Policy and Guidance;
- Assessment Methodology and Significance Criteria;
- Baseline Methodology;
- Baseline Conditions;
- The Development;
- Landscape Assessment;
- Visual Assessment;
- Cumulative Effect Assessment;
- Implications of Effects for Designated landscapes;
- Mitigation Measures and Residual Effects; and
- Summary.

This Chapter of the EIA Report is supported by the following Technical Appendix documents provided in Volume 3 Technical Appendices:

- Appendix A6.1 - Methodology for the Landscape, Visual and Cumulative Assessments;
- Appendix A6.2 - Viewpoint Selection;
- Appendix A6.3 - Residential Visual Amenity Assessment;
- Appendix A6.4 – Wild Land Assessment; and
- Appendix A6.5 – Supplementary Guidance Criteria.

This Chapter of the EIA Report is supported by the following figures provided in Volume 2b Landscape and Visual Plan Figures:

- Figure 6.1 - Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) to Blade Tip to 40 kilometres (km);
- Figure 6.2 - ZTV to Blade Tip (1:50,000 base map on A1);
- Figure 6.3 - ZTV to Blade Tip (1:50,000 base map excerpt on A3);
- Figure 6.4 - ZTV to Hub Height;

- Figure 6.5 - Designated Landscapes;
- Figure 6.6 - Landscape Character Types;
- Figure 6.7 - Visual Receptors;
- Figure 6.8 - Cumulative Baseline (25 km);
- Figure 6.9 - Cumulative ZTV with existing wind farms (the LVIA baseline);
- Figure 6.9a - Cumulative ZTV with Baillie and Strathy North;
- Figure 6.10 - Cumulative ZTV with consented wind farms;
- Figure 6.10a - Cumulative ZTV with Limekiln and Strathy South;
- Figure 6.11 - Cumulative ZTV with existing, consented and 'in-planning' wind farms;
- Figure 6.11a - Cumulative ZTV with Drum Hollistan 2;
- Figure 6.27 - Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA) Study Area;
- Figure 6.29a - Cumulative ZTV with existing wind farms over Wild Land Area 39; and
- Figure 6.29b - Selected cumulative ZTVs over Wild Land Area 39.

Figures for the viewpoints, Figures 6.12 - 6.26 and 6.30 - 6.33, have multiple pages to include the sheets required by NatureScot and The Highland Council (the Council) visualisations. Volume 2c contains NatureScot versions of these figures, and Volume 2d contains versions to the Council's visualisation standards. The following figures are provided in Volume 2c NatureScot Visualisations and Volume 2d The Highland Council (THC) Visualisations:

- Figure 6.12 - Viewpoint 1 A836 Forss;
- Figure 6.13 - Viewpoint 2 A836 Downreay;
- Figure 6.14 - Viewpoint 3 A836 Reay;
- Figure 6.15 - Viewpoint 4 A836 Layby;
- Figure 6.16 - Viewpoint 5 A836 Melvich;
- Figure 6.17 - Viewpoint 6 Portskerra;
- Figure 6.18 - Viewpoint 7 Strathy Point;
- Figure 6.19 - Viewpoint 8 A897 Strath Halladale, Calgarry;
- Figure 6.20 - Viewpoint 9 Beinn Ràtha;
- Figure 6.21 - Viewpoint 10 Hill of Shebster;
- Figure 6.22 - Viewpoint 11 Dunnet Head;
- Figure 6.23 - Viewpoint 12 A9 Georgemas Station;
- Figure 6.24 - Viewpoint 13 Beinn Dorrery;
- Figure 6.25 - Viewpoint 14 A897 Forsinard;
- Figure 6.26 - Viewpoint 15 Beinn Griam Beg;
- Figure 6.28 (a-c): RVAA property wirelines (not included in Volume 2d);
- Figure 6.30 – Wild Land Viewpoint A Cnoc Bad Mhairtein;
- Figure 6.31 – Wild Land Viewpoint B Sean Airigh;
- Figure 6.32 – Wild Land Viewpoint C Loch na Caorach; and
- Figure 6.33 – Wild Land Viewpoint D Beinn nam Bad Mòr.

The following terms are used within this Chapter to describe the Development and various associated study areas:

- The Development: the whole physical process involved in the development of Ackron Wind Farm, including the infrastructure and activities associated with wind farm construction, operation and decommissioning (i.e. not a piece of land or an area);
- The Site Boundary: the red line or application boundary as shown in Figure 1.2
- The Site: the land within the Site Boundary available for turbine development and associated wind farm infrastructure; and
- The Study Area: the whole of the Study Area of 40 km radius from the outermost turbines of the Development.

6.2 LEGISLATION, POLICY AND GUIDANCE

6.2.1 Legislation

The UK Government signed up to the Council of Europe's European Landscape Convention in November 2006¹. The European Landscape Convention is designed to promote the protection, management and planning of all landscapes, including natural, managed and urban areas as well as special and degraded landscapes.

6.2.2 Policy and Guidance

In addition to the above legislation and the detailed methodological guidance detailed below and in Technical Appendix A6.1, the following is a summary of the key policy and guidance of relevance to this Chapter.

6.2.2.1 Scottish Planning Policy (SPP)

Relevant sections of SPP include paragraphs 161, Table 1 and Paragraph 169.

Paragraph 161 of SPP² states that Planning Authorities should set out spatial frameworks identifying areas most likely to be appropriate for onshore wind farms, including an indication of scale that the framework applies to, and criteria used to consider proposals. Table 1 referenced in that paragraph sets out three groups of areas to be used in the frameworks:

- Group 1 Areas where wind farms will not be acceptable;
- Group 2 Areas of significant protection; and
- Group 3 Areas with potential for wind farm development.

Paragraph 169 of SPP sets out that development management for wind farms should include consideration of landscape and visual impacts, including effects on wild land, and cumulative effects.

6.2.2.2 Highland Wide Local Development Plan

The current Development Plan for the area is the Highland Wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP³). The key policy for the Development is Policy 67, advising on renewables. Other relevant policies include Policy 57 Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage, and Policy 61 Landscape. These are considered further in **Chapter 5: Energy and Planning Policy** of this EIA Report.

6.2.2.3 Supplementary Guidance

The relevant Supplementary Guidance that accompanies the HwLDP includes:

- Highland Renewable Energy Strategy (2006)⁴;
- Highland Council Core Paths Plan (2011)⁵;
- Highland Council Onshore Wind Energy: Supplementary Guidance (2016)⁶; and
- Highland Council Onshore Wind Energy: Supplementary Guidance: Part 2b (2017)⁷.

Background papers to the HwLDP include:

¹ Council of Europe (2000) European Landscape Convention.

² Scottish Planning Policy (2014).

³ The Highland Council (2012) Highland Wide Local Development Plan.

⁴ The Highland Council (2006) Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines.

⁵ The Highland Council (2011) Highland Council Core Paths Plan, and The Highland Council (2019) Modified Core Paths Plan (Caithness & Sutherland) Amended.

⁶ The Highland Council (2016) Onshore Wind Energy: Supplementary Guidance.

⁷ The Highland Council (2017) Addendum Supplementary Guidance: 'Part 2b'.

- Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas⁸.

The Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance⁶ which sets out to amplify the advice in Policy 67 of the HwLDP, sets out ten criteria against which the landscape and visual effects of proposed wind farm developments will be assessed, including:

1. "Relationship between Settlements/Key locations and wider landscape respected
2. Key Gateway locations and routes are respected
3. Valued natural and cultural landmarks are respected
4. The amenity of key recreational routes and ways is respected
5. The amenity of transport routes is respected
6. The existing pattern of Wind Energy Development is respected
7. The need for separation between developments and/ or clusters is respected
8. The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected
9. Landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is respected
10. Distinctiveness of Landscape character is respected"

Responses to these criteria, following the detailed assessment of landscape, visual and cumulative effects, are set out in Technical Appendix A6.5.

6.2.2.4 *Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan*

The Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan, adopted 2018⁹) sets out some revisions to Special Landscape Area (SLA) boundaries, but relies on the HwLDP for safeguarding policies.

6.2.2.5 *Highland Council Onshore Wind Energy: Supplementary Guidance: Part 2b (2017)*

This Supplementary Guidance¹⁰ for Caithness sets out a number of key receptors in the area around the Development, including:

- Key views including Ben Dorrery, Dunnet Head and Scrabster Hill. Ben Dorrery and Dunnet Head are used as viewpoints for the LVIA (Viewpoints 13 and 11 respectively); Scrabster Hill looks eastwards and will not have a view of the Development;
- Key routes including the A836 Drum Hollistan to John O'Groats and the Forsinard – Scotsvalley train line. The A836 is considered in the LVIA, the train line will have very limited visibility at over 18km away and is not considered further; and
- Gateways including the transition from open flat moorland/agricultural land of Caithness to the more undulating and rugged moorland of Sutherland.

The landscape unit 'CT4 Central Caithness' is roughly equivalent to the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT assessed in the LVIA. For this area the landscape character sensitivity in the Supplementary Guidance is '3' of a scale of 1-4, 1 being the most susceptible to change¹¹.

On page 101, the Supplementary Guidance notes that the potential for wind energy development in CT4 is constrained by wild land characteristics, the visual setting of Lone Mountains, and areas of transition to adjacent LCTs. The Supplementary Guidance notes that there is 'no scope' for "*larger scale development to the west of the LCA where it impinges upon experience of the important landscape transition between Caithness and Sutherland. Even wind energy development within 10 to 15 km could significantly erode this experience*". The section goes on to state "*Limited scope for: Larger turbines*."

⁸ Highland Council and Scottish Natural Heritage (2011) Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas.

⁹ Highland Council (2018) Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan.

¹⁰ The Highland Council (2017) Addendum Supplementary Guidance: 'Part 2b'.

¹¹ Ibid, page 100.

Turbines should: concentrate and consolidate with existing development; maintain open, clear and direct views, which allow the appreciation of the wild landscape, in particular from the A9; be designed so that the logical relationship between development scale; and landscape character is maintained'.

6.3 ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY AND SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

6.3.1 Scoping Responses and Consultation

Throughout the scoping exercises, and subsequently during the ongoing EIA process, relevant organisations were contacted with regards to the Development. Consultation specific to the LVIA included the selection of viewpoints for inclusion in the visual assessment, and the identification of cumulative wind farms for the Cumulative LVIA (the CLVIA). Table 6.1 outlines the consultation responses received in relation to landscape and visual matters.

Table 6.1: Summary of Consultation Responses

Consultees	Details	Where Addressed in EIA Report
Pre-Application Advice:		
The Council, Pre-Application Advice Pack (5 February 2019)	<p>Expressed concerns over effects on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A836 North Coast 500 (NC500) route; • East Halladale Flows Wild Land Area; • The landscape transition between Caithness and Sutherland. <p>Provided advice on planning guidance, baseline information sources, and that visualisations should follow the Council's standards¹². Infrastructure should be assessed as well as turbines. Sensitive receptors include those who reside in the area and those who visit it.</p> <p>Draws attention to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criteria in the Supplementary Guidance¹³ that should be key considerations during assessment and design; and • Landscape Sensitivity appraisals¹⁴ undertaken for Caithness. <p>Sets out that the LVIA should be receptor led, with the purpose of each viewpoint set out.</p>	<p>The LVIA considers effects on all receptors mentioned in this advice.</p> <p>An appraisal of the Development with respect to criteria in the Supplementary Guidance is set out in Technical Appendix A6.5.</p>
Responses to Scoping:		
The Council, Response to Scoping (6 June 2019)	<p>An LVIA should be included in the EIAR, considering landscape and visual effects separately. Visualisations to Council's standards should include A4 maps to locate viewpoints.</p> <p>Infrastructure should be assessed as well as turbines.</p> <p>Viewpoint locations should be agreed with the Council. Advised that the</p>	<p>Visualisations to the Council's standards are provided for each viewpoint (Volume 2d).</p> <p>The LVIA considers borrow pits, tracks and infrastructure as well as turbines (e.g. effects on landscape fabric of the Site).</p> <p>The process of selection of viewpoints is set out in</p>

¹² The Highland Council (2016) Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments.

¹³ The Highland Council (2016) Onshore Wind Energy: Supplementary Guidance, page 18.

¹⁴ The Highland Council (2017) Addendum Supplementary Guidance: 'Part 2b'.

Consultees	Details	Where Addressed in EIA Report
	viewpoints proposed in the Scoping Report are broadly acceptable, but the final list should take account of requests from the Community Council. The purpose of viewpoints should be set out.	Technical Appendix A6.2. The purpose of inclusion of each viewpoint is set out in Table 6.5.
NatureScot in Response to Scoping (6 May 2019)	Concerns over effects on East Halladale Flows Wild Land Area. Assessment of effects on wild land required.	The Wild Land Assessment is contained in Technical Appendix A6.4.
<i>Responses to Re-Scoping:</i>		
The Council, Response to Re-Scoping (11 December 2019)	Reiterated advice from previous response. Reiterated NatureScot response.	See below.
NatureScot in Response to Re-Scoping (undated,)	Referred to advice from previous response. Additional viewpoints are required for the Wild Land Assessment to match those used for Drum Hollistan 2. The assessment should follow 2017 guidance ¹⁵ .	The wild land assessment is set out in Technical Appendix A6.4 using the 2020 ¹⁶ guidance which supersedes the 2020 and was published after this correspondence. Visualisations for the wild land viewpoints are provided in Figures 6.30-6.33.
<i>Responses to Post-scoping Consultation on Viewpoints and Cumulative Schemes:</i>		
Video call meeting with the Council and NatureScot 16 April 2020	Concerns over effects on views when travelling along the coast. Concerns over cumulative effects. Concerns over effects on East Halladale Flows Wild Land Area. Photographs for wild land viewpoints required.	Effects on coastal views considered in the LVIA with the A836 and representative viewpoints. Cumulative effects considered in detail in the LVIA. Effects on WLA considered in Appendix A6.4, with visualisations provided in Figures 6.29 to 6.33.
NatureScot (18 May 2020)	Noted that Limekiln Extension was in planning	Limekiln Extension included in the cumulative assessment.
The Council (19 May 2020)	Regarding cumulative sites, providing a link to the Council's cumulative database listings. Requested cumulative sites to be considered to 45 km.	The Council data has been used to inform the assessment. The patterns of development are considered to 40-45 km, but the detailed consideration of cumulative effects is focussed on effects in relation to wind farms within 25 km.
Correspondence dated up to 16 June 2020	Correspondence requesting confirmation of viewpoint locations. No response from The Council.	Viewpoint selection has been made accessible to the Council over numerous correspondences, viewpoint list assumed to be acceptable.

¹⁵ Scottish Natural Heritage (2017) Consultation Draft Guidance: Assessing impacts on Wild Land Areas – technical guidance.

¹⁶ NatureScot (2020) Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Areas – Technical Guidance.

6.3.2 Scope of Assessment

NatureScot guidance¹⁷ suggests that for turbines of up to 150 m to blade tip, an initial Study Area of 40 km radius should be considered, followed by refinement of the Study Area to focus on potential significant effects. The ZTV to 40 km is shown on Figure 6.1. The Study Area was reduced to 25 km radius for detailed assessment of visual effects, and 15 km for detailed assessment of landscape effects.

To allow a focussed assessment, where receptors are unlikely to be affected by the Development, either through having little or no theoretical visibility, or being distant from the Development, those receptors have been scoped out of the LVIA. The exception to this is when long distance viewpoints are requested by consultees and have been retained to provide evidence of likely visibility from these locations, even though effects are unlikely to be significant.

The LVIA fully considers:

- Effects during construction on the landscape character of the Site;
- Effects during operation on landscape character and views of the Site;
- Effects during operation on landscape character and views across the Study Area towards the Site, including:
 - Views from key viewpoint locations identified through consultation, site visits and professional judgement;
 - Views from settlements and sequential routes, including those used by recreational receptors; and
- Cumulative effects during operation on landscape character and views across the Study Area.

The LVIA also includes consideration of the implications of landscape and visual effects on designated landscapes. A Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA) is contained in Technical Appendix A6.3, and an assessment of effects on Wild Land is contained in Technical Appendix A6.4.

6.3.3 Baseline Methodology

Desk studies were undertaken to provide information about the baseline landscape and visual resource and to inform field work and the evaluation of effects. For this work, data sources included Ordnance Survey (OS) topographic and geological maps, as well as references specific to landscape character (NatureScot Landscape Character Assessments) and designated areas (e.g. Local Plans):

- Scottish Landscape Character Types Maps and Descriptions (2019)¹⁸;
- Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas (2011).

The LVIA also has cognisance of other, supplementary assessments of landscape character and sensitivity provided in:

- Highland Council Onshore Wind Energy: Supplementary Guidance: Part 2b (2017); and
- Cumulative Landscape and Visual Assessment of Wind Energy in Caithness (2014)¹⁹.

Field survey work was carried out during several visits under differing weather conditions, between October 2018 and July 2020. Records were made in the form of field notes and photographs. Field survey work included visits to viewpoints and designated landscapes,

¹⁷ Scottish Natural Heritage (2017) Visual Representation of Windfarms.

¹⁸ Scottish Natural Heritage (2019) Scottish Landscape Character Types Maps and Descriptions.

¹⁹ LUC (2014) Cumulative Landscape and Visual Assessment of Wind Energy in Caithness.

and extensive travel around the wider Study Area to consider potential effects on landscape character and on experiences of views seen from routes.

6.3.4 Methodology for the Assessment of Effects

The methodology for the LVIA and the CLVIA, as well as the production of visualisations is set out in Technical Appendix A6.1.

It should be noted that:

- The methodology follows guidance set out in Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment²⁰;
- Mitigation of landscape and visual effects has been undertaken through design modifications and input to the design process. The design evolution is set out in **Chapter 3: Site Selection and Design** of this EIA Report. As all mitigation is embedded within the final design for the Development and the proposed Habitat Management Plan, all effects identified are residual effects (embedded mitigation is discussed further in Section 0);
- The duration of all operational effects is assumed to be permanent²¹. This is not repeated for every receptor, but is considered as part of the judgement of magnitude of change. However, it is relevant to note that the development can almost wholly be removed on decommissioning;
- Using a precautionary approach, and although people may consider the appearance of wind farms to be positive for a variety of reasons, all likely landscape and visual effects identified are judged to be adverse;
- The assessment of cumulative effects reports on the effects of the Development when introduced into the baseline altered by the cumulative situation, and whether these are greater or lesser than those identified in the LVIA. The CLVIA also considers the role of the Development in the combined effects of all wind farms, and whether overall effects will be to alter the degree to which the area is characterised by wind energy development;
- The cut-off date for the cumulative assessment was 15 September 2020; and
- Assessment limitations are set out in Appendix A6.1.

The Assessment considers three different development scenarios, the first, the Existing Scenario, considers the effects of the introduction of the Development to the existing landscape, which includes existing wind farms and those under construction. Secondly, the assessment considers the Consented Scenario: the addition of the Development in the context of operational, under construction *and consented* wind farms, i.e. a likely future scenario. Thirdly, the In-Planning Scenario considers the addition of the Development in the context of operational, under construction, consented, *undetermined planning applications and wind farm developments currently at appeal*, i.e. a less certain future scenario. The Existing scenario is considered in detail in the LVIA (Sections 0 and 6.7), the Consented and In-planning Scenarios make up the cumulative assessment section (Section 6.7.6).

²⁰ Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Assessment (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. Third Edition.

²¹ SPP paragraph 170 states that “*Areas identified for wind farms should be suitable for use in perpetuity*”, and therefore that assessments should assume that wind farms are permanent.

6.4 BASELINE CONDITIONS

6.4.1 The Site

The Site is located approximately 18 km west of Thurso and approximately 2 km south-east of Melvich on the north coast of Scotland in Sutherland. The Site ranges from approximately 186 m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) in the east of the Site at Beinn Ruadh, generally sloping westward to 30 m AOD along the A897 within Strath Halladale. The Site extends from the A836 to the north-west, southwards on the east side of the A897 to Golval Hill and Loch Akran to the south.

6.4.2 The Surrounding Study Area

The Site is part of an extensive area of gently undulating moorland along the north coast of Scotland that extends over much of Sutherland. There are low hills emerging from the moorland, with Beinn Ràtha the closest to the Site and the highest locally.

To the south of the Site, the moorland extends for miles, with little to interrupt views. This Sweeping Moorland has been described by NatureScot as a wild land area²². In contrast, the north coast is farmed and settled, with the A836 as a key route for local people and tourists, that runs from Thurso all along the north coast. Settled landscapes also extend up the valleys, such as Strath Halladale, along which the A897 connects Melvich and the north coast with Forsinard and Helmsdale. To the east of the Site across the settled landscapes around Loch Calder and Halkirk, there is a network of minor roads with scattered properties.

Moorland and bog occupy much of the landscape away from the settled coastal, lowland or valleys. Deciduous woodland is relatively infrequent across the Study Area, limited to sheltered valleys and around farmsteads. Coniferous plantations occur across extensive areas of the undulating landscape, particularly to the east of the Site (East of Beinn Ràtha), around Forsinard to the south and west of Strath Halladale (Strathy Forest).

6.4.2.1 Existing and Under Construction Wind Farms

There are currently several existing wind farms in the Study Area, but none currently under construction²³. These are considered as part of the baseline for the LVIA, and are listed in Table 6.2 and shown on Figure 6.8. Consented wind farms and proposed wind farms in planning are included in the CLVIA baseline, are set out later in the Chapter.

Table 6.2: Wind Farms Considered as Part of the Baseline for the LVIA

Wind Farm name	Status	Number of turbines	Blade tip height (m)	Approximate distance
Strathy North	Existing	33	109	9.8 km south-west
Baillie	Existing	21	110	10.1 km east
Forss Phases 1&2	Existing	6	76 and 78	11.9 km north-east
Bettyhill	Existing	2	45	17.1 km west
Achlachan	Existing	5	115	25.0 km south-east
Causeymire	Existing	21	100	25.8 km south-east
Bad a Cheo	Existing	13	111	28.2 km south-east
Halsary	Under construction	15	120	27.7 km south-east

²² Scottish Natural Heritage (2017) Wild Land Area Descriptions

²³ Halsary Wind Farm was under construction at the cumulative cut-off date of 15 September 2020.

The pattern of wind farm development in the wider area is one of a number of wind farms along the north coast; one wind farm located at the coast (Forss Wind Farm and its extension), the others inland of the A836 at varying distances. Turbines are also evident in the landscape along the A9 south of Thurso with the Causeymire group, made up of Causeymire, Achlachan, Bad a Cheo and Halsary. Further afield, there are scattered developments across Caithness, to the east and south-east, but no additional developments in Sutherland to the west beyond Bettyhill. There are also domestic scale turbines in numerous places, the closest to the Site being the small turbine at Ackron Farm, with more being present along the coast towards Thurso.

6.4.3 Landscape Baseline

The Study Area includes a range of landscapes from coastal bays and cliffs to agricultural crofts and open flows, as well as coniferous plantations. The landscape of the Study Area is described further in the assessment section below (Sections 6.5).

Landscape character is defined as a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one tract of land different from another. Landscape Character Types (LCT) refer to distinct tracts of land that are relatively homogenous in character. They are generic in nature and can occur more than once in different parts of the country. Landscape character areas are particular geographical examples of a landscape type²⁴.

The LCTs of the Study Area are identified in the Scottish Landscape Character data²⁵ as shown on Figure 6.6. The LCTs listed below are included in the detailed assessment of landscape effects:

- 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows;
- 135 Rounded Hills - Caithness & Sutherland;
- 136 Rocky Hills and Moorland;
- 138 Lone Mountains;
- 140 Sandy Beaches and Dunes;
- 141 High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays;
- 142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland;
- 143 Farmed Lowland Plain; and
- 144 Coastal Crofts and Small Farms.

6.4.3.1 Designated Areas in the Surrounding Landscape

The Site is not covered by any statutorily or nationally protected landscape-based planning designations that will protect the quality or scenic value of the landscape. There are, however, several designated areas within the Study Area as shown on Figure 6.5. However, those beyond 20 km are unlikely to have significant effects that affect the reasons for which they are designated, and are scoped out of the assessment. Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra Special Landscape Area (SLA)²⁶ is the only designated area that occurs within approximately 20 km of the Site and its closest point is 2.2 km to the north-west of the Site at Bighouse.

²⁴ The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (2002) Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland.

²⁵ Scottish Natural Heritage (2019) Landscape Character Types Map and Descriptions.

²⁶ The Highland Council. Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas. (Updated since 2011 but undated)

6.4.3.2 *Wild Land*

In addition to the designated landscapes listed above, NatureScot has mapped Wild Land Areas (WLAs) across Scotland²⁷, two of which lie within approximately 20 km of the Site, as shown in Figure 6.5. These are:

- WLA 39 East Halladale Flows, 1.5 km south of the Site at its closest point; and
- WLA 36 Causeymire – Knockfin Flows, 19 km south.

An assessment of effects on wild land, considering the wild land qualities of WLA 39 is set out in Technical Appendix A6.4. Following preliminary assessment, it was judged that the distance to WLA 36, and the limited visibility of the Development from it, will mean that significant effects to wild land qualities are unlikely. During consultation (meeting of 16 April 2020), NatureScot were content with the scope of the wild land assessment and did not request detailed consideration of WLA36. This WLA has not been considered further.

6.4.4 *Visual Amenity Baseline*

The landscape around the Study Area is one of open undulating to flat moorland and settled coastal areas to the north and the north-east. Around the Site, there are small hills emerging from the moorland, and some extensive forest plantations. Views from open hills are panoramic and long ranging. In contrast, views from within valleys are generally contained by surrounding hills. It is the coastal edge to the north, Strath Halladale to the west, and Caithness to the east that represent the main settled area.

The Study Area is not an area that people experience uniformly and from all directions. Unlike a lowland area with a regular network of roads, this is a landscape of empty moorland and hills, with settlement, transport and most activity limited to the coast, Strath Halladale and further east where the landscape changes to farmed lowland plain. The experience of the landscape is therefore of a coast with moorland hinterland for most, and the A836 is the main route for local people and visitors. The key visual sensitivities are therefore views along the coast from the A836, and the settlements and points of visitor interest along the coast (such as Reay, Melvich, Portskerra, Strathy Point, Dunnet Head, beaches and roadside viewpoints). Other sensitivities include Strath Halladale, albeit with fewer residents and visitors than the coastal areas, and dispersed hills that are popular with walkers (Ben Dorrery, Bens Griam, Ben Loyal, Ben Klibreck). To the east of the study area, across the Caithness farmlands, the viewing experience is very different, with a network of roads and scattered properties, though perhaps more used by local people than tourists. In contrast to the farmlands, the open moorlands are uninhabited, and for the large part unvisited. The extensive sweeping moorlands have few tracks, paths and almost no visitors, and are described by NatureScot as wild land. Beinn Ràtha is a low hill within the wild land area that is relatively accessible from Reay, and therefore has sensitivities as a place where people might go to view the wild land (although there is little evidence of worn paths or regular access being taken).

Change to the visual amenity of the Study Area as seen by people is assessed using representative viewpoints, as well as considering views from settlements and sequential views along routes. The baseline description of the existing views at these locations is provided for receptor, contained in the assessment sections later in the chapter.

²⁷ Scottish Natural Heritage (2014) Wild Land Areas

6.5 THE DEVELOPMENT

The Development is described in full in **Chapter 4: Development Description** of this EIA Report; however, the elements that have the potential to create landscape and visual effects include:

- Up to 12 three-bladed turbines with a maximum tip height of 149.9 m including external transformers (if required);
- Associated foundations, blade laydown areas and crane hardstandings at each wind turbine location;
- Access tracks linking the turbine locations;
- Substation compound incorporating electrical switchgear and wind farm control elements;
- Temporary construction compound;
- Network of underground cabling running adjacent to the access tracks where possible;
- A permanent anemometry mast (up to 92 m);
- Up to two borrow pits; and
- New site access off the A897.

The Development will have construction, operation and decommissioning phases, with an operational lifetime of 30 years.

As the turbines are under 150 m in tip height, there is no requirement for aviation lighting.

6.5.1 *Design Parameters*

The LVIA is based on the design parameters set out in **Chapter 4: Development Description** of this EIA Report. No additional design parameters are required for the assessment presented in this Chapter.

As set out in **Chapter 4: Development Description**, the turbines and other infrastructure may be micro-sited up to 50 m, where constraints allow. Such relocations have been considered when undertaking the assessment, and they would not affect the conclusions drawn for any considered effect.

6.5.2 *Embedded Mitigation*

Embedded Mitigation includes the design changes that have been implemented during the development of the scheme. These are set out in detail in **Chapter 4: Development Description**. The design changes of note for landscape and visual mitigation are listed below:

- The turbines were moved southwards to alleviate some of the effects on coastal landscapes and views, and to set the turbines further back away from the A836 to alleviate effects experienced from that road which is part of the NC500. Although this brought turbines closer to the wild land area to the south of the site, the changes to the site area allowed for improvements of the balance of the design when seen from within the wild land area;
- Turbines have been arranged, where on-site constraints allow, to form a balanced array from key receptor locations including Melvich (VP5), Portskerra (VP6), Strathy Point (VP7), Reay (VP3), Beinn Ràtha (VP9) and Strath Halladale (VP8), without detriment to the array when seen from other locations;
- Locating the access off the A897 rather than the A836 also reduces effects on the A836 and NC500, and preserves the sweeping moorland context adjacent to the A836; and
- Infrastructure layout was reviewed for visual effects, and adjustments were made to the substation location and sections of the track layout to reduce visibility from the Melvich area.

6.6 LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT FOR THE EXISTING SCENARIO

The landscape assessment considers the effects of changes to the landscape fabric of the Site and the character of the surrounding area that will result from the introduction of the Development to the existing landscape. The assessment focusses on likely significant effects during construction, operation and decommissioning. A detailed assessment of landscape effects within the Study Area is set out below.

6.6.1 *Assessment of Effects on Landscape Fabric*

The Site is located within an area of Sweeping Moorland and Flows (LCT 134²⁸), see Figure 6.6. The proposed turbine footprint of the Development occupies an area of characteristically sweeping, undulating landform at elevations between approximately 30-160 m AOD. The host landscape is typical of the wider Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT in this part of north Caithness: an expansive area of moorland / blanket bog with occasional coniferous plantations. It is a large scale, mainly open landscape with sweeping landform and expansive views. The landcover of the Site itself is described further in **Chapter 7: Ecology**.

The large scale, smooth landform and characteristic uniform landcover of the host Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT give the host landscape a low susceptibility to wind energy development. This combined with the lack of landscape designation over the Site indicates a low landscape value and a low landscape sensitivity overall. However, the Site's proximity to the coast and the smaller scale Strath (LCT 142) and Coastal Crofts and Small Farms (LCT 144) to the north and west (see Figure 6.6), combined with the presence of East Halladale Flows Wild Land Area to the south, suggest a slightly higher landscape value and susceptibility. Taken together these factors indicate a low to medium landscape value and low to medium susceptibility to the Development in relation to the landscape fabric of the Site. The overall sensitivity of the Site landscape with respect to the Development is therefore judged to be low to medium.

During construction, vehicle / crane movements and other activities associated with the construction of access tracks, compounds, substation and energy storage compound, import of materials, turbine installation, and reinstatement works at the end of the construction phase will have a direct impact on the landscape fabric (landform and landcover). The extent of physical impact of the works within the Site will constitute a small proportion of the whole²⁹, the larger part of which will be physically unaffected by either construction and decommissioning works or operation.

The magnitude of change to the landscape fabric of the Site associated with the introduction of the proposed wind turbines and associated ground level infrastructure is predicted to be small, temporary and short term in duration. The changes will also be reversible in that: a) from the outset of operation any disturbed landscape on site immediately surrounding the operational components will be reinstated to its pre-development state as part of the proposed, embedded mitigation measures; and b) following operation, decommissioning (described below) will facilitate the removal of the turbines and reinstatement of the Site landscape to an appropriate pre-development state (see **Chapter 4: Development Description**). Taking these various factors into account the effect of construction works on the landscape fabric of the Site is judged to be **not significant (minor)** for the duration of the construction period.

During operation, the impact on the alterations to the landscape fabric due to construction of the Development will remain initially but will reduce over time in the short to medium term. Once the proposed remedial works and embedded mitigation has

²⁸ Scottish Natural Heritage (2019) Landscape Character Types Map and Descriptions.

²⁹ As set out in Chapter 4: Development Description, the total site area is 662 hectares, and the approximate land take during construction will be 16 hectares, with the permanent footprint reduced to 7.5 hectares after construction is complete.

established and matured, the effect on the physical landscape will reduce and be less than during construction and will relate to the footprint of the operational development only. Onsite activity will be minimal, relating to maintenance.

The magnitude of physical change to the landscape will be medium at the outset of operation, reducing to low in the short term once disturbed areas have recovered and the turbine bases and associated infrastructure have become assimilated into the underlying moorland. On balance the effect of the Development on the landscape fabric of the Site during the operational phase is judged to be **not significant (minor)**.

The decommissioning phase will involve the removal of the turbines and reinstatement of the Site landscape to its pre-development state. Activity on the Site will be similar to that during construction except in reverse. During this phase the magnitude of change will be medium, decreasing quickly to negligible as decommission works progress and the Site is fully restored. The effects during decommissioning upon completion of the short-term works will be **not significant (minor reducing to negligible)**.

In summary, the Development is predicted to have a not significant (minor) effect on the landscape fabric during the construction phase which will be temporary, a not significant (minor) during the operation phase, and a not significant (minor reducing to negligible) effect during the decommissioning phase.

6.6.2 Assessment of Landscape Character Effects

The LCT listed in Table 6.3 are located within the Study Area for landscape character effects (15 km extent) and are assessed in this section. The table provides references for the areas referred to in the Highland Council Supplementary Guidance³⁰.

Table 6.3: LCTs Assessed in Detail

LCT Ref	LCT Title	Landscape Character Areas (Highland Supplementary Guidance)	Distance Range from Site (km)
134	Sweeping Moorland and Flows	CT4 Central Caithness	0-35+
136	Rocky Hills and Moorland	n/a	10+
140	Sandy Beaches and Dunes	CT7 Sandside Bay, Melvich Bay (etc.)	1-6
141	High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays	CT8 Rubha Bhra (etc.)	3+
142	Strath – Caithness and Sutherland	CT10 Strath Halladale	0-10
143	Farmed Lowland Plain	CT9 North Caithness	5-25+
144	Coastal Crofts and Small Farms	CT1 Melvich (etc.)	5-12+

In the interests of proportionality, due to their distance from the Site and / or lack of visual influence of the Development, the following LCTs in the Study Area are excluded from the assessment of landscape character effects (Figure 6.6):

- 135 Rounded Hills - Caithness & Sutherland; and
- 138 Lone Mountains.

6.6.2.1 Construction Effects

In addition to the individual descriptions provided for each relevant LCT below, the character of the landscape immediately around the Site is described in Section 6.4 Baseline Conditions. The onsite activities associated with the construction of the Development (described and assessed in Section 6.6.1 in relation to the Landscape Fabric) will have a short-term, reversible impact on the landscape character of the Site

³⁰ The Highland Council (2017) Addendum Supplementary Guidance: 'Part 2b'.

and the immediate surrounding area. However, similar activities have occurred locally in the past with the implementation of Baillie Wind Farm (adjacent to the LCT covering the Site) and North Strathy Wind Farm (within the same LCT as the Site) and it is judged that the short-term construction activities involved will have a **significant (moderate)** effect on the landscape character of the Site and immediately surrounding area (1-2 km), reducing to **not significant (minor to negligible)** with distance. This assessment takes into account the low to medium overall landscape sensitivity of the Site and surrounding landscape (see also assessment of individual LCTs in Section 6.6.2.2).

6.6.2.2 Operational Effects

The general context and character of the Study Area landscape is described in Section 0 Baseline Conditions by reference to published / adopted documents and evidence base. The LVIA also has cognisance of the more recent, supplementary landscape character and sensitivity assessments referred to previously.

The NatureScot LCTs described in the documents / evidence base are shown in Figure 6.6, which shows the LCT boundaries with the ZTV of the Development overlaid. The key characteristics of each LCT are summarised in the baseline descriptions included in the assessment of character effects that follows.

LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows

The Development is located within the Central Caithness (Highland LCA CT4) part of the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT (134). The LCT is bounded by: the High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays LCT (141), Sandy Beaches and Dunes LCT (140), and Coastal Crofts and Small Farms LCT (144) to the north; the Strath – Caithness and Sutherland LCT (142) and Rocky Hills and Moorland LCT (136) in the west, and the Farmed Lowland Plain LCT (143) to the east (see Figure 6.6).

The key characteristics of the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT in the Study Area can be summarised as including³¹:

- Very gently sloping or undulating landform;
- Distinctive flora, including sphagnum mosses;
- Coniferous forest a dominant characteristic;
- Sparsely settled with dispersed crofts and farms;
- Wind farms, transmission lines and minor roads;
- Long, low skylines;
- Distant views; and
- Sense of exposure.

The stretch of coast to the north-west of the Site, comprising Sweeping Moorland and Flows (134), Rocky Hills and Moorland (136), Sandy Beaches and Dunes (140), High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays LCT (141) and Coastal Crofts and Small Farms (144), is designated as the Farr Bay, Strathy Point and Portskerra SLA, the Melvich Bay / Strathy Point (Rubha Bhra) part of which lies within approximately 2.5-10 km of the Site (see Figure 6.5). Notable landscape and visual characteristics of the SLA designation include³²:

- “Deeply-indented coastline characterised by a repetitive rhythm of alternating rocky headlands and sheltered bays
- Impressive assemblage of hard/rocky coastal landforms including cliffs, headlands, stacks, arches, caves and ravines.
- Fine sandy beaches in the largest and most sheltered bays

³¹ Scottish Natural Heritage (2019) Landscape Character Types Map and Descriptions.

³² The Highland Council. Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas. (Updated since 2011 but undated).

- Elevated areas on the intervening high ground between the bays close to the sea provide expansive views both along the coast and out to sea, contrasting with a more enclosed, intimate visual character within the major bays.
- Views south to the inland mountains are a notable feature of this stretch of coast.
- The large scale of the landscape
- The immediate coastline is often not visible from the adjacent inland areas due to convex nature of slopes and the vertical cliffs which screen views. Consequently, views tend to focus upon the waters of the Pentland Firth with its strong tides and currents which are clearly visible from many locations.”

Regarding the SLA’s visual characteristics, it is worth noting the following special qualities description (under the heading Dramatically Intricate Coastline and Forceful Sea):

- “This is a distinctive stretch of rocky coastline which is typically viewed from the cliff tops and enclosed sandy beaches or from the sea by passing vessels.
- This coast can be an awe-inspiring, particularly during extreme weather or heavy oceanic swells. Access to the cliffs and coast line is readily available and allows opportunities to experience the sea’s force and scale at close proximity.
- By contrast the sandy bays which alternate with the harsher cliffs and headlands provide a more focussed and tranquil setting due to their low lying location and the shelter afforded by flanking cliffs.”

Of note here is the powerful influence of the sea on local landscape character. Also of relevance is the description of the Big Skies and Extensive Views SLA special quality:

- “There is a distinct perception and experience of immense space and dynamism, strongly influenced by the combination of big skies, and the distinctive coastal light, and the constantly changing influence of the weather. Fine conditions allow impressive and extensive views to Orkney and along the coast to Cape Wrath and Dunnet Head while in contrast poor weather restricts views and highlights the sense of remoteness of the landscape. The buildings and structures at Dounreay form prominent features in views from Strathy Point.”

In summary, the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT is characterised by large scale and smooth form, and gently sloping, undulating landform. This, combined with a simple landcover of moorland and some conifer plantations, gives it a generally uniform character. The Site and immediate surrounding LCT displays the majority of key characteristics identified by NatureScot.

Sensitivity: Regarding the LCT’s sensitivity to the Development, bearing in mind its characteristics (as set out in full in the NatureScot citation) combined with the influence of existing infrastructure and its more settled neighbours to the north and east (e.g. the Coastal Crofts and Small Farms LCT and Farmed Lowland Plain LCT), it is judged as having a low to medium value and low to medium susceptibility. The latter is raised slightly due to the proximity of the Site to the coast / Pentland Firth and the Farr Bay, Strathy Point and Portskerra SLA. The overall landscape sensitivity of the LCT to the Development is therefore assessed as low to medium. This assessment has regard to the influence of other operational wind energy development locally within 25 km of the Site, including Baillie in the east and Strathy North to the west.

It is noted that the Supplementary Guidance³³ finds that this area (CT4) is of landscape character sensitivity level 3 (out of a scale of 1-4 where 1 is most sensitive).

Analysis of the ZTV: This indicates that visibility of the Development will be extensive across the northern part of LCT within approximately 20 km of the Site (see Figure 6.6), less so towards the east and the neighbouring Farmed Lowland Plain LCT. However, the potential for significant effect is not only the extent of visibility, but also the

³³ The Highland Council (2017) Addendum Supplementary Guidance: ‘Part 2b’.

Development's visual relationship with existing landscape elements and characteristics, in particular the large scale and relatively uniform nature of the host landform and landcover.

The sensitive siting and compact design will minimise the Development's visual influence and impact on landscape character, particularly as perceived from key sensitive receptors in the surrounding area, including the neighbouring SLA. These aspects and others relating to the Development's visibility and visual influence / effect are examined further below, as detailed in Section 6.7.

Effect: The Development will have a direct, long term impact on the north-western part of the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT. Although implementing the Development will not alter the physical landscape and its characteristic large scale, sweeping landform, the introduction of additional upstanding features in the form of the proposed wind turbines and associated infrastructure will affect the LCT's skylines, pattern and complexity, and perceptual influences to a degree.

However, these perceived changes need to be considered in the context of the Development's relationship with the landscape baseline including existing wind energy development, for example Strathy North Wind Farm located approximately 10 km to the west of the Site, straddling the boundary of the LCT. It is important to note that, the Development will neither alter the physical landscape and characteristic sweeping moorland and smooth texture of the LCT itself, nor will it, for the most part, interfere with the LCT's long, low skylines, distant views and sense of exposure. Furthermore, visual attributes such as "views south to the inland mountains", as identified in relation to the SLA designation, will not be interrupted.

The carefully considered design of the Development within the Site will limit its effect on landscape character and visual amenity / views. Its compact layout will generally appear as a coordinated whole seen from the surrounding area, as evidenced in the visualisations. Notwithstanding some unavoidable overlapping of turbines in certain views, the Development will present a coherent image, its horizontal form / outline reflecting the sweeping lines of the host landform. As such it will appear to sit comfortably within the gently sloping, undulating landform. Thus the extent and magnitude of landscape character effects will be restricted.

Taking the LCT's inherent characteristics into account, and bearing mind the siting and design factors, the Development is predicted to cause a high magnitude of landscape character change, reducing to medium magnitude or less with distance, within approximately 5-7 km of the Site at most. This will involve the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT immediately surrounding the Site to the north, west and south. To the east the extent of character effects will be limited by landform to approximately 4 km. To the north, high reducing to medium magnitude character effects will likely extend to the neighbouring High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays LCT which form the narrow interface at the coast. Bearing in mind its low to medium sensitivity, the Sweeping Moorlands and Flows LCT will be subject to a **significant (major)** effect within 2-3 km, reducing to **significant (moderate)** with distance up to 5-7 km at most in the west and south.

Viewpoint 5 (Figure 6.16) can illustrate significant landscape character effect to the west of the Site within 2-3 km. Viewpoint 6 (Figure 6.17) and Viewpoint 8 (Figure 6.19) visualisations illustrate the level of character change at approximately 4-5 km to the north-west and south-west respectively, the approximate limit of significant landscape effects. Viewpoint 9 (Figure 6.20) visualisation illustrates the limit of significant character effects to the east at a distance of approximately 4 km from the Site.

Due to the increasingly strong influence on character of the sea / Pentland Firth, the impact of the Development on the landscape to the north of the Site will tend to diminish as one approaches the coast. Here the Development will be perceived set back from the

coastal fringe, seen in the context of the wider Sweeping Moorland and Flows landscape extending inland to the south. Consequently, for similar levels of visibility, the magnitude of change on character is predicted to be slightly lower to the north compared to the west and south. A **significant (moderate)** level of landscape effect is predicted to arise between the A836 and the coast.

In excess of approximately 5-7 km, due to the large scale and expansive, sweeping nature of the landscape, combined with the careful / considered siting and design, the magnitude of change will be lower (less than medium), diminishing with increasing distance from the Site, and the resulting effect being **not significant (minor)**. Viewpoint 7 (Figure 6.18) visualisation is illustrative of a minor level of effect at the north-west extremity of the LCT at approximately 10 km distance from the Site. Viewpoint 15 (Figure 6.26) visualisation illustrates a **not significant (negligible)** level of effect on the LCT at approximately 25 km distance from the Site.

In conclusion, the Development is predicted to cause a significant (major reducing to moderate) effect on a small, northern part of the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT within 5-7 km of the Site. Beyond this approximate threshold, due largely to the expansive scale and nature of the LCT, combined with the Development's careful / considered siting and design, and its relationship with existing wind energy development locally, it is judged that the effect on the LCT as a whole will be **not significant (minor)**. This judgement reflects the assessment that the addition of the Development will not notably alter the degree to which this northern part of the Sweeping Moorlands and Flows LCT is already characterised by wind energy development.

LCT 136 Rocky Hills and Moorland

The Rocky Hills and Moorland LCT lies to the north-west of the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT (134) within which the Development is located (Figure 6.6). The LCT is bounded by: the High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays LCT (141) and Coastal Crofts and Small Farms LCT (144) to the north, and bisected by Strath Naver, a discrete section Strath – Caithness and Sutherland LCT (142).

The key characteristics of the Rocky Hills and Moorland LCT within the Study Area include³⁴:

- Rough landcover;
- Many lochans;
- Pockets of broadleaf woodland and scrub;
- Particularly distinctive rocky hills lying on the fringes of the Kyle of Tongue and at the head of Loch Eriboll;
- A number of often prominent rocky hills outcropping along the coast;
- Currently largely uninhabited landscape abutting more settled coasts; and
- Provides the foreground to spectacular views over the coast and sea and also inland to the Lone Mountains.

The section of Rocky Moorlands and Hills LCT abutting the coast to the north-west of the Site is designated as the Farr Bay, Strathy Point and Portskerra SLA, the closest point of which – the Strathy Point/Lednagullin part – lies some 10 km north-west of the Site (see Figure 6.5). Notable landscape and visual characteristics of the SLA designation with respect to this LCT are set out above in the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT section, together with relevant special qualities.

In summary, the Rocky Moorlands and Hills LCT is characterised by extensive rocky moorland with distinctive rocky hills and rough landcover. The part of the LCT lying within the Study Area displays the majority of key characteristics identified by NatureScot.

³⁴ Scottish Natural Heritage (2019) Landscape Character Types Map and Descriptions.

Sensitivity: With respect to the LCT's sensitivity to the Development located in the neighbouring Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT, it is judged as having a medium value and low susceptibility to wind farm development at a distance the east. This assessment has regard to the LCT's inherent characteristics (set out in full in the NatureScot citation) and the influence of existing infrastructure, for example Strathy North Wind Farm situated at the eastern limit of the LCT. It considers the sensitivity of LCT as foreground to inland views of lone mountains, which tend to lie to the south and south-west. It also takes account of the LCT's proximity to the coast / Pentland Firth and the Farr Bay, Strathy Point and Portskerra SLA. The overall landscape sensitivity of the Rocky Moorlands and Hills LCT to the Development is assessed as low to medium.

Analysis of the ZTV: This shows that visibility of the Development will be limited mainly to the eastern extremity of the Rocky Moorlands and Hills LCT, within approximately 10-20 km of the Site, affecting higher ground and east facing slopes between Beinn nam Bo and Ardmore Point on the north coast (see Figure 6.6). Excluding certain summits / hilltops, there will be little visibility of the Development within the LCT further west.

The careful / considered siting and compact design will minimise the Development's visual influence and impact on landscape character, including the neighbouring SLA. These aspects and others relating to the Development's visibility and visual influence / effect are examined further below, as detailed in Section 6.9.

Effect: The Development will have limited indirect, long term impact on the eastern extremity the Rocky Moorlands and Hills LCT. The introduction of the proposed wind turbines and associated infrastructure within the neighbouring Sweeping Moorland and Flows will affect the LCT's skylines, pattern and complexity, and perceptual influences to a minor degree.

However, the perceived character change needs to be considered in the context of the Development's relationship with the landscape baseline which includes existing wind energy development, namely Strathy North Wind Farm which straddles the LCT's eastern boundary. It is important to note that, the Development will neither alter the physical landscape and characteristic rocky hills and rough texture of the LCT itself, nor interfere with the LCT's visual attributes, in particular the "spectacular views over the coast and sea and also inland to the *Lone Mountains*".

As evidenced in the visualisations (see VP7 Strathy Point, Figure 6.18), the compact layout of the Development will appear as a coherent unit seen from the LCT, its silhouette reflecting the sweeping lines of the host landform situated over 10 km to the east. It will appear to sit comfortably within the gently sloping, undulating landform. As a result of the extent and magnitude of indirect landscape character effects will be restricted.

Taking the inherent characteristics of the LCT and the host landscape into account, the Development is predicted to cause a low magnitude of landscape character change at most within the Rocky Moorlands and Hills, at approximately 10 km from the Site (between Beinn nam Bo and Ardmore Point), reducing to negligible magnitude with distance.

In summary, the Development is predicted to cause a **not significant (minor)** effect on the eastern extremity of the Rocky Moorlands and Hills LCT within approximately 10-15 km of the Site. In excess of this approximate threshold, due to a combination of lack of visibility of the Development and the expansive scale and nature of both the LCT and the neighbouring host landscape, it is judged that the effect of the Development on the Rocky Moorland and Hills LCT as a whole will be **not significant (minor to negligible)**. This judgement reflects the assessment that the addition of the Development will not notably alter the degree to which the eastern part of the Rocky Moorland and Hills LCT is already characterised by wind energy development, in particular Strathy North Wind Farm.

LCT 140 Sandy Beaches and Dunes

The Sandy Beaches and Dunes LCT is a coastal fringe landscape type occurring at intervals along the Pentland Firth / North Atlantic coast, mainly in conjunction with straths and associated rivers / watercourses (see Figure 6.6).

It is a small to medium scale, coastal interface landscape characterised by sandy beaches and dunes of various sizes enclosed by cliffs and rising landform. The tracts of LCT lying within the Study Area display the following key characteristics³⁵:

- Low shingle ridges backing many of these sandy beaches and forming the base for dune systems;
- Focus for recreation with camp sites, caravan parks and car parks located close to more accessible areas of coast;
- Many small crofting communities located on the fringes of beaches, particularly in north and west Sutherland;
- Strong sense of space, light and exposure, and extensive visibility on the larger and more open stretches of sandy beach; and
- Contained smaller beaches on the north coast with views focused along the beach to rocky headlands and out to sea to near shore islands.

There are two tracts of Sandy Beaches and Dunes LCT situated on the north Caithness coast in the Study Area, namely Melvich Bay and Sandside Bay. The former lies 2-4 km to the north-west of the Site, comprising a curving beach with dunes, abutting the sandy mouth of the Halladale river at Melvich; the latter is a compact bay lying approximately 5 km to the north-east of the Site backed by dunes and golf links (Reay Golf Course) – see Figure 6.6.

Sensitivity: Regarding landscape sensitivity, the settled, attractive coastal attributes of the Sandy Beaches and Dunes LCT described above and supported by fieldwork indicate that it has a medium value. The inter-relationship of the adjacent large scale Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT that forms the inland backdrop to views ‘focused along the beach to rocky headlands’, the susceptibility of the LCT to the Development is outside the LCT as part of this backdrop is assessed as medium. Consequently, the overall landscape sensitivity of the LCT is judged to be medium.

Analysis of the ZTV: The ZTV shows full visibility of the Development across the Melvich Bay tract and more limited visibility (rotors and blades) within the Sandside Bay tract (see Figure 6.6). Notwithstanding that the Development will be widely visible, the careful / considered siting and compact design will temper its visual influence and impact on landscape character to a degree. These aspects and others relating to the Development’s visibility and visual influence / effect are examined further below, as detailed in Section 6.8.

Effect: Introducing the Development into the adjacent Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT will indirectly affect the Melvich Bay and Sandside Bay sections of Sandy Beaches and Dunes LCT to a degree by becoming a feature on the inland backdrop to views along the beach and coast. However, the resulting changes to skylines, pattern and complexity, and perceptual influences need to be considered in the context of the landscape baseline which includes settlement and infrastructure and existing wind energy development in the area, in particular Baillie and Forss Wind Farms seen from Sandside Bay. It is important to note that in terms of seascape, the Development will neither alter the physical landscape and characteristic sandy beaches backed by dunes of the LCT itself, nor, for the most part, interfere with the views focused along the beaches to rocky headlands and out to sea.

³⁵ *ibid.*

Experienced from the Melvich Bay tract of Sandy Beaches and Dunes LCT, due to its sensitive siting within the surrounding higher ground, set back from the lower lying coastal strip, the Development will appear to be firmly placed within the adjacent Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT and will not affect seascapes around the bay. Notwithstanding this perceived separation, taking the LCT's inherent characteristics into account, and bearing mind the careful / considered siting and design, the Development is predicted to cause a high to medium magnitude of indirect change to landscape character within approximately 2-4 km from the Site, where it is fully visible. Viewpoint 5 A836 Melvich visualisation (Figure 6.16) illustrates the maximum level of predicted landscape change across the LCT.

Regarding the Sandside Bay tract of LCT, due to the greater separation distance and more limited visibility of the Development, a low magnitude of landscape character change is predicted across this tract as a whole. Viewpoint 3 Reay visualisation (Figure 6.14) illustrates the maximum level of predicted character change within the LCT.

In summary, and bearing in mind the LCT's medium landscape sensitivity, a **significant (major to moderate)** landscape effect is predicted to arise within the closest tract of Sandy Beaches and Dunes LCT (Melvich Bay) due to its proximity the Development. The Sandside Bay tract will be affected to a lesser, **not significant (minor)** level.

LCT 141 High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays

The High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays LCT is a linear landscape type framing much of the Caithness coastline adjacent to the North Atlantic / Pentland Firth and the North Sea (see Figure 6.6).

It is a small to medium scale, coastal landscape characterised by a relatively even coastline of cliffs and small inlets. The tracts of LCT lying within the Study Area display the following key characteristics³⁶:

- Intricate coastline of fissured (often high) cliffs, ravines, caves and stacks with small coves and narrow inlets regularly interrupting cliffs;
- Coastline becomes more fragmented and indented west of Dunnet Head;
- Narrow headlands, inlets and small bays occur between Strathy Point and Kyle of Tongue;
- Adjacent moorland stretching inland is open and sweeping;
- Strong sense of naturalness and wild landscape character along remote stretches of coast where there is an absence of development;
- Cliff tops offer exhilarating experience, open elevated views and perception of huge space;
- Views of coastline from adjacent inland areas often restricted due to convex slopes and sheer cliffs; and
- Views from cliffs generally directed along coast and out to sea.

Based on the character descriptions supported by fieldwork, two distinct tracts of High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays LCT can be identified within the Study Area: Sandside Bay to Strathy Point; and Strathy Point to Farr Bay.

The Sandside Bay to Strathy Point tract can be divided into two discrete sections of slightly different character, separated by Melvich Bay. The first section is the stretch of mainly unsettled coast between Sandside Bay and Melvich Bay, comprising a relatively even coastline of sheer cliffs abutting sweeping moorland inland, lying immediately north of the Site at a distance of between approximately 2-5 km from the Development – see Figure 6.6. The second section (Melvich Bay to Strathy Point) is an extension of the former stretching from Portskerra as far as Strathy Point, differing from it in being settled

³⁶ *ibid.*

with dispersed dwellings / linear settlement, namely Portskerra, Baligill, Strathy and Totegan. This section of coastline forms the sides (framing / enclosing element) of Strathy Bay, backed by Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT inland. Both sections of coast have seascapes of cliffs and bays that mean the shore is not visible from the moorland that meets the tops of the cliffs above, but the cliffs are visible from along the coast such as at Strathy Point (VP7, Figure 6.18).

As identified by NatureScot in its character description summarised above, the Strathy Point to Farr Bay tract of High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays LCT is differentiated from its neighbour to the east of Strathy Point. It is predominantly unsettled, consisting of characteristic cliffs punctuated by narrow headlands, inlets and small bays, abutted in the main by Rocky Moorlands and Hills LCT stretching inland. This gives the tract a different landscape and seascape context compared to that east of Strathy Point which abuts Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT.

The section of High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays LCT west of Melvich Bay is designated as the Farr Bay, Strathy Point and Portskerra SLA. The closest point of the SLA – Portskerra / Strathy Point (Rubha Bhra) – lies some 3.5 km north-west of the Site (see Figure 6.5). Notable landscape and visual characteristics of the SLA designation with respect to the LCT are set out above in the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT section, together with the salient special qualities.

An assessment of the likely effect of the Development on the High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays LCT is provided below, taking into account the subtle differences in landscape and seascape character and context.

Sensitivity: Regarding landscape sensitivity, considered in the round, the dynamic coastal attributes of the High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays LCT described and supported by fieldwork, combined with the presence of the SLA designation, indicate that it has a medium value overall.

Taking into account the location of the Site in the adjacent large scale Sweeping Moorland and Flows on the one hand, and its proximity to the High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays LCT on the other, and considering the relationship of the adjacent LCTs (and parts of) to each other in terms of the Sweeping Moorland and Flows forming a backdrop to views along the coast, the susceptibility to the Development of the two distinct tracts of LCT is assessed as follows: Sandside Bay to Strathy Point – medium; Strathy Point to Farr Bay – low. As a result, the overall landscape sensitivity of the two LCT tracts is judged to be:

- Sandside Bay to Strathy Point – medium; and
- Strathy Point to Farr Bay – low to medium.

Analysis of the ZTV: Figure 6.6 shows that the Development will have a varied visual influence across the High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays LCT within the Study Area. Regarding the Sandside Bay to Strathy Point tract the ZTV shows visibility of the Development from the sections between Sandside Bay to Melvich Bay and the east-facing coastline of Strathy Point. Conversely, there will be intermittent visibility from the north-facing section between Portskerra and Strathy, and negligible visibility within the Strathy Point to Farr Bay tract (see Figure 6.6).

However, visibility of the Development is not the only factor to consider when assessing its visual influence and likely effects; it is important to keep in mind the Development's relationship with the coast and its wider landscape context. The Development has been carefully sited and designed in order to minimise its effect on both landscape character and visual amenity, and has sought to keep the turbines back from the coastline. These aspects and others relating to the Development's visual influence / effect are examined further below, as detailed in Section 6.8.

Effect: Introducing the Development into the adjacent Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT will indirectly affect the character of the Sandside Bay to Strathy Point tract of High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays LCT to a degree. Where the Development does have a visual influence, it is important to consider the resulting changes to skylines, pattern and complexity, and perceptual influences in the context of the landscape and seascape baseline, which includes settlement and infrastructure and existing wind energy development in the area, particularly the Dounreay UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) site, Forss and Baillie Wind Farms. Strathy North Wind Farm is not visible from much of the LCT though there are glimpses from some parts of this tract.

Visibility of the Development within the Sandside Bay to Melvich Bay section at distances up to 5 km will alter the perceptual aspects of character experienced from the cliff tops to a degree. However, it is important to note that neither the physical attributes nor the key visual characteristics of the LCT identified by NatureScot will be altered. The intricate coastline of cliffs, coves and narrow inlets, and the views from the cliffs along the coast and out to sea, will remain unchanged. The Development will be visible when looking inland from the cliff tops, but views of the hinterland are not identified as a key characteristic of the LCT. Consequently, the Development is predicted to have a low magnitude of landscape effect on the Sandside Bay to Melvich Bay section of High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays LCT which, considering its medium sensitivity will generate a **not significant (minor)** character effect.

Regarding the Melvich Bay to Strathy Point section of LCT, the Development will be visible intermittently from the cliff tops at distances between approximately 5-11 km. However, visibility of the Development will tend to increase in frequency with distance from the Site, such that it will be more visible from the east-facing cliffs of Strathy Point than those north-facing ones between Portskerra and Strathy where it will have little or no visual influence.

Viewpoint 6 (Figure 6.17) visualisation is representative of maximum visibility in the vicinity of Portskerra at approximately 5 km distance. Viewpoint 7 (Figure 6.18) visualisation illustrates the level of character change at Strathy Point, approximately 10 km to the north-west of the Site.

Notwithstanding that the Development will be visible from the east-facing cliffs and bays of Strathy Point, at distances between 8-11 km, its considered siting and compact design, set firmly within the adjacent Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT, albeit above cliffs when seen from Strathy Point (Viewpoint 7), will limit the indirect landscape effect on the High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays LCT. From Strathy Point, the Development will be seen in the backdrop of eastward views along the coast. However, the large scale, sweeping moorland context of the Site, combined with the Development's comfortable landscape fit, a product of its careful siting and design, will temper its effect on character. The magnitude of landscape change across the Melvich Bay to Strathy Point section of LCT is predicted to be low to medium, which bearing in mind its medium sensitivity will result in a **significant (moderate)** landscape/seascape effect on the east side of Strathy Point (between 8-11 km away), but **not significant (minor)** landscape effect from Melvich Bay to Strathy.

There will be **not significant (negligible)** effects on the character of the Strathy Point to Farr Bay tract due to lack of visibility of the Development east of Strathy Point (see Figure 6.6).

In summary, drawing the assessment together, the Development is predicted to have a **not significant (minor to negligible)** landscape effect on the High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays LCT as a whole.

LCT 142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland

The Strath – Caithness and Sutherland LCT that is Strath Halladale bisects the northern part of the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT (134) within which the Development is located, along a north/south axis. The LCT abuts the Melvich / Portskerra tract of Coastal Crofts and Small Farms LCT (144) in the north and is terminated by LCT 134 in the south – see Figure 6.6. The Site is located to the east of the northern section of Strath Halladale close to its transition with LCT 144.

The key characteristics of the LCT include³⁷:

- Fairly straight, deeply incised troughs and more winding valleys with minor side glens;
- River terraces and hummocky lower side slopes a common feature;
- Central rivers meandering across floodplains, often traced by clumps of birch and alder;
- Lochs and / or strings of small lochs and wetlands adding scenic interest;
- Smooth and fairly large pastures predominate in floodplains;
- Lower side slopes support semi-improved pastures, heather, moorland and coniferous plantations;
- Increasing extent of moorland and woodland generally higher up straths;
- Crofts with strip-fields often present on lower side slopes / terraces, sometimes backed by woodland;
- Occasional small farms in broader straths;
- Settlement generally denser within lower reaches of straths;
- Sporadic 19th Century estate style buildings and shooting lodges;
- Narrow roads aligned with floodplain edges provide channelled views along straths; and
- Highly scenic backdrop of mountains often revealed in upper reaches of straths.

The Strath Halladale is the only occurrence of this LCT within the Study Area. It displays the majority of key characteristics identified by NatureScot. It is a relatively narrow and straight strath characterised by incised landform, the slopes of which enclose a floodplain and meandering river. Landcover is a mix of pasture and scattered mixed woodland in the floodplain, and rough grassland / moorland with occasional woodland and conifer blocks on the enclosing slopes. Large scale commercial forestry is concentrated within the surrounding moorland of the upper reaches of the strath to the south. Otherwise, barring a few conifer plantations in the north, the adjacent upland is predominantly moorland typical of Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT (134).

Regarding the LCT visual characteristics, views are channelled north and south along the strath by its enclosing slopes, formed on both sides by the immediately adjacent Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT. Views become slightly less enclosed as the strath broadens approaching its juncture with the Coastal Crofts and Small Farms LCT (144) in the north towards the mouth of the Halladale river at Melvich.

Sensitivity: Regarding the sensitivity of Strath LCT to the Development, bearing in mind its inherent characteristics (as set out in the NatureScot and Highland Council citations) combined with the Site's location in the neighbouring Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT, its value is judged to be medium. The susceptibility to wind farm development outside the LCT is limited to the presence of development on skylines, to which the susceptibility is judged to be medium. This assessment has regard to the proximity of the Development to the northernmost reaches of the strath, and considers both the relationship of the adjacent LCTs to each other, and the influence of settlement and infrastructure on the Site, including the very limited visibility of wind farms in adjacent LCTs, for example Strathy North Wind Farm situated some 10 km to the west. Drawing these threads

³⁷ *ibid.*

together, the overall landscape sensitivity of the Strath LCT to the Development is assessed as medium.

Analysis of the ZTV: This shows that visibility of the Development will occur mainly in the northern section of the Strath LCT, within approximately 6 km of the Site, affecting to varying degrees the floodplain and enclosing slopes of the strath between Craigtown and Melvich (see Figure 6.6). For the remainder of the LCT south of Craigtown to Trantlemore / Trantlebeg there will be less visibility of the Development, with views only from the upper western slopes.

In order to limit (as far as practically possible within operation constraints) its impact on landscape character and visual amenity, the Development has been carefully designed to create a compact layout and minimise its visual influence on Strath Halladale. These aspects and others relating to the Development's visibility and visual influence / effect are examined further below.

Effect: The introduction of the Development into the adjacent Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT overlooking the Strath LCT will indirectly affect the skylines of the strath, pattern and complexity, and perceptual influences to a degree. However, the Development will not alter the physical attributes of the LCT and the predicted changes to its perceptual and aesthetic attributes will be limited to its northern section. In addition, these changes should be considered in the context of the proposed wind turbines' relationship with the landscape baseline which includes settlement and associated infrastructure.

Experienced from within the strath, the carefully sited and designed Development will reflect the sweeping lines of the host landform and appear to have a comfortable fit in the surrounding, large scale undulating landscape. Furthermore, key visual characteristics such as the "*Highly scenic backdrop of mountains often revealed in upper reaches of straths*" will be unaffected in this particular case.

Taking the LCT's inherent characteristics into account, and considering the siting and design factors described elsewhere, the Development is predicted to cause a high to medium magnitude of landscape character change within approximately 5-6 km from the Site; that is the part of the strath north of Craigtown. Beyond this approximate distance, south of Craigtown, where visibility of the Development will be restricted to mainly the upper slopes of the strath, the effect on character will be low magnitude, reducing to negligible as one moves further south.

Bearing in mind its medium sensitivity to the Development, substantial parts of Strath LCT within approximately 5-6 km of the Site (i.e. between Melvich and Craigtown) will be affected to a **significant (major reducing to moderate with distance)** level. Further afield, in excess of approximately 5-6 km from the Site, the effect on character is predicted to be **not significant (minor at most reducing to negligible with distance)**.

Viewpoint 8 visualisation (Figure 6.19) is illustrative of a significant (moderate) level of landscape effect some 3 km from the Site in the vicinity of Achiemore, in a part of the LCT where there will be partial visibility of the Development (i.e. rotors and blade tips).

To sum up, the Development is predicted to have a significant (major to moderate) landscape effect on the northern half of the Strath Halladale Strath LCT, broadly speaking as the part north of Craigtown. Across the southern half (i.e. south of Craigtown) the predicted effect will be not significant (minor to negligible). This is due mainly to the lack of visibility of the Development within the strath to the south of Craigtown, a result of the Development's careful / considered siting and design.

LCT 143 Farmed Lowland Plain

The Development is situated to the west of this large scale, gently undulating, settled LCT, approximately 4 km from its closest point at Reay to the east of the Site.

The key characteristics of the Farmed Lowland Plain LCT in the Study Area can be summarised as³⁸:

- Generally open, gently undulating, low-lying plain with subtle low ridges, affording extensive views;
- Occasional smooth hills forming local landmarks;
- Series of broad, shallow valleys generally aligned south-east/north-west of which River Wick forms the largest;
- Agriculture the predominant land cover, with more intensive farmland near the coast around Thurso and Wick, and close to Loch Watten;
- Sparse woodland, comprising mainly small coniferous plantations / shelter belts;
- Larger conifer woodlands located at transition with the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT;
- Farm buildings and houses / crofts forming focal points;
- Straight roads reinforce settlement pattern and field / property boundaries;
- Variety of small and larger settlements, including Thurso and Wick on the coast;
- Small groups of large wind turbines sited on some low ridges and hills³⁹;
- Prominent visibility of larger wind farms⁴⁰ in adjacent LCTs;
- Dramatic views to Dunnet Head and distant Orkney islands from northern part of the LCT; and
- Views from the A9 across the low-lying Sweeping Moorland and Flows towards the Lone Mountains of Morven and Scaraben.

The Farmed Lowland Plain within the Study Area displays most of the key characteristics summarised above. It is worth noting that, although a relatively open landscape affording wide ranging views, the LCT displays an absence of scenic views⁴¹.

Sensitivity: Regarding the LCT's sensitivity to the Development located in the neighbouring Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT, bearing in mind its inherent characteristics (as set out in the NatureScot citation), it is judged as having a low to medium value and low susceptibility to development outside the LCT where it is not in the way of key views to Dunnet Head, Orkney, Morven and Scaraben. This assessment takes into account the influence of settlement and infrastructure, including visibility of operation wind farms in adjacent LCTs and the presence of Baillie Wind Farm located within the north-western part of the LCT, near Shebster, approximately 10 km east of the Site. The overall landscape sensitivity of the Farmed Lowland Plain LCT to the Development is therefore assessed as low.

Analysis of the ZTV: This shows that visibility of the Development will be limited to mainly the north-western extremity of Farmed Lowland Plan LCT, within approximately 7-20 km of the Site, affecting mainly the coastal strip between Thurso and Reay (see Figure 6.6). Further afield within the LCT the Development will exert negligible visual influence, except for patchy visibility east of Thurso, north of the A882.

The careful / considered siting and compact design will minimise the Development's visual influence and impact on landscape character. These aspects and others relating to the Development's visibility and visual influence / effect are examined further below.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ This appears to refer to Baillie, Forss, and single turbine schemes, although this is not stated in the description.

⁴⁰ This appears to refer to the Causeymire group, the Camster and Bilbster Groups, and Stroupster Wind Farms, although it is not stated.

⁴¹ "The broad, low-lying character allows typically wide views within and across this landscape, but few scenic views." Highland Council (2017) Onshore Wind Energy: Supplementary Guidance: Part 2b – CT9 North Caithness, Key Views, page 107.

Effect: The introduction of the Development into the adjacent Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT will indirectly affect the Farmed Lowland Plain's skylines, pattern and complexity, and perceptual influences to a degree. However, these changes must be considered in the context of the proposed wind turbines' relationship with the landscape baseline which includes existing wind energy development, for example Baillie Wind farm. It is important to note that, the Development will neither alter the physical landscape and characteristic gently undulating, low-lying plain and settled nature of the LCT itself, nor interfere with the LCT's long, low skylines, distant views towards lone mountains and sense of exposure. Furthermore, the LCT's visual attributes such as "dramatic views to Dunnet Head and distant Orkney Islands" will be unaffected.

Experienced from within the Farmed Lowland Plain LCT, the carefully sited and designed Development will follow the sweeping lines of the host landform and appear to sit comfortably in the large scale undulating landscape outside the LCT. In addition, the Development will be in keeping with the existing and emerging pattern of wind farms comprising Baillie and Limekiln to the east, and the Strathy group in the west.

Taking the LCT's inherent characteristics (including operational wind farms) into account, and bearing in mind the siting and design factors described above and elsewhere, the Development is predicted to cause a low magnitude of landscape character change beyond approximately 4-5 km from the Site, reducing to negligible with distance. Bearing in mind its low sensitivity to the Development, the Farmed Lowland Plain LCT will be affected to a **not significant (minor)** level at most and **not significant (negligible)** overall. Viewpoints 1, 2, 3, 10 and 12 visualisations (Figures 6.12-14, 6.21 and 6.23) are illustrative of the levels of change predicted within the 5-15 km distance range.

LCT 144 Coastal Crofts and Small Farms

The Coastal Crofts and Small Farms LCT includes linear, settled areas separating the Sweeping Moorland and Flows (incorporating the Site) and the Rocky Hills and Moorland LCTs from the Pentland Firth / North Atlantic coast (see Figure 6.6).

It is a medium scale, undulating coastal landscape with incised straths characterised by mixed farmland and sparse settlement, comprising small villages and dispersed crofts and farmsteads, linked (in the Study Area) by the A836, and associated minor roads. The LCT displays the following key characteristics in the Study Area⁴²:

- Narrow, settled and farmed coastal fringe with subtle variations in topography, from strongly contained coastal shelves and raised beaches, to smaller pockets at river mouths;
- Pastures and occasional arable fields of varied crop colour and texture, often divided by post and wire fences;
- Little woodland within the more exposed east and north Caithness coasts;
- Small woodlands and clumps of trees present at outlet of more sheltered straths;
- Settlement with larger farms and crofts most concentrated where LCT broadens at mouths of major rivers (e.g. at Melvich);
- Small, hunkered-down croft houses and outbuildings;
- Highly visible landscape, seen from major roads and, on the east Sutherland coast, the railway; and
- Complex visual composition of views tending to focus on the detail of houses, field patterns and crops, yet with the wider context of backdrop hills and sea adding diversity.

There are four main tracts of Coastal Crofts and Small Farms LCT within the Study Area, situated on the north Caithness coast. Two are located within 10 km of the Site; the other two between 10-20 km. This assessment focusses on the two tracts lying within 10 km

⁴² Scottish Natural Heritage (2019) Landscape Character Types Map and Descriptions.

of the Site. Those tracts situated over 10 km from the Site are not predicted to be affected by the Development due to lack of visual influence (see Section 6.7.1 Analysis of the ZTV).

The closest LCT tract – Melvich / Portskerra, lying between 2-5 km to the north of the Site - occupies the low-lying mouth of Strath Halladale (Melvich Bay). The next closest, the mouth of the Strathy River / Strathy Bay, lies approximately 7-10 km north-west of the Site. The remaining two LCT tracts, Armadale Bay and Farr Bay / Bettyhill, lie approximately 11-13 km and 14-17 km west of the Site respectively. All four tracts fall partly within the Farr Bay, Strathy Point and Portskerra SLA – see Figure 6.5. The key characteristics of the SLA are summarised in the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT section above.

Sensitivity: Regarding landscape sensitivity, the settled attributes of the Coastal Crofts and Small Farms LCT described above and supported by fieldwork, taking into account the presence of the SLA designation, indicate that it has a medium value. Bearing in mind the location of the Site in the adjacent Sweeping Moorland and Flows on the one hand and its proximity to the Coastal Crofts and Small Farms LCT on the other, and considering the inter-relationship of the adjacent LCTs, the susceptibility of the LCT to the Development in the backdrop is assessed as medium. Consequently, the overall landscape sensitivity of the LCT is judged to be medium.

Analysis of the ZTV: This shows that visibility of the Development will be limited mainly to the closest two LCT tracts, namely Melvich / Portskerra and Strathy river / Strathy Bay, situated within approximately 2-5 km and 7-10 km of the Site respectively (see Figure 6.6). There will be negligible or nil visibility of the Development within the two other LCT tracts in the Study Area, namely Armadale Bay and Farr Bay / Bettyhill.

The careful / considered siting and compact design will minimise the Development's visual influence and impact on landscape character, including within the SLA. These aspects and others relating to the Development's visibility and visual influence / effect are examined further below.

Effect: Introducing the Development into the adjacent Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT will indirectly affect the Melvich / Portskerra section of the Coastal Crofts and Small Farms LCT to a degree. However, the resulting changes to skylines, pattern and complexity, and perceptual influences need to be considered in the context of the wider landscape baseline which includes existing development and infrastructure within and around the LCT, such as Dounreay Power Station, Forss and Baillie Wind Farms and Strathy North Wind Farm, which are visible from the northern parts of this tract of the LCT.

Experienced from the Melvich / Portskerra tract of Coastal Crofts and Small Farms LCT, due to its careful / considered siting within the surrounding higher ground, set back from the lower lying coastal strip, the Development will appear to be firmly placed inland, within the adjacent Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT. Notwithstanding this perceived separation, taking the LCT's inherent characteristics into account, and bearing mind the sensitive siting and design factors, the Development is predicted to have a **significant (major to moderate)** indirect effect on landscape character within approximately 2-5 km from the Site, where it is fully visible.

Viewpoints 5 A836 Melvich and 6 Portskerra visualisations (Figures 6.16 and 6.17) are illustrative of these levels of predicted landscape change across the LCT at distances of 2 km and 5 km respectively.

Regarding the Strathy Bay tract of LCT, there is a greater separation distance and more limited visibility of the Development across the tract, but the Development will be seen along the coast in the context of the seascape around the LCT. Overall a medium magnitude of landscape character change is predicted for the northern part of the tract,

reducing to negligible / nil effect southwards around Strathy settlement where there will be no visibility of the Development. The Development is predicted to have a **significant (moderate)** effect on this tract. Viewpoint 7 Strathy Point visualisation (Figure 6.18) illustrates the maximum level of predicted character change within the LCT.

In summary, a significant (major to moderate) landscape effect is predicted to arise within the closest, Melvich / Portskerra tract of Coastal Crofts and Small Farms LCT due to its proximity the Development. A significant (moderate) landscape effect is predicted to arise in the Strathy Bay tract due to the Development forming part of the seascape seen from the LCT. No other tracts of the LCT will be significantly affected.

6.6.2.3 Summary of Landscape Character Effects

With respect to the overall effect on landscape character within the Study Area, introducing the Development midway between the operational Baillie and Strathy North wind farms is predicted to have a significant (major to moderate) effect on character within approximately 5-11 km of the Site. The area so affected will comprise limited tracts of the following LCTs, as set out in more detail in Table 6.4 below.

- LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows;
- LCT 140 Sandy Beaches and Dunes;
- LCT 141 High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays;
- LCT 142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland; and
- LCT 144 Coastal Crofts and Small Farms (Melvich / Portskerra).

The character of the remainder of the Study Area will be affected to a lesser, not significant (minor to negligible) degree. Large parts of the Study Area will remain unchanged character wise.

This assessment reflects the judgement that, although the Development will introduce a new group of turbines into the northern part of the Sweeping Moorland and Flows, set back from the coast, it will not essentially alter the pattern of development across the wider area, but rather it will extend the series of wind farms west of Thurso.

Table 6.4: Summary of Landscape Character Effects

LCT (Figure 6.6)	Landscape Value and Susceptibility	Overall Land-scape Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change (distance approx.)	Nature of Effect	Significance (distance approx.) <i>Overall significance in italics</i>
Sweeping Moorland and Flows (134)	Low to Medium Low to Medium	Low to Medium	High reducing to Medium within 5-7 km <i>Low overall</i>	Direct Long term Permanent	Significant (major to moderate) within 5-7 km <i>Not Significant (minor) overall</i>
Rocky Hills and Moorland (136)	Low to Medium Low	Low	Low to negligible	Indirect Long term Permanent	Not Significant (minor to negligible)
Sandy Beaches and Dunes (140)	Medium [Medium] Medium [Low]	Medium [Low to Medium]	High reducing to Medium within 5 km <i>[Low at 5 km]</i>	Indirect Long term Permanent	Significant (major to moderate) within 5 km <i>[Not Significant (minor) at 5 km]</i>
High Cliffs and	Medium [Low]	Medium [Low to Medium]	Medium within 8-11 km	Indirect Long term	Significant (moderate) on the east side of Strathy Point, 8-11 km away

LCT (Figure 6.6)	Landscape Value and Susceptibility	Overall Land-scape Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change (distance approx.)	Nature of Effect	Significance (distance approx.) <i>Overall significance in italics</i>
Sheltered Bays (141)			[Negligible]	Permanent	
Strath – Caithness and Sutherland (142)	Medium Medium	Medium	High reducing to Medium within 5-6 km <i>Low to negligible beyond 5-6 km</i>	Indirect Long term Permanent	Significant (major to moderate) within 5-6 km <i>Minor to negligible beyond 5-6 km</i>
Farmed Lowland Plain (143)	Low to Medium Low	Low	Low to negligible	Indirect Long term Permanent	Not Significant (minor to negligible)
Coastal Crofts and Small Farms (144) Melvich / Portskerra, Strathy [and Armadale and Farr]	Medium [Medium] Medium [Low]	Medium [Low to Medium]	High reducing to Medium within 11 km <i>[Low to negligible beyond 5 km]</i>	Indirect Long term Permanent	Significant (major to moderate) within 5 km Significant (moderate) within 8-11km <i>[Not Significant (minor to negligible) beyond 5 km]</i>

6.7 VISUAL ASSESSMENT FOR THE EXISTING SCENARIO

The visual assessment considers the effects of changes to the views that people will see from the surrounding area as a result of the introduction of the Development to the existing landscape. The assessment was carried out using the methodology set out in Technical Appendix A6.1, and focusses on likely significant effects. The detailed assessment of effects on views and visual amenity is set out below, based on fieldwork, analysis of the ZTV and visualisations (Figures 6.12 onwards).

6.7.1 Analysis of the ZTV

A ZTV is a tool which can be used to calculate and illustrate the theoretical visibility of the Development. It is important to note that the ZTV is a 'bare earth' model and as such represents a worst case scenario. The actual visibility is usually considerably less due to screening afforded by buildings and vegetation/woodland. Views from along roads and in rural areas are often filtered by woodland and hedgerows. This can be seasonal when trees are deciduous.

The Study Area is described in Section 0 within this Chapter. On a local scale, views depend on local topographic conditions, and although generally open around Caithness, can be constrained by subtle changes in topography or local screening by plantations. In Sutherland, the topography tends to be more varied, with undulating moorlands and emergent hills or mountains.

The ZTVs in Figures 6.1 - 6.4 show the theoretical visibility of the proposed turbines. Field surveys were undertaken to verify potential views on the ground and to appraise the overall actual visibility of the proposed turbines.

6.7.1.1 Within approximately 5 km of the Outermost Turbines

The Development will be visible for much of the area within 5 km, except for land beyond Beinn Ràtha or in the lee of other smaller hills, and from the coastal cliffs and inshore waters. The Development will be visible from the A836 between Reay and Portskerra, and the A897 within Strath Halladale. It will also be visible from the wider landscape inland and along the coast, from Melvich Bay and out to sea (beyond the immediate lee of the cliffs).

6.7.1.2 5-15 km from the Proposed Turbines

From within this distance range, the topography is variable and the theoretical visibility is more intermittent. The Development will be visible from much of the area eastwards along the coast from Reay to Brims Ness, and to inland to Westfield, although not beyond the Hill of Shebster and within the Forss Water valley. To the south-east, Beinn Ràtha and Sean Airigh screen views from much of the undulating lower lying land, although it will be visible from higher points such as Beinn nam Bad Mòr. To the south, there is extensive visibility across the sweeping moorland either side of Strath Halladale, though it will not be visible from within the strath. To the west, the Development will not be visible within the valleys such as the River Strathy, and whilst it will be visible from the ridges and headlands such as Strathy Point and Ardmore Point, it will not be visible in the bays and valleys between them around Strathy and Armadale. The Development will be visible offshore from within this distance range.

6.7.1.3 Beyond 15 km of the Proposed Turbines

Further away, visibility will be more intermittent inland due to varied topography, but the Development will be visible from the moorlands around Forsinard, and the flatter lands of Caithness around Halkirk and along the A9 south of Mybster. It will be visible from south of Thurso, and from Dunnet Head. To the south and south-west, visibility is more limited to higher ground. Visibility will be open across the sea, including visibility from the high south-west facing slopes of Hoy.

6.7.1.4 Hub height ZTV

This ZTV, on Figure 6.4, shows that the hubs of the turbines will be visible from much of the area covered by the tip ZTV, but fewer hubs will be visible from the areas to the east around Reay to Forss and Shebster due to the screening of topography close to the Site. Turbine hubs will not be visible from more distant areas to the south-east beyond Beinn nam Bad Mòr. The hub ZTV is also reduced around the edges in all directions, such as over higher ground to the south-west. The hub ZTV is also less extensive over the sea where the Development intervening headlands will hide the hubs from views obliquely along the coast.

6.7.2 Visual Receptors

Visual receptors are the people within the Study Area who will be affected by the changes in views and visual amenity. The assessment of visual effects considers the changes that people will see in views from various locations. Viewers include local residents, tourists, walkers and recreational route users, road users etc. The methodology for the identification of sensitivity of visual receptors is set out in Technical Appendix A6.1.

The visual amenity of the Study Area as experienced by people is assessed using representative viewpoints, as well as considering views from settlements and from along routes. The detailed assessment of visual effects considers the receptors listed below.

6.7.2.1 Viewpoints

Viewpoints were selected to represent and assess the visual impacts of the Development that will be seen by various groups of people. The viewpoint list is a representative selection of locations agreed with the statutory consultees. It is not an exhaustive list of locations from which the Development will be visible. 15 viewpoints were selected through desk study, site work and discussions with the Council⁴³. These viewpoints are all publicly accessible and include:

- Viewpoints selected to represent the experience of different types of receptor (representative);
- Viewpoints selected because they are key vantage points (sometimes promoted as such) (specific); and
- Viewpoints chosen specifically to demonstrate a particular effect (illustrative).

The viewpoints were selected to represent a range of receptors, viewing directions, distances and elevations.

All viewpoints were selected as being suitable for use to illustrate landscape effects, visual effects or cumulative effects, and sequential assessments where they are located on or adjacent to routes.

The viewpoints are listed in Table 6.5, and shown on Figure 6.7. Other viewpoints considered during the selection process are set out in Technical Appendix A6.2.

Table 6.5: Viewpoints Assessed in the LVIA

ID	Name	Easting	Northing	Distance (km)	Reason for Selection
1	A836 Forss	305710	969424	15.1	For the visual assessment as part of a sequence along the A836 (NC500). Representing one of the first views when leaving Thurso, and longer views of the Development from the east. Views seen by general road users, tourists and cyclists.
2	A836 Dounreay	299667	966903	8.6	For the visual assessment as part of a sequence along the A836 (NC500). Used also for the cumulative assessment. Views seen by workers at Dounreay, general road users, tourists and cyclists.
3	A836 Reay	296635	964825	4.9	For the visual and cumulative assessment to represent views from Reay settlement and as part of the sequence along the A836 (NC500). Views seen by local residents, general road users, tourists and cyclists.
4	A836 Layby	290254	964075	1.1	For the visual assessment as part of a sequence along the A836 (NC500) and representing close-up views from the closest stretch of road to the Site. Views seen by general road users, tourists and cyclists.
5	A836 Melvich	288864	963931	2.3	For the visual and cumulative assessments to represent views from Melvich settlement and as part of the sequence along the A836 (NC500). Also used for the landscape assessment. Views seen by local residents, general road users, tourists and cyclists.
6	Portskerra	287630	965621	4.2	For the visual and cumulative assessments to represent views from Portskerra settlement. Also

⁴³ The Council were informed of the viewpoint list and made aware of minor alterations, but did not respond to requests for confirmation.

ID	Name	Easting	Northing	Distance (km)	Reason for Selection
					used to for the landscape assessment, and drawn upon as part of the sequence along the A836 (NC500). Views seen by local residents, tourists and cyclists.
7	Strathy Point	282767	968497	9.8	For the visual and cumulative assessments to represent views along the coast from Strathy Point (visitor location). Referred to as part of the assessment of effects on the sequential experience of the A836 (NC500). Views seen by tourists, visitors walking to the lighthouse and cyclists.
8	Strath Halladale, Calgarry	290000	959268	2.8	For the visual and cumulative assessments to represent views from Strath Halladale and from the A897. Also used to for the landscape assessment. Views seen by general road users, tourists and cyclists.
9	Beinn Ràtha	295417	961303	3.2	For the visual, landscape, wild land and cumulative assessments. Isolated hill inland of the coast and within the Wild Land Area. Specific to elevated views seen by walkers on this hill top.
10	Hill of Shebster	301219	964538	9.2	For the landscape and cumulative assessments, but also part of the visual assessment. Low hill inland of the coast in a more settled area with views to moorland, representing views from Farmed Lowland Plain LCT. Views seen by walkers and representing views from local area by general road users, tourists and cyclists.
11	Dunnet Head	320530	976491	31.5	For the visual assessment. Specific to views from Dunnet Head as a distant yet important visitor location. Views seen by tourists.
12	A9 Georgemas Station	315569	959243	23.6	For the visual assessment. Representing views from the A9 and A882, the railway and from Hallkirk and scattered residences. Views seen by general road users, tourists, train passengers and cyclists.
13	Ben Dorrery	306287	955037	16	For the landscape and cumulative assessments as well as specific elevated views seen by walkers on this hill top.
14	A897 Forsinard	288461	940609	21.3	For the visual assessment, representing views from the A897, as well as long distance views from the south. Views seen by general road users, tourists and cyclists.
15	Ben Griam Beg	283180	941165	22.2	For the visual assessment. Specific elevated views seen by walkers on this isolated mountain top to the south of the Study Area.

6.7.2.2 Settlements

Analysis of the ZTV and fieldwork was used to identify settlements to be included in the assessment, based on theoretical visibility and the potential for significant visual effects. Settlements within approximately 10 km of the Site with theoretical visibility include Portskerra, Melvich, Strathy, and Reay. Strathy is not within the ZTV and is therefore not considered further. Although there are no settlements in Strath Halladale between

Forsinard and Melvich, there are properties around Upper Bighouse, Achiemore and Calgarry that are considered as dispersed settlement. VP8 A897 Strath Halladale, Calgarry can be used to represent views from this area.

Other sizeable settlements within the Study Area are Thurso, Halkirk, Castletown, Bettyhill and Tongue. Halkirk is the only one of these that is inland and within the ZTV, the other settlements are focussed around coastal bays and are not within the ZTV. These other settlements are therefore not considered further.

6.7.2.3 *Sequential Views from Routes*

Routes through the Study Area tend to follow the coast, or go inland, either along remote watercourses or forming part of a rectilinear network of routes across Caithness. Routes to be included in the detailed assessment are shown on Figure 6. 7 and include:

- The main A836 which is the NC500 tourist route;
- The A897 along Strath Halladale within approximately 20 km of the Site;
- Minor roads including the Thurso – Westfield – Shebster – Reay route which is part of the National Cycle Route NCN1 (within approximately 15 km of the Site); and
- Local paths within approximately 5 km of the Site, including core paths around Reay, Melvich, Portskerra and Strath Halladale⁴⁴.

Other routes may also have views of the Development, but are considered to be less likely to have significant effects, or can be represented by the selection of routes above. In particular the A9, the main route to Thurso, has limited ZTV coverage at over 20 km away and passes close to other wind farms, in particular the Causeymire group. It is not considered further on the basis that effects are unlikely to be significant as visibility is limited, and with greater influence of nearby wind farms. The Scrabster to Orkney ferry route is 20 km away at its closest point, with views of other wind farms closer to the coast (such as Baillie and Forss Wind Farms). It is not considered further on the basis that effects are unlikely to be significant due to distance, and with greater influence of nearby wind farms.

6.7.3 **Viewpoint Assessment**

6.7.3.1 *Viewpoint 1 - A836 Forss*

Grid Reference	NGR 305710 969424
Figure Number	Figure 6.12
Landscape Character Type	143 Farmed Lowland Plain
Landscape Designation	None
Direction and distance to nearest turbine	15.1 km west
Number of hubs and blades theoretically visible	11 hubs, 12 tips

This viewpoint is from the A836 at New Houses, 2 km east of Forss. The A836 runs over the subtle ridge between Thurso and Forss at this point, and presents the first open view of the Development when travelling along this route from Thurso. It is a representative viewpoint, selected to represent views from the A836. Receptors of this view are people travelling westbound from Thurso along the A836 including general road users, tourists and cyclists, and the residents of New Houses and nearby crofts.

The view is an open panorama across relatively flat land along the coast. The viewpoint is approximately 1.5 km inland, and the sea cliffs are not visible nearby, although more distant stretches beyond Forss are visible. The panorama extends across the fields to the coast (with properties in the foreground to the north of the road), and inland over flat

⁴⁴ The Highland Council (2019) Modified Core Paths Plan (Caithness and Sutherland) Amended.

farmland with scattered small crofts. The open fields are bounded by Caithness slab fences, post and wire fences, or drystone dykes. The view south-east is contained by rising land on which there are two domestic scale turbines. Orkney is just visible north-eastwards between buildings in clear weather. Towards the west, Baillie Wind Farm forms a group of turbines in the middle distance, Forss Wind Farm is located by the coast, and the reactor dome and chimneys of the Dounreay UKAEA site are just visible beyond a middle distance horizon. The distant landscape is made up of successive headlands along the coast that form layers of receding land leading to the background mountainous terrain. The emphasis of the view is horizontal, and the distant hills (when visible) and Baillie Wind Farm catch the attention of the eye.

Sensitivity

This is a location on a relatively busy road that is part of the NC500 tourist route. Although this is not a place where people other than the local residents stop (without a layby), the view towards the Site is ahead for west-bound travellers who include tourists on the NC500 and cyclists. The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint, although there are existing wind farms present, is judged to be high. It is not within a designated landscape, although it has panoramic views of Caithness farmland from this tourist route. The value is judged to be medium due to these panoramic views. The sensitivity of this location is judged to be high.

Magnitude of Change

The Development will be visible in the distance to the west, as a group of turbines on the open moorland beyond the Dounreay UKAEA site, and to the right (north) of a low hill which is Beinn Ràtha. The turbines will form a regular array, with some slight overlapping of rotors, and most of the towers and some hubs hidden behind the low horizon. No infrastructure will be visible. The Development will be further from the viewpoint than Baillie and Forss Wind Farm. The Development will be seen as an additional group of turbines further along the coast, but with some set-back so that is not seen as being on the coast, but with some moorland between the Site and the sea cliffs.

The scale of change resulting from the introduction of the Development is judged to be low as although it is a view towards the Development along the coastal area, there are existing wind farms visible. The geographic area from which this change will be experienced includes the section of the A836 between the viewpoint and Forss, and scattered properties around it. Overall the magnitude of change is judged to be medium.

Significance

The visual effect seen at this location is judged to be **not significant (minor)**.

6.7.3.2 Viewpoint 2 - A836 Dounreay

Grid Reference	NGR 299667 966903
Figure Number	Figure 6.13
Landscape Character Type	143 Farmed Lowland Plain
Landscape Designation	None
Direction and distance to nearest turbine	8.6 km west
Number of hubs and blades theoretically visible	9 hubs, 12 tips

This viewpoint is at the gateway to the Dounreay UKAEA site, on the A836. At this point the road runs along flat land inland of the coast, approximately 1 km from the tops of the sea cliffs. It is a representative viewpoint, selected to represent views from the A836 as part of a sequence. Receptors of this view are people travelling westbound from

Thurso along the A836 including tourists and cyclists, workers at the UKAEA site, and the residents of nearby crofts.

The view is an open panorama across flat land along the coast although the sea cliffs are not visible nearby. The UKAEA site is seen as multiple buildings, including the large white dome, and a large car park (on a former landing strip), with lighting columns, vehicles, and screening bunds in the distance. The panorama extends across farmland along the coast (to north-east and south-west), and inland with scattered small crofts. The open fields are bounded by post and wire fences, with occasional sections of Caithness slabs. A domestic turbine and Baillie Wind Farm are seen inland to the south-east, with Baillie forming an array of turbines approximately 2.5 km away. Forss Wind Farm is visible as two blade tips only due to the slight rise in land north-east of this location.

The view westwards towards the Site is over foreground grassland (fields and UKAEA site grounds) with pylons and a man-made mound in the middle distance. Beyond these, a low ridge forms the horizon, this ridge being made up of Beinn Ratha (inland to the left) and the Beinn Ruadh ridge close to the Site. The sea and the cliffs further west along the coast are not visible from this point, being behind the buildings of the UKAEA site.

Sensitivity

This is a location on a relatively busy road that is part of the NC500 tourist route. This is a junction on the main road, giving access the UKAEA site, and is similar view to those seen from the car park. Workers tend to be classified as being of lower sensitivity than other road users or tourists, as they tend to be looking less at the view. However, as this also represents views seen by tourists and visitors. Given the presence of wind farms in the view and the UKAEA site buildings close to the route, the susceptibility to change to this view is judged on balance to be medium. It is not within a designated landscape, and the view is affected by the presence of the UKAEA site, such that the value is judged to be low. The sensitivity of this location is judged to be medium overall.

Magnitude of Change

The Development will be visible to the west, as a group of turbines behind the open moorland horizon. Hubs and rotors will be visible, the turbines will form a regular array, with some slight overlapping of rotors. No infrastructure will be visible. The Development will be further from the viewpoint than Baillie Wind Farm, and in a different part of the view. The Development will be seen as an additional group of turbines further along the coast, but with a clear separation between the Site and the coastline.

The scale of change resulting from the introduction of the Development is judged to be medium as although the turbines will be features on the horizon ahead for west-bound travellers, it will be a group of additional man-made features seen while passing close to the Dounreay UKAEA site with Baillie Wind Farm nearby. The geographic area from which this change will be experienced includes the section of the A836 between Forss and Reay, and from minor roads and scattered properties around Upper Dounreay and Achrearnie. Overall the magnitude of change is judged to be medium.

Significance

The visual effect seen at this location is judged to be **significant (moderate)**.

6.7.3.3 Viewpoint 3 - A836 Reay

Grid Reference	NGR 296635 964825
Figure Number	Figure 6.14
Landscape Character Type	143 Farmed Lowland Plain
Landscape Designation	None
Direction and distance to nearest turbine	4.9 km west
Number of hubs and blades theoretically visible	6 hubs, 11 tips

This viewpoint is on the A836 within Reay, at the cemetery gate, close to Reay Golf Club. The view is therefore experienced by road users (general road users, tourists and cyclists) and visitors to the cemetery and church, as well as golfers and residents of Reay. Reay is located about 500 m inland of Sandside Bay, either side of the Sandside Burn. The viewpoint is on a slightly elevated ridge between the two clusters of properties that make up Reay, at this location there are relatively few buildings, and most properties are at slightly lower elevations close to the Sandside Burn or the Reay Burn or Isauld Burn.

The view from this location is a panorama across relatively flat coastal agricultural land, with the cemetery and golf course to the north and Sandside Bay visible beyond the Club House. Inland there are wall bounded grazing fields and low moor covered knolls (Big Keoltag, Borlum Rock, and the Knowes) with low lying coniferous plantations beyond. Baillie Wind Farm is visible to the east, beyond the church, and Forss is further to the north-east beyond the cemetery. Towards the west along the A836 there is a single storey house to the south of the road, and fields beyond. Roof tops and trees around the other properties of Reay are visible in the middle distance, and the moorland rises to a low ridge beyond. The woodlands of Sandside House are visible, and the low headland extends out to Sandside Head. Beinn Ratha is visible as a low hill beyond The Knowes.

Sensitivity

This is a location within the settlement of Reay and on a relatively busy road that is part of the NC500 tourist route and the NCN1. The viewpoint is at the cemetery and similar views are seen from the Golf Course, the church and from nearby properties. This represents views seen by residents, tourists and visitors including golfers and cyclists, the susceptibility is judged to be high. It is not within a designated landscape, and although it is a high point within the settlement, the value of views from this location is judged to be low. Overall, the sensitivity of this location is judged to be high.

Magnitude of Change

The Development will be visible to the west, as a group of turbines behind the open moorland horizon, ahead for west-bound road users. The turbines will form a regular array or rotors on the horizon, with three hubs visible low on the horizon, but other turbines as just blades or blade tips. No infrastructure will be visible. The Development will be seen on the moorland horizon beyond the house in the foreground. The Development will form an additional group of turbines westwards, in the opposite direction to Baillie Wind Farm.

The scale of change resulting from the introduction of the Development is judged to be high as the turbines will be eye-catching features on the horizon ahead for west-bound travellers, and it will be an additional man-made feature seen from the settlement of Reay. The scale of change is slightly reduced by the Development not being the first windfarm visible from this location, although there is a cumulative element to the change, in the relationship between the Development and Baillie Wind Farm in the opposite direction. The geographic area from which this change will be experienced includes the short higher section of the A836 through Reay, and from the golf course and from

properties of Reay that have open views to the west. Overall, the magnitude of change is judged to be high.

Significance

The visual effect seen at this location is judged to be **significant (major)**.

6.7.3.4 Viewpoint 4 - A836 layby

Grid Reference	NGR 290254 964075
Figure Number	Figure 6.15
Landscape Character Type	134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows
Landscape Designation	None
Direction and distance to nearest turbine	1.1 km south
Number of hubs and blades theoretically visible	12 hubs, 12 tips

This viewpoint is on the A836 at a layby formed adjacent to the turnoff to Bighouse. It is at a point where the road is running over moor, before it drops (westwards) down towards Melvich Bay. The view is therefore experienced by general road users, tourists, cyclists and people who stop at the layby or turn in/out of the Bighouse road. It was selected as a location representative of views seen from the A836 as it passes close to the Site, and it is one of the closest publicly accessible locations to the Site.

The viewpoint is on open moorland, adjacent to the Giligill Burn. The view from this location is a panorama across open moorland on all sides, and the sea is not visible from this location. The view west is down towards Strath Halladale with enclosed green fields visible in contrast to the moorland. The settlement of Melvich is visible to the north-west, with scattered properties along the A836 that climbs the other side of Melvich Bay. There are forest plantations visible to the south, and pole mounted power lines also pass the viewpoint. Towards the south-west, across Strath Halladale, distant mountains are the Bens Giam. No wind farms are currently visible from this location. Towards the south, the heather covered moorland rises beyond the Giligill Burn to a horizon that is close to the road.

Sensitivity

This is a location is on a relatively busy road that is part of the NC500 tourist route. It represents views seen by road users who may include tourists, visitors and cyclists on the NCN1, the susceptibility is judged to be high. It is not within a designated landscape and views are open but not extensive and do not include the coast near this location, the value of views is judged to be low. The sensitivity of this location is judged to be medium overall.

Magnitude of Change

The Development will be visible to the south-east, as a group of turbines over the open moorland horizon. The turbines will be large and close to the viewer at this point which is close to the Site. The turbines form a relatively regular array, with turbine T8 being the closest to the road. All hubs will be visible from this location, but some of the towers will be partly hidden by the bank of the Giligill Burn in the foreground. The ground level of the site is not visible from this location such that no infrastructure will be seen.

The scale of change resulting from the introduction of the Development is judged to be high as the turbines will be prominent features on the south side of the road. The geographic area from which this change will be experienced includes the section of the A836 over Drum Hollistan Moss to where the road drops into Strath Halladale. Overall the magnitude of change is judged to be high.

Significance

The visual effect seen at this location is judged to be **significant (major)**.

6.7.3.5 Viewpoint 5 - A836 Melvich

Grid Reference	NGR 288864 963931
Figure Number	Figure 6.16
Landscape Character Type	144 Coastal Crofts and Small Farms
Landscape Designation	None
Direction and distance to nearest turbine	2.3 km south-east
Number of hubs and blades theoretically visible	12 hubs, 12 tips

This viewpoint is on the A836 at a layby at the lower end of Melvich, which is a linear settlement stretched along the A836. It is at a point where the road starts to climb the western side of Strath Halladale above Melvich Bay. The view is therefore experienced by road users (east-bound) including general road users, tourists and cyclists and people at properties of Melvich. It was selected as a location representative of views seen from the A836 as it passes through Melvich.

The viewpoint is on open east-facing farmland on the western side of Strath Halladale. The view from this location is a panorama across the strath although the river is not visible except briefly to the east of the viewpoint. The A836 is also not visible as it crosses the strath unless vehicles pass along it. The view is over improved grassland within the valley floor, with moorland and forest plantations leading up to open skyline formed by low moor covered ridges on the south side of the strath. The quarry by Ackron Farm is visible, as is a small domestic scale turbine and farm buildings. There are pylons on the horizon that lead south to the substation at Calgarry in Strath Halladale. There are no existing wind farms visible from this location.

The views south and west are contained by the moorland slopes either side of Strath Halladale, which are steep behind the viewpoint (west). Northwards the properties of Melvich are dispersed along the road as it climbs the moorland slopes, and Melvich Bay is visible with steep cliffs on the east side beyond Bighouse.

Sensitivity

This is a location is within the settlement of Melvich and on a relatively busy road that is part of the NC500 tourist route and the NCN1. This represents views seen by residents, tourists and cyclists and the susceptibility is judged to be high. It is not within a designated landscape, although the Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA is nearby (the boundary passes through Melvich). The value of the views from this location are judged to be medium. The sensitivity of this location is judged to be high.

Magnitude of Change

The Development will be visible to the south-east, as a group of large turbines on the open moorland in the middle distance on the other side of Strath Halladale. Some of the bases of the turbines will be seen on the moorland in front of the skyline, with some stretches of access track potentially visible between turbines where the bases are visible, and accessing the turbines just over the horizon. Other infrastructure has been located so as to avoid visibility from this location (see **Chapter 3: Site Selection and Design**). The turbines form a relatively regular array, with some turbines overlapping to a degree.

The scale of change resulting from the introduction of the Development is judged to be high as the turbines will be very prominent features on the other side of the strath, albeit away from the coast and views of Melvich Bay. The geographic area from which this

change will be experienced includes the section of the A836 through Melvich. Overall the magnitude of change is judged to be high.

Significance

The visual effect seen at this location is judged to be **significant (major)**.

6.7.3.6 Viewpoint 6 - Portskerra

Grid Reference	NGR 287630 965621
Figure Number	Figure 6.17
Landscape Character Type	144 Coastal Crofts and Small Farms
Landscape Designation	Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA
Direction and distance to nearest turbine	4.2 km south-east
Number of hubs and blades theoretically visible	12 hubs, 12 tips

This viewpoint is on the upper road within the village of Portskerra, amongst the houses and near the school. There is an open space to the east of the road that allows a more open view east or south-eastwards than from most stretches of either the upper or lower roads. Receptors include residents of Portskerra, and similar views can be seen from the A836 as it passes Portskerra (general road users, tourists and cyclists). Portskerra is located on the east facing slopes of a headland, on the west side of Melvich Bay. Portskerra is a linear settlement linked with Melvich (Portskerra is off the A836 whilst Melvich is along the A836).

From this location, there are buildings containing views to the south, west and north, but there is an open view across the green space (over rooftops further down the slope) to the east and south-east. This provides views out of the settlement along the coast. The long distance seascape includes the cliffs on the other side of Melvich Bay (Rubha an Tuir) and the Orkneys and Dunnet Head on clear days. Dounreay UKAEA site is visible beyond the nearby cliffs of Rubha an Tuir, which form the focus of the view. In the foreground are the cottages and small rough grazing fields of *Coastal Crofts and Small Farms*. The view extends inland to the south, over moorland to the east of Strath Halladale. The strath itself is partly obscured by nearby buildings, but the eastern flanks of the valley are visible, and the moorland that forms the edge of the flows forms the low skyline. There are forest plantations on the flanks of Strath Halladale that form dark patches on the slopes. Beinn Ràtha is low on this horizon, and there are no mountains visible. There are pole mounted power lines and lighting columns in the foreground, and the pylons crossing the moorland from the Calgarry substation can be seen in the distance. There are no wind farms nearby, although Forss Wind Farm is visible along the coast. Baillie Wind Farm is hidden behind Rubha an Tuir.

Sensitivity

This is a location is within the settlement of Portskerra on a minor road that is off the NC500 tourist route. The viewpoint represents views seen by residents and visitors and the susceptibility is judged to be high. It is within the SLA that includes the coast between Melvich and Bettyhill, and the value of the view from within the settlement is judged to be medium. The sensitivity of this location is judged to be high.

Magnitude of Change

The Development will be visible to the south-east, as a group of turbines on the open moorland in the distance on the other side of Strath Halladale. The Site is not in the direction of the view along the coast, which is the focus of the view, but rather it is inland. They will be notably further inland than the turbines of Forss Wind Farm. The turbines will form a relatively regular array with some turbines overlapping slightly. Some of the

bases of the turbines will be seen on the moorland in front of the moorland horizon, with some stretches of access track visible.

The scale of change resulting from the introduction of the Development is judged to be high as the turbines will be prominent features on the low horizon beyond Strath Halladale, albeit set back from the coast and views of the sea cliffs. The scale of change is somewhat reduced by the presence of existing turbines (Forss Wind Farm) in the view, but overall is judged to be high. The geographic area from which this change will be experienced includes much of Portskerra and a section of the A836 over the headland. Overall the magnitude of change is judged to be high.

Significance

The visual effect seen at this location is judged to be **significant (major)**.

6.7.3.7 Viewpoint 7 - Strathy Point

Grid Reference	NGR 282767 968497
Figure Number	Figure 6.18
Landscape Character Type	144 Coastal Crofts and Small Farms
Landscape Designation	Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA
Direction and distance to nearest turbine	9.8 km south-east
Number of hubs and blades theoretically visible	12 hubs, 12 tips

This viewpoint is from close to the end of the public road on Strathy Point, at slightly higher elevation than the car part at the end of the road. This view is experienced by visitors to Strathy Point, including those who walk along to the headland and the lighthouse.

The view from this location is a long, very open panoramic view towards the Pentland Firth, along the Caithness coast. Dunnet Head and the Orkneys are visible on the horizon. The views west are over local moor covered knolls to the open sea with no sea cliffs visible. There are a few scattered buildings around Strathy Point visible in the foreground. Southwards the moorland rises gently inland, but the very distant tops of the Bens Griam and Ben Loyal and Ben Hope are just visible in good conditions.

Eastwards towards the Site, the view is along the north coast, with successive receding headlands backed by predominantly flat blanket moorland. The cliffs below Baligill and Portskerra on the other side of Strathy Bay are partly hidden by foreground topography, but their tops are visible. Further along the coast the UKAEA site at Dounreay, 15 km east, forms a distant focal point. Forss and Baillie Wind Farms are also visible in clear conditions, along the coast, and the rotors of Strathy North Wind Farm are visible inland to the south. In the foreground, there is a wooden pole electricity line, and post and wire fences enclosing rough grazing fields on the rugged terrain around the viewpoint.

Sensitivity

This is a location is on a remote minor road that is off the NC500 tourist route, but is a point where visitors come seeking views of the northern coast, and there is an advertised walk to the lighthouse. The viewpoint therefore represents views seen and tourists/visitors in particular and the susceptibility is judged to be high. It is within the SLA that includes the coast between Melvich and Bettyhill, and there are scenic qualities to the views along the coast. The value is judged to be high. The sensitivity of this location is judged to be high.

Magnitude of Change

The Development will be visible to the south-east, as a group of turbines on the open moorland in the distance beyond the nearest headland. The Development will be seen in the view along the coast, which is the focus of the view from this location, but as this viewpoint is on a headland jutting out into the sea, views to south-east are looking over sea (Strathy Bay) to the cliffs and on towards inland areas. Even though the turbines are set 2.25 km back from the coast at its closest point, they will appear to be behind the coastline from this vantage point. In this view, the turbines will be 6 km away from the coast immediately in front of them from this viewing direction (Rubha na Cloiche west of Portskerra), but this intervening distance will be difficult to judge. It is inevitable therefore that they will be seen in the context of the coast from this location, and it is noted that this is also the case for Forss and Baillie Wind Farms, albeit that they are further from the viewpoint.

The turbines will form a relatively regular array with some turbines overlapping in the left hand side of the group. Some of the bases of the turbines will be seen on the moorland in front of the moorland horizon. Although potentially visible it is unlikely that the access tracks will be readily visible at this distance.

The scale of change resulting from the introduction of the Development is judged to be high as the turbines will be prominent features on the low horizon along the coast, along which Forss and Baillie Wind farms are present. Although the Development will be set back from the coast it will be seen in the context of the cliff lined seascape as a feature above the cliffs of Rubha na Cloiche, and may affect the perceived scale of those cliffs. The geographic area from which this change will be experienced is limited to Strathy Point from north of Strathy to the lighthouse at Strathy Point itself. Overall the magnitude of change is judged to be medium.

Significance

The visual effect seen at this location is judged to be **significant (major)**.

6.7.3.8 Viewpoint 8 - A897 Strath Halladale, Calgarry

Grid Reference	NGR 290000 959268
Figure Number	Figure 6.19
Landscape Character Type	142 Strath - Caithness and Sutherland
Landscape Designation	None
Direction and distance to nearest turbine	2.8 km north-east
Number of hubs and blades theoretically visible	2 hubs, 12 tips

This viewpoint is on the A897 within Strath Halladale, at a passing place on the single track road between Calgarry Beg and the new substation. It is at a point where the road, which is on the east side of the valley, turns a corner to allow views to the north-east along a section of Strath Halladale that runs north-east around Meall Mòr a' Bealaich (this outcrop forms an obstacle around which the valley flows). This location was selected to represent the stretch of the A897 from which there are views of the Development at relatively short distance, although north-bound travellers will have had distant views from Forsinard (Viewpoint VP14). The road is narrow here, and the passing place is close to the river. Viewers include general road users, tourists and cyclists travelling northwards, and some local properties may have similar views.

The viewpoint is with Strath Halladale, adjacent to the Halladale River. The view from this location is a framed view along a short section of valley to rising moorland where the valley turns north-westwards. The view is contained by the valley sides in all directions, particularly by rising ground adjacent to the road on the east and south-east. Across the

valley to the north-west is across the river to Meall Mòr a' Bealaich and the moorland plateau edge beyond, the view south-west is of the road running around a promontory but with the moorland slopes on the far side of Strath Halladale visible. Toward the Site is along the road to the north-east, which at this point runs parallel to the river. The road can be seen sweeping round to the left following the eastern side of the valley. The Calgarry substation is visible from this location, as a metallic development on the south flank to the right of the view, with pylon lines running from it, in particular a line running up away over the moorland horizon to the north-east. There is coniferous forest on the horizon and mixed plantation further down the slope, but the skyline of Golval Hill in the centre of the view is open moorland. There are no existing wind farms visible, although the view includes a number of electricity transmission lines.

Sensitivity

This is a location is on a single track road that is an important link road, which can be relatively busy with visitors in season. It represents views seen by road users who may include tourists and cyclists, the susceptibility is judged to be high. It is not within a designated landscape and views are enclosed within a limited part of Strath Halladale, such that the value of the view is judged to be low. The sensitivity of this location is judged to be high.

Magnitude of Change

The Development will be visible to the north-east, as a number of turbine blades over the open moorland horizon of Golval Hill, seen by north-bound viewers. The turbines will be large and close to the viewer at this point which is close to the Site, but most of the turbine hubs will be hidden behind Golval Hill. Two turbine hubs will be visible to the right (south) of the group, the remaining turbines will be seen as blades or blade tips only. There will be some overlapping of blades from this location. No infrastructure will be visible.

The scale of change resulting from the introduction of the Development is judged to be high as the turbines will be prominent features on the skyline ahead when viewers come around the corner on this road. The geographic area from which this change will be limited to this part of Strath Halladale. Overall the magnitude of change is judged to be high.

Significance

The visual effect seen at this location is judged to be **significant (major)**.

6.7.3.9 Viewpoint 9 - Beinn Ràtha, Ceann Mòr

Grid Reference	NGR 294962 960944
Figure Number	Figure 6.20
Landscape Character Type	134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows
Landscape Designation	Wild land Area
Direction and distance to nearest turbine	3.2 km north-west
Number of hubs and blades theoretically visible	12 hubs, 12 tips

This viewpoint is located at the cairn on Ceann Mòr, the southern top of the hill known as Beinn Ràtha. Similar views are seen from the northern top (Beinn Ràtha itself), though the views from Beinn Ràtha are more towards the coast, and the views from Ceann Mòr are more towards the open moorland towards the south. which is part of a broad low ridge running south from Beinn Ràtha. The viewpoint is accessed from the east, via a track from Reay along the Helshetter Strath. There is little evidence of people visiting this location except for the presence of cairns on the summits.

From this location, there is a 360° panorama from the hill top, with the coast to the north, Caithness farmlands to the east and open moorland to the south and south-west. The foreground is the rocky moorland top of the hill, with slopes descending in all directions, Beinn Ràtha is a broad shoulder of hill to the north-east. Views to the north-east beyond Beinn Ràtha include the coastal area around Sandside Bay, with the settlement of Reay as houses and trees, and the Dounreay Nuclear Testing complex seen as collections of buildings, an airstrip and the white dome. Forss Wind Farm is visible beyond, with Baillie Wind Farm further east, further inland. Orkney and Dunnet Head are visible in the distance.

There are extensive forest plantations that stretch from the Helshetter Strath eastwards, with the firebreaks between the plantation coups forming a patchwork within for forest. Distant farmland and moorland of Caithness are seen beyond.

Views south and west are open and extensive across low undulating moorland, with lone mountains visible in the far distance in good conditions. A number of waterbodies are seen on the moorland, including Loch Garbh, Loch Akran and Loch Na Seilge. Forest plantations are visible in the far distance to the south, and smaller areas to the west. Strathy North Wind Farm is visible to the west, and two turbines of Bettyhill Wind Farm further away.

There are no views into Strath Halladale from this location, though it is marked by an interruption to the moorland, and further north, greener vegetation on the valley sides. A line of lattice pylons is visible coming out of Strath Halladale and crossing the moorland past Loch Akran and to the north of Beinn Ràtha, and continuing to Dounreay. The coast to the north-west is an abrupt change from undulating moorland to sea, except further away where scattered settlement can be seen on the coastal slopes above sea cliffs. Melvich, Portskerra and Strathy Point can be identified.

This viewpoint is within the East Halladale Flows WLA 39, and the views south and west are over extensive open moorland that has little evidence of management and few man-made artefacts. There are no paths visible, and the moorland has boggy areas that are riddled with ponds in places. There are few foci in these views, and the eye is drawn across the moorland to distant mountains, forest plantations or Strathy Wind Farm to the west. The views north and north-east are very different, with forest plantations to the east and settled landscapes along the coast.

Sensitivity

This is a relatively remote hill top that is visited infrequently. It is not within a designated landscape, though the wildness characteristics of the viewpoint and the landscape around it (particularly to the south and west) increase the susceptibility to development of the type proposed. There are wind farms present in the views to both east and west, and settled coastal and lowland landscapes can be seen beyond the moorland around Beinn Ràtha. These reduce the susceptibility to change, such that the susceptibility is judged to be high on balance. The viewpoint is within a Wild Land Area which is a nationally important mapped interest, and has scenic qualities to the view, judged to be of high value. The sensitivity of this location is judged to be high.

Magnitude of Change

The Development will be visible on the open moorland to the west, as a group of turbines beyond the transmission line pylons. No infrastructure will be visible from this location as the site itself is out of view beyond a moorland horizon. The turbines will form a relatively regular array, with some slight overlapping of rotors. The turbines furthest to the right (north) of the group will be seen front of Melvich but, in spite of this, the turbines will be seen to be at a distance away from the coast. The proposed turbines will appear as large in the view as they will be relatively close to the viewpoint, and seen from an elevated location. There are few other features in the landscape with which to make scale

comparisons, except the pylons that run in front of the Site and the more distant turbines at Strathy or Baillie Wind Farms, albeit that one needs to turn towards them. As an additional wind farm in the panorama, the Development will raise awareness of wind farms in the wider landscape around this viewpoint (both along the coast and inland).

The scale of change resulting from the introduction of the Development is judged to be high, albeit that the Development will not be the first wind farm in the view. The geographic area from which this change will be experienced includes the tops and west facing slopes of Ceann Mòr and Beinn Ràtha. Overall the magnitude of change is judged to be high.

Significance

The visual effect seen at this location is judged to be **significant (major)**.

6.7.3.10 Viewpoint 10 - Hill of Shebster

Grid Reference	NGR 301219 964538
Figure Number	Figure 6.21
Landscape Character Type	143 Farmed Lowland Plain
Landscape Designation	None
Direction and distance to nearest turbine	9.2 km west
Number of hubs and blades theoretically visible	10 hubs, 12 tips

This viewpoint is from the top of Hill of Shebster, a low hill rising above the Caithness farmland 3 km to the east of Reay. It is approximately 4 km inland, inland of the A836 road, although the hill is skirted by minor roads from Reay to Shebster and Achreameie. This is a local high point where panoramic views over the Caithness farmland are possible, and was selected to represent these views, as well as views of the transition from farmland to moorland to the west. It is close to Baillie Wind Farm, which is to the north-east of the Hill of Shebster. Receptors of this view are people who walk up to the cairns on the hill, but similar views will be seen by those travelling along local roads (general road users, tourists and cyclists on the NCN1 that passes the foot of the hill) and residents of nearby crofts.

The view is an open panorama across low lying agricultural land with scattered crofts, particularly to the north-east and south-east where views are extensive across Caithness. Farmland also extends to the north-west towards Dounreay and Reay, and the coast. The coast itself with sea cliffs is not visible along the closest stretches, although Sandside Bay is visible. To the west, the village of Reay is visible as buildings and trees inland of Sandside Bay. Orkney is visible north-eastwards in clear weather. To the south-west and west, the improved fields over the Hill of Shebster drop away to rough moorland beyond the minor road at the foot of the hill, and there is an abrupt change to coniferous forest plantations which extend into the distance and form the horizon over rising land. Some moor clad hills emerge in the middle distance, including Creag Leathan and Creag Mhòr, and Beinn Ràtha is visible as a low hill further away. Ben Loyal and Ben Hope are visible as distant mountains in clear visibility. There are pylons in a line over the moorland to the west, and Strathy North Wind Farm is visible as a few turbines beyond the pylons. This is a transition from farmland to moorland, with coniferous plantation on the fringes. From this location there is a sense of having farmland to the east and moorland to the west.

Baillie Wind Farm forms a group of turbines close to the viewpoint to the north-east, the closest turbine being approximately 1 km away. Forss Wind Farm is seen by the coast to the north, and the reactor dome and chimneys of the Dounreay UKAEA site are visible on the coast.

Sensitivity

This is a location on a hill top that is not frequently visited. It represents views seen by people on local roads who include local residents and visitors, and cyclists on the NCN1. It is not within a designated landscape, although it has panoramic views of Caithness farmland and views of the transition to moorland further west. There are wind farms nearby, increasing the susceptibility to cumulative effects. The susceptibility at this location is judged to be medium overall, and the value is judged to be low. The sensitivity of this location is judged to be medium.

Magnitude of Change

The Development will be visible in the middle distance to the west, as a group of turbines on the skyline to the right (north) of Beinn Ràtha, in front of Strathy North. No infrastructure will be visible. The turbines will form a relatively regular group although there will be some overlapping of turbines. Most of the hubs of the proposed turbines will be visible, low on the horizon, though two turbines will be seen as blade tips only. The Development will be considerably further from the viewpoint than Baillie Wind Farm which is close to the viewpoint in the opposite direction, and will also be more distant than Forss Wind Farm. It will be seen closer than Strathy North, but in the same direction of view. The Development will be seen as an additional group of turbines further along the coast, located on the open moorland beyond the farmed or forested foreground, and therefore beyond the transition to moorland.

The scale of change resulting from the introduction of the Development is judged to be low as it is a view with existing wind farms along the coast. Although it will increase the presence of turbines in the view to the west, the experience of this viewpoint is one of being close to Baillie Wind Farm, with other wind farms in the wider landscape (one of which will be the Development). The geographic area from which this change will be experienced includes the local roads around the viewpoint, and scattered properties. Overall the magnitude of change is judged to be low.

Significance

The visual effect seen at this location is judged to be **not significant (minor)**.

6.7.3.11 Viewpoint 11 - Dunnet Head

Grid Reference	NGR 320530 976491
Figure Number	Figure 6.22
Landscape Character Type	141 High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays
Landscape Designation	Dunnet Head SLA
Direction and distance to nearest turbine	31.5 km south-west
Number of hubs and blades theoretically visible	11 hubs, 12 tips

This viewpoint is located on the summit of the small hill to the south of Dunnet Head Lighthouse, where there is a viewing area with a waymarker and seating, accessed from the car park by a good path. Dunnet Head, being the most northerly point of mainland Scotland, is well visited and many visitors climb the short path to this hill top. Viewers are therefore primarily visitors, and whilst most people might focus on the views out to sea and to Orkney, the 360° panorama includes extensive views along the coast and inland.

The panorama is coastal, such that the northern half is seaward, across the Pentland Firth to Orkney located to the north-east. The Old Man of Hoy (seastack) is visible on clear days beside the high cliffs of Hoy. The mainland coast is of cliffs that truncate the undulating moorland at the sea edge, particularly close to the viewpoint and to the west

beyond the more settled bay of Thurso. The coast to the east of Dunnet Head and Brough is less dramatic, with lower lying land meeting the coast with rocky shores. Inland, there is moorland with occasional rocky outcrops and waterbodies in the foreground around Dunnet Head, south and south-east of which the landscape changes to enclosed fields of agricultural land and crofts. To the west the landscape of undulating moorland extends into the distance, and a few lone mountains are visible on clear days (Morven and Scaraben, the Bens Griam and Ben Loyal).

There are several existing wind farms in this extensive panorama, the closest is Lochend (10 km to the south-east), and others include Stroupster (16 km to the south-east), Baillie and Forss in the distance to the south-west (20.2 km and 19.5 km away respectively), and the Causeymire and others in the distance to the south (24.5 km away or more). The view is therefore one of several wind farms in the panorama across inland seen from this elevated viewpoint on the coast. In the direction of the Site, Baillie and Forss Wind Farms are visible, with Strathy North in the distance between them.

Sensitivity

This is a popular viewpoint at the northernmost point of mainland Scotland, and a place where many people visit to see the views that form a full panorama inland, along the coast in both directions and out to sea towards Orkney. It is within the Dunnet Head SLA, and is a location considered to be a landmark. The susceptibility, value and sensitivity of this location are judged to be high.

Magnitude of Change

The Development will be visible along the coast to the west, as a group of turbines in the distance seen between Baillie and Forss Wind Farms. It will be in front of Strathy North, and will not be a new feature in that part of the view. The Development will be seen above the sea cliffs of Spear Head and in front of the very distant Ben Loyal. The turbines will appear to be of similar size to those of Forss or Baillie (although they are larger and further away), and the layout will appear similar to that of Baillie in terms of turbine spacing. The Development will increase the presence of turbines in that part of the panorama currently occupied by Strathy North such that there will appear to be three groups of wind turbines of similar prominence along the coast (Baillie, the Development plus Strathy North, and Forss). There will therefore be cumulative relationships between the Development and existing wind farms, in particular Baillie and Forss, as the Development will bring a third group of turbines to similar prominence to the Baillie and Forss Wind Farms in this view westwards along the coast.

The scale of change to the experience of the panorama resulting from the introduction of the Development, considering the distance to the Site, the presence of other wind farms in the view along the coast to the west and the relationships between them, is judged to be low. The geographic area from which this change will be experienced is limited to the summit and high slopes of Dunnet Head. Overall the magnitude of change is judged to be low.

Significance

The visual effect seen at this location is judged to be **not significant (minor)**.

6.7.3.12 Viewpoint 12 - A9 Georgemas Station

Grid Reference	NGR 315569 959243
Figure Number	Figure 6.23
Landscape Character Type	143 Farmed Lowland Plain
Landscape Designation	None
Direction and distance to nearest turbine	23.6 km north-west
Number of hubs and blades theoretically visible	7 hubs, 10 tips

This viewpoint is located on the bridge of the A9 over the railway at Georgemas Station. It is a busy trunk road, viewers are mainly road users who include tourists and cyclists, and those approaching/leaving the station. There are a few scattered properties nearby from which views may be similar. Rail users will see this view oblique to the direction of travel, although not at or around the station itself due to screening by the bridge and buildings.

The bridge over the railway is higher than the surrounding relatively flat land, such that views are panoramic in all directions, over Caithness farmland. Ben Dorrery is visible to the west as a distant low hill with masts and forested lower slopes, Spittal Hill is visible as a low rise to the south along the A9. The distant outlines of Morven and Scaraben can be seen in good visibility. There are a number of forest plantations in the view. To the south along the A9 beyond, the Causeymire group turbines are visible (8.0km away). The view towards the Site is to the west, beyond the station and across flat moorland and flat farmland with scattered properties and woodlands. Baillie Wind Farm is not visible (although blade tips are theoretically visible).

Sensitivity

This is a location on a trunk road close to a small rail station. Viewers are therefore frequent road users likely to be moving at speed albeit that they include tourists, rail passengers and local residents. Visitors use this route as a main route to the north coast, but overall the susceptibility to change at this location is judged to be medium. It is not within a designated area, and the value of this view is judged to be low. The sensitivity of this location is judged to be medium.

Magnitude of Change

The Development will be visible to the west, beyond the station. The Development will form a small group of turbines on the horizon in the distance within this panorama, in a different direction of view from the Causeymire Group and more distant.

The scale of change resulting from the introduction of the Development, considering the distance to the Site, is judged to be low. The geographic area from which this change will be experienced is the local area around Georgemas. Overall the magnitude of change is judged to be low.

Significance

The visual effect seen at this location is judged to be **not significant (negligible)**.

6.7.3.13 Viewpoint 13 - Ben Dorrery

Grid Reference	NGR 306287 955037
Figure Number	Figure 6.24
Landscape Character Type	134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows
Landscape Designation	None
Direction and distance to nearest turbine	16 km north-west
Number of hubs and blades theoretically visible	2 hubs, 10 tips

This viewpoint is located at top of Ben Dorrery by the trig point and the telecoms mast. Similar views are seen from the top of Beinn Freiceadain immediately to the north of Beinn Dorrery. The viewpoint is accessed from the east, via a track from Dorrery Lodge used as access for the mast. Viewers include walkers climbing the hill and workers attending to the mast.

From this location, there is a 360° panorama from the hill top, with the coast and Orkney to the north, Caithness farmlands to the east and wide open moorland to the west. There are extensive forest plantations, both on the flanks of the hill and in the wider panorama, to the south and north-west. To the north, the small sloping plateau top of Beinn Freiceadain occupies the foreground, but views beyond extend to moorland, lochs, forest and farmland towards the coast. Eye-catching man-made features include Baillie Wind Farm, the Dounreay UKAEA site dome, the large buildings of Janetstown industrial site south of Thurso, and the Causeymire group of wind turbines to the south.

Views to the east are over Loch Shurrery to low undulating moorland with Beinn nam Bad Mòr as a low hill in undulating moorland and Beinn Ràtha just visible on the low horizon. Strathy North Wind Farm is just visible over the flank of Beinn nam Bad Mòr. Distant mountains visible include Ben Loyal to the west, the Bens Giam to the south-west and Morven and Scaraben to the south.

Sensitivity

This is a hill top that is visited by walkers. It is not within a designated landscape, though it is a good vantage point over the landscape around it which includes wild land to the west. The value of the view is judged to be high as an accessible location with panoramic views. There are wind farms present in the views to north and south-east (Causeymire group etc.), and settled coastal and lowland landscapes can be seen to the north and east. The susceptibility to additional wind farms in the views is judged to be medium. The sensitivity of this location is judged to be high.

Magnitude of Change

The Development will be visible as a series of turbine blades or blade tips, with two hubs visible low on the horizon beyond the low form of Beinn Ràtha to the west. The turbines, being largely hidden by the topography will not be easily comparable in size with those of Baillie Wind Farm, but will appear more distant and on a part of the horizon beyond extensive forest plantations.

The Development will be more distant and less visible than Baillie Wind Farm and the Causeymire group, and as it is partially hidden it will not be prominent as an additional group in the panorama. The scale of change resulting from the introduction of the Development is judged to be low. The geographic area from which this change will be experienced includes the tops and west facing slopes of Ben Dorrery and Beinn Freiceadain. Overall the magnitude of change is judged to be low.

Significance

The visual effect seen at this location is judged to be **not significant (minor)**.

6.7.3.14 Viewpoint 14 - Forsinard

Grid Reference	NGR 288461 940609
Figure Number	Figure 6.25
Landscape Character Type	134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows
Landscape Designation	None
Direction and distance to nearest turbine	21.3 km north
Number of hubs and blades theoretically visible	12 hubs, 12 tips

This viewpoint is on the A897 south of Forsinard, where the road rises slightly over the foot of Meall a' Bhealaich. Viewers are principally general road users, tourists and cyclists, and similar views are seen by visitors to the Forsinard reserve.

From this location, there is a 360° panorama from the edge of a flat extensive bog/moor area, with rising land to the east up Meall a' Bhealaich and to the west up Ben Griam Beg. The view south is contained by forest plantations on the flanks of Meall a' Bhealaich. Northwards the flat moor/bog continues, with the few buildings and trees of Forsinard visible in the middle distance, and beyond the moorland continues with further patches of forest plantation. The skyline is of low hills or flat land, and some parts of the skyline are obscured by forest trees. The turbines of Strathy North Wind Farm are visible low on the horizon to the north.

Sensitivity

This is a location is on a single track road that is an important link road, which can be relatively busy with visitors in season. This is a roadside location that is at a layby that is not somewhere people will normally stop. It represents a view seen from this road for a stretch south of Forsinard that is seen by road users who will include visitors and cyclists. The susceptibility is judged to be medium. It is not within a designated landscape, though it has panoramic views across the landscape around it which includes wild land, the value is judged to be medium. The sensitivity of this location is judged to be medium.

Magnitude of Change

The Development will be visible as a group of turbines on the low land to the north. The Development will be seen behind a small knoll in the foreground, but will form a relatively regular array. The turbines will be more visible than those of Strathy North Wind Farm although of similar distance from the viewpoint, due to the lower intervening topography of the view towards the Development which is along Strath Halladale. The Development will form a distant feature in the view ahead for north-bound travellers.

The scale of change resulting from the introduction of the Development is judged to be low. The geographic area from which this change will be experienced is limited a short section of the A897 between Meal a Bhealaich and Forsinard, although similar views may be glimpsed from the train nearby, or seen from higher ground on Meall a' Bhealaich. Overall the magnitude of change is judged to be low.

Significance

The visual effect seen at this location is judged to be **not significant (minor)**.

6.7.3.15 Viewpoint 15 - Ben Griam Beg

Grid Reference	NGR 283180 941165
Figure Number	Figure 6.25 ⁴⁵
Landscape Character Type	134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows
Landscape Designation	Bens Griam & Loch nan Clar SLA
Direction and distance to nearest turbine	22.2 km north-east
Number of hubs and blades theoretically visible	12 hubs, 12 tips

This viewpoint is located at top of Ben Griam Beg by the trig point. Similar views are seen from the top of Ben Griam Mòr to the south. The mountain can be accessed from the east, via a track past Greamachary. Being the smaller of the Bens Griam, it is less frequently climbed than Ben Griam Mor, but has more open views to the north.

From this location, there is a 360° panorama from the hill top, with extensive moorland with forest plantations and lochs. In the distance to the north the coast is visible and mountains contrast with flat moorland in all directions.

Views to the north are down over extensive forest plantations and bog with small bodies of open water. Strath Halladale is visible as a cleft in the otherwise undulating landscape, running northwards to the coast. Strathy North and Baillie wind farms and the Dounreay Dome are visible towards the north coast with Orkney beyond, and Forss Wind Farm can also be seen in clear conditions.

Sensitivity

This is a hill top that is visited by few walkers, although the viewpoint represents the more popular Ben Griam Mòr. It is within a SLA that covers the Bens Griam and land to the south, it is at the northern fringes of this designated landscape, as a vantage point over the landscape around it which includes wild land. There are wind farms present in the views to north and south-east (Causeymire group etc.), and settled coastal and lowland landscapes can be seen as distant features. The susceptibility, value and sensitivity of this location are judged to be medium.

Magnitude of Change

The Development will be visible as an additional distant group of turbines on the low land towards the north coast. The Development will be a smaller group than Strathy North Wind Farm, and more distant from the viewpoint. It will be closer than Baillie and Forss Wind Farms. The development will be located beyond the open moorland that extends from Ben Griam Beg to the north coast, and will not affect the sense of scale of the wilder landscapes around the hill, nor the views to the extensive moorland.

The scale of change to the panorama from this location resulting from the introduction of the Development as an additional wind farm in the distance to the north is judged to be low. The geographic area from which this change will be experienced includes the tops and north facing slopes of Ben Griam Beg and Ben Griam Mòr. Overall the magnitude of change is judged to be low.

Significance

The visual effect seen at this location is judged to be **not significant (minor)**.

⁴⁵ No photography is provided for this very distant viewpoint, Figure 6.25 includes wirelines only.

6.7.4 *Assessment of Views from Settlements*

As noted in the methodology (Technical Appendix A6.1), visual receptors in all settlements are assumed to be of high sensitivity. The geographical extent is taken as the extent of the settlement (either its concentrated core or the wider area for dispersed settlements). Reversibility and duration of effects are considered to be permanent and long term for all operational effects.

6.7.4.1 *Melvich*

Melvich is a small linear settlement along the A836, south of the junction of the minor road to Portskerra. It is on the western side of Strath Halladale, across the east facing slopes above Melvich Bay. The views from the settlement are generally open as buildings are dispersed and do not generally screen views from each other as will occur in a denser settlement. Views are similar for residents from properties (either uphill or downhill off the A836) which generally face eastwards, curtilages and from the A836 along which there is a pavement. VP5 is at the layby at the lower (southern) end of the settlement, VP6 is Portskerra can be used to represent views at the upper end of the settlement.

The views are out over Melvich Bay and the upper part of Strath Halladale with Bighouse as a feature on the other side of the strath. Beyond the land rises sharply, and the sea cliffs of Rubha an Tuir are prominent in views from all parts of the settlement. From upper parts of Melvich, the view along the coast is of successive headlands with Orkney and Dunnet Head visible on clear days. Dounreay UKAEA site is visible beyond the nearby cliffs of Rubha an Tuir, and Forss Wind farm is visible beyond. Baillie Wind Farm is also visible from the upper parts of the settlement, over the horizon above Bighouse. The views from Melvich also extend inland to the south, over upper Strath Halladale with glimpses of the river, and up to moorland to the east, which forms a low skyline. There are forest plantations on the flanks of Strath Halladale around Ackron Farm, forming dark patches on the slopes that contrast with quarry workings there, as well as with the moorland or the improved land in the strath. Beinn Ràtha is low on the horizon, there are no mountains visible, and Strathy North Wind Farm is not visible.

The Development will be visible to the south-east, as a group of turbines on the open moorland in the middle distance on the other side of Strath Halladale. The turbines will form a relatively regular array, though varying overlapping will occur in views from different parts of the settlement (similar to the visualisations from VP5 and VP6, Figures 6.16 and 6.17). The Development will be closer to the settlement, and more prominent than Baillie and Forss Wind Farms, and will form an additional group of turbines along the coastal area to the east, albeit closer than Baillie and Forss.

The Development will introduce a prominent group of turbines to views inland from Melvich, visible from all parts of the settlement, but generally inland rather than in the direction that most properties face, which is towards Melvich Bay. As Forss and Baillie are visible from parts of the settlement, but the Development will be closer, there will be locations where the Development will be seen in the context of one or both of the existing schemes. The approach to the settlement from the south/east is along the A836 (or via the A897), such that people approaching the settlement will have passed closer to the Development. On approach from the west, there will be brief glimpses from the A836, but most of the approach will not have visibility of the Development.

Overall, it is judged that there will be a medium magnitude of change to the visual experience of the settlement as a whole, bearing in mind that the Development will be in a part of the panorama that is peripheral to many views from properties.

The effect on the visual experience of the settlement as a whole is judged to be **significant (moderate)**.

6.7.4.2 *Portskerra*

Portskerra is a small settlement arranged around a looped minor road off the A836, meeting Melvich at the A836 and the Melvich Hotel. Portskerra lies on the western side of Melvich Bay, on east facing slopes. The properties are generally east facing with views along the coast. Given that Portskerra is a denser settlement than Melvich, there are fewer open views than from Melvich. VP6 by the school is located at one of the more open locations with views to the Site, but generally views are more constrained by adjacent houses.

From Portskerra views are out over Melvich Bay and along the coast, with the cliffs of Rubha an Tuir as a focal feature. The views extend along the coast with successive headlands with Orkney and Dunnet Head visible on clear days. The Dounreay UKAEA dome is visible, with Forss Wind Farm beyond. Baillie Wind Farm is hidden behind Rubha an Tuir for lower parts for the settlement, but is visible from higher up. The views inland to the south are often obscured by adjacent buildings, but where they are more open, they extend over upper Strath Halladale with a low moorland skyline. Forest plantations on the flanks of Strath Halladale contrast with the moorland. Beinn Ràtha is low on the horizon, there are no mountains visible, and Strathy North Wind Farm is not visible due to the rising land to the south of the settlement.

The Development will be visible to the south-east, as a group of turbines on the open moorland in the distance beyond Strath Halladale, as illustrated by VP6 (Figure 6.17). The Development will introduce a prominent group of turbines to views inland from Portskerra, but it will not be visible from everywhere within the settlement, as there is local screening by neighbouring buildings and vegetation. The approach to the settlement is from south, at the junction with the A836. At this point the Development will be in the opposite direction to the settlement. Effects on the A836 are assessed separately.

Overall, it is judged that there will be a medium magnitude of change to the visual experience of the settlement as a whole, bearing in mind that the Development will be in a part of the panorama that is peripheral to the generally east facing views from parts of the settlement, and that views are often subject to screening by adjacent buildings.

The effect on the visual experience of the settlement as a whole is judged to be **significant (moderate)**.

6.7.4.3 *Reay*

Reay is a small settlement on the A836, with two parts, the eastern part is linear along the A836 from the church to Keoltag Drive. The western part, New Reay is more clustered, with the Terrace and Beinn Ràtha Court. New Reay is set slightly lower within the Sandside Burn valley, lower than the church and the graveyard (VP3).

The views from within the village often have local screening by adjacent properties and vegetation in gardens. Views from the cemetery and church are as described for VP3, and similar views can be seen from parts of Reay further to the east before the road drops down to the Keoltag Burn near the school and views become more contained. Around the memorial, views are contained and do not extend westwards. In New Reay, there is more local screening by buildings or vegetation, and views west towards the Sandside House woods and the moor beyond are less open. Baillie and Forss Wind Farms are located to the west of Reay, and is visible as turbines over the horizon from around the church.

The Development will be visible from some parts of Reay, as being to the west on the moorland horizon. VP3 is at the point where there is maximum visibility of the turbines, locations at lower elevations will not have as many hubs or tips visible. The proposed turbines will be screened from many views by foreground features within the settlement. As Baillie and Forss Wind Farms are visible from parts of the settlement albeit in a

different direction (east), the Development will for an additional group of turbines to the west, although there are limited places from which all three will be visible. On approaching the settlement from the east along the A836 or from Westfield and Shebster, there will be views of the Development beyond the settlement, seen from locations such as VP3 at Dounreay, albeit that people will approach past Baillie. From the west, people approaching Reay will pass the Development (see VP4).

Overall it is judged that there will be a medium magnitude of change to the visual experience of the settlement as a whole, given that open views such as at VP3 do not occur for much of the settlement due to local screening.

The effect on the visual experience of the settlement as a whole is judged to be **significant (moderate)**.

6.7.4.4 *Strath Halladale (Upper Bighouse, Achiemore and Calgarry)*

This part of Strath Halladale has a number of scattered properties, either along the A897 on the eastern side of the Halladale River such as those around Achiemore and Calgarry, and dispersed properties along a minor road (no-through road) on the western side including those known as Upper Bighouse. Properties tend to be orientated across the strath, views therefore extend over the river to rising slopes and a moorland horizon opposite, with views up and down the strath oblique to most properties.

VP8 is located north of the properties on the east side of the strath, and views will be similar or screened by local topography on the eastern side of the strath. In contrast, properties on the western side of the strath will have views of the Development at the end of the strath looking northwards. Although these are not necessarily the main views from these properties, the Development will be a prominent feature at the end of the strath in views north within approximately 10 km, similar to those seen from VP8. The approaches to the settlement are along the A897 either from the north (which passes close to the Development and the site access), or from the south, which has no visibility except briefly from Forsinard.

Overall, it is judged that there will be a low magnitude of change to the visual experience of the Achiemore and Calgarry areas on the eastern side of the strath, and although the Development will be visible from the western side of the strath, there will be a limited effect on the experience of this area as settled. The magnitude of change to the experience of the settlement on the western side of the strath is judged to be low.

Overall it is judged that the effect on the visual experience of this dispersed settlement area as a whole is judged to be **not significant (minor)**.

6.7.4.5 *Halkirk*

Halkirk is a concentrated settlement with a grid of streets, approximately 21 km from the Site. Views from outermost properties theoretically may include the Development as a distant feature low on the horizon to the west, but actual visibility is reduced by local screening of houses and trees of the settlement and of Gerston such that the Development is unlikely to be visible except from a few upper storey windows. Overall, the magnitude of change will be negligible and the visual effect on the experience of this settlement is judged to be **not significant (negligible)**.

6.7.5 ***Assessment of Sequential Views available from Routes***

As noted in the methodology (Technical Appendix A6.1), visual receptors along road routes are generally assumed to be of lower sensitivity, but users of some roads will include tourists or visitors, particularly on the NC500, thus increasing sensitivity. Sensitivity is therefore identified for each route. The geographical extent is taken as the

linear corridor along the route. Reversibility and duration of effects are considered to be permanent and long term for all operational effects.

6.7.5.1 A836 (NC500 & NCN1)

This route runs from John o' Groats to Thurso, past the Site and on along the north coast to Tongue and beyond. It is part of the NC500 route, and the National Cycle Route NCN1 runs along it from Reay westwards. The route keeps close to the coast, through coastal crofting farmland, with dispersed settlements and properties along it. West of Thurso the road climbs Scrabster Hill up onto moorland, and past the coastal farmlands between Forss and Reay. West of Reay the road climbs onto moorland again, over Drum Hollistan, before descending to Strath Halladale and Melvich. Further west the road follows a similar pattern of climbing over moor covered headlands and dropping into settled bays, some of which are very small scale. Views from the route are generally extensive along the coast and out to sea, but views inland more varied due to the varied topography close to the road on the inland side.

Several wind farms are visible from this route, including Forss (600m from the road at Hill of Lybster); and Baillie (2.3 km from the road at Forss), Strathy North (5.2 km from the road at Armadale) and Bettyhill (1.3 km from the road near Farr). There are also small turbines or telecoms masts visible from the road.

The sensitivity of the route is judged to be high, as road users include tourists (high susceptibility), and the route is valued as the NC500 and the NCN1 (high value). It is a busy route, and traffic is often fast moving due to straight sections of the route.

The Development will be visible in the distance from the section of the route as it passes Dunnet Head to the east, for west bound road users going around Dunnet Bay. The ZTV indicates that there will be almost continuous theoretical visibility of the proposed turbines from Scrabster Hill to Portskerra, with the exception of Forss. Actual visibility is somewhat reduced by local screening by roadside vegetation within the Forss and Reay areas, but views are generally very open. West of Portskerra, visibility is more intermittent, corresponding to higher east facing slopes where east-bound road users may have views of the Development beyond intervening land. There is no theoretical visibility west of Kirtomy.

When travelling westwards, from the Dunnet Head section, the Development will be seen as a very distant element, at approximately 30 km away. West of Scrabster Hill, the Development will be seen progressively closer as represented by VP1, VP2 and VP3, until the route passes the Site (VP4). The route passes between Forss and Baillie Wind Farms, and the Development will be the third wind farm in the local area, set back from the coast when passing over Drum Hollistan Moss towards Strath Halladale.

When travelling eastwards, the Development will be seen as a distant feature from higher sections of the road as it undulates over the rugged moorland. Strathy North is also visible from some sections of this part of the route, as turbines inland. From above Portskerra, the Development will be seen across Strath Halladale without intervening hills, and open views will be seen from the sloping road as it descends to Strath Halladale (see VP6 and VP5) before climbing to the section adjacent to the Site at VP4.

In some views the proposed turbines will be seen as larger than those of Baillie or Forss Wind Farm, through comparisons with Strathy North will be more difficult due to the rugged terrain between. Overall the Development will be an additional wind farm seen from this route, as a group of large turbines close to the route, though roughly equidistant between Baillie and Strathy North and set a short distance to the south of the route. The magnitude of change to the experience of the route will vary with proximity and visibility of the Development, from high between Reay and Portskerra, medium between Forss and Reay and between Strathy and Armadale, and low further away.

Overall, the visual effect on the experience of the route as a whole is judged to be:

- **Significant (major)** between Reay and Portskerra;
- **Significant (moderate)** between Forss and Reay and between Armadale and Portskerra; and
- not significant (minor to negligible) east of Forss and west of Armadale.

6.7.5.2 A897 Strath Halladale

The A897 runs from Helmsdale via Kinbrace to the north coast at Melvich, following the Strath of Kildonan and Strath Halladale. The Strath Halladale section runs approximately north/south, with the road on the east side of the valley once it gets north of Forsinard. The A897 is a single track road but is an important link road, which can be relatively busy with visitors in season. Strathy North Wind Farm is visible for a short section to the south of Forsinard. The susceptibility, value and sensitivity of the route are judged to be medium to high.

The ZTV indicates that there will be not visibility of the Development from south of VP14 at Forsinard. Visibility between VP14 and Forsinard Lodge will be somewhat reduced by buildings and roadside trees, and will include the Development as a distant element on the low horizon to the north where more distant forest plantations do not screen the horizon. The Development will be located to the right of Strathy North. There will be no visibility of the Development between Forsinard Lodge and Craigtown where the valley turns slightly to the north-east. Between Craigtown and Calgarry the proposed turbines will be seen on the horizon to the north-north-east ahead for northbound road users. These views are represented by VP8 which is closer to the Site, from further south the turbines will be more distant and beyond the bulk of the hills above Achiemore and Culfern (Creag an Iolair). Visibility is lost briefly beyond the Calgarry substation as the road is below Golval Hill, but the turbines will be visible again from around Loch Earacha for the remainder of the route past Golval and Ackron Farms to the A836. The turbines will be approximately 850 m from the road, south of Ackron Farm.

Overall there will be glimpses of the Development from around Forsinard, and views along the strath from Craigtown to Calgarry, and views of the turbines above the route to the east from Loch Earacha to the A896. It is judged that there will be **significant (major)** effects from Craigtown northwards, **not significant (minor)** effects around Forsinard, and no effects on other stretches of this road.

6.7.5.3 Thurso – Westfield – Shebster – Reay (NCN1)

This route runs from the southern edge of Thurso south-westwards past Janetstown and Newlands of Geise, before climbing over the slight rise and down to Westfield. After crossing the Forss Water the route continues west, skirting below Hill of Shebster and meeting the A836 at Isauld by Reay. It is a minor route used often by local people and residents, but is also used by cyclists as part of the National Cycle Route NCN1. The susceptibility, value and sensitivity of this route are judged to be medium.

There are other local roads around it, this route is used to represent views from minor roads south-west of Thurso. As is typical for roads in this area, the views are open and unconstrained by roadside vegetation, except through Shebster, and around Hill of Shebster where local trees and buildings contain some views. Baillie Wind Farm is visible to the north of this route, the closest turbine being 500 m from the road. Forss Wind Farm is visible further away to the north (over 5 km away).

The ZTV on Figure 6.2 indicates that there will be almost continuous visibility of the Development from the route west of Newlands of Geise, except for where the road descends through Westfield to cross the Forss Water. The Development will be seen as an array of turbines on the moorland horizon to the west, with an appearance similar to

that shown on Figure 6.21 for Viewpoint VP10 on the Hill of Shebster, although that viewpoint is somewhat elevated above the road route. The experience of traveling the route westbound will be one of seeing, from Newlands of Geise, an additional wind farm ahead (Baillie is also ahead); dropping down towards Westfield with only Baillie visible ahead; passing Baillie with another wind farm (the Development) low on the horizon ahead, and then with Baillie behind and the additional wind farm ahead albeit partly screened by intervening moorland and forest plantations. Given the proximity of Baillie Wind Farm to this route, the Development will be seen as a more distant wind farm, but will be an additional group of turbines visible from this route.

The magnitude of change to the route which passes Baillie site is judged to be low increasing to medium closer to the Site. It is judged that the effect on the experience of this route will be **not significant (minor)** to the east of Shebster, increasing to **significant (moderate)** west of Shebster when route users will have wind farms to both east and west.

6.7.5.4 Local Paths

There are a number of paths within 5 km of the Site, including core paths around Reay, Melvich, Portskerra and Strath Halladale⁴⁶ as shown on Figure 6.7. Core paths, by virtue of being identified as such, are judged to have high susceptibility and value, and therefore sensitivity.

- Melvich has one core path, SU19.05 from the A836 down to the parking place above the bay, over the footbridge and up to the steading above Bighouse. The route is 2.4 km from the nearest turbine at its closest point. The ZTV (see Figure 6.3) indicates that the Development will be visible from much of this route except as it passes Bighouse, and views will be similar to those shown on Figure 6.16 for VP5 on the A836 within Melvich. Although the focus of this path is the views of Melvich Bay and the crossing of the river, the Development will be prominent features in views inland, with a high magnitude of change. It is judged that there will be **significant (major)** visual effects seen from this route.
- Portskerra has two core paths, one short link from the upper to lower roads (SU19.08) which is rather overgrown with vegetation, and a cliff-top path from the Pier to the northern end of the settlement (SU19.01). The Development will be visible from both of these routes, with views similar to that at VP6 on the upper road by the school (Figure 6.17). Although the focus of the coastal path is the views of Melvich Bay and the coastal cliffs, the Development will be prominent features in views inland. It is judged that there will be a medium magnitude of change and **significant (moderate)** visual effects seen from these routes.
- Strath Halladale has one core path in its northern part, SU19.03 runs from Upper Bighouse to Kirkton cemetery, on the western side of the strath. The views from this path are contained within the strath, but include the Calgarry substation, the gravel quarry and domestic scale turbines within the strath. The ZTV indicates that the Development will be visible from the whole of this route except briefly on the southern slopes of Am Bealach. VP8 on the A897 can be used to represent what the Development will look like from this route, although the arrangement of turbines within the group will change as the route travels northwards. The turbines will be prominent features on the skyline across the strath, and the magnitude of change will be high. Visual effects are judged to be **significant (major)** for this route.
- Reay Core Paths include the CA11.02-09. They run around Reay and Sandside Bay, and along tracks inland towards the forest plantations. Views from these routes are generally open, with views westwards to the moorland horizon over which the Development will be visible (see VP3). The route to the west of Sandside Bay

⁴⁶ The Highland Council (2019) Modified Core Paths Plan (Caithness and Sutherland) Amended.

(CA11.04) is not within the ZTV and views are out over the sea to the north-east. The other routes, CA11.02 Achvarasdal Woodland, CA11.03 Limekiln Forest north of the forest, CA11.05 Achins/Helshetter, CA11.06 Reay Roadside Link, CA11.07 and CA11.08 around Reay Golfcourse and CA11.09 Borlum Circuit, will all have views of the Development although not necessarily continuously. The magnitude of change will be medium and the visual effects on these routes around Reay is judged to be **significant (moderate)**.

6.7.6 Summary of Visual Effects

Table 6.6: Summary of Visual Effects

Receptor		Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Significance
1	A836 Forss	high	low	Not significant (minor)
2	A836 Dounreay	medium	medium	Significant (moderate)
3	A836 Reay	high	high	Significant (major)
4	A836 Layby	low	high	Significant (major)
5	A836 Melvich	high	high	Significant (major)
6	Portskerra	high	high	Significant (major)
7	Strathy Point	high	medium	Significant (moderate)
8	Strath Halladale, Calgarry	high	high	Significant (major)
9	Beinn Ràtha	high	high	Significant (major)
10	Hill of Shebster	low	low	Not significant (minor)
11	Dunnet Head	high	low	Not significant (minor)
12	A9 Georgemas Station	low	low	Not significant (negligible)
13	Ben Dorrery	high	low	Not significant (minor)
14	A897 Forsinard	medium	low	Not significant (minor)
15	Ben Griam Beg	medium	low	Not significant (minor)
Melvich		high	medium	Significant (moderate)
Portskerra		high	medium	Significant (moderate)
Reay		high	medium	Significant (moderate)
Strath Halladale (Upper Bighouse)		high	low	Not significant (minor)
Halkirk		high	negligible	Not significant (negligible)
A836 (NC500 & NCN1)		high	variable	Significant (major) between Reay and Portskerra; Significant (moderate) between Forss and Reay and between Armadale and Portskerra; and Not significant (minor to negligible) east of Forss and west of Armadale
A897 Strath Halladale		medium to high	variable	Significant (major) effects from Craigton northwards Not significant (minor) effects around Forsinard

Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Significance
Thurso – Westfield-Shebster	medium	low to medium	Significant (moderate) west of Shebster Not significant (minor) to the east of Shebster
Local Paths – Melvich core paths	high	high	Significant (major)
Local Paths – Portskerra core paths	high	medium	Significant (moderate)
Local Paths – Strath Halladale core paths	high	high	Significant (major)
Local Paths – Reay core paths	high	medium	Significant (moderate)

6.8 CUMULATIVE ASSESSMENT

Cumulative effects are assessed following the methodology set out in Technical Appendix A6.1. The assessment considers:

- The Consented Scenario: the addition of the Development in the context of operational, under construction *and consented* wind farms, i.e. a likely future scenario; and
- The In-Planning Scenario: the addition of the Development in the context of operational, under construction, consented, *undetermined planning applications and wind farm developments currently at appeal*, i.e. a less certain future scenario.

6.8.1 Scope of the Cumulative Assessment and Initial Observations

The consented and application stage wind farms with 40-45 km of the Development, used for the review of wider patterns of development are shown on Figure 6.8. The wind farms within 25 km of the Development considered in the detailed cumulative assessment are listed in Table 6.7⁴⁷. There are also a number of schemes at scoping stage, which are shown on Figure 6.8 but are not included in the assessment of cumulative effects.

Table 6.7: Wind Farms within 25 km

Wind Farm	Status ⁴⁸	Number of Turbines	Blade Tip Height (m)	Approximate Distance
Limekiln	Consented	21	139 or 126	4.9 km east
Dounreay Tri Offshore	Consented	2	201	12.1 km north
Hill of Lybster	Consented	1	99.5	12.3 km north-east
Strathy South ⁴⁹	Consented	39	135	13.6 km south-west
Weydale	Consented ⁵⁰	1	66	21.9 km east
Achlachan 2	Consented	3	110	25.3 km south-east
Drum Hollistan 2	Application	7	125	690 m east
Strathy Wood	Application	18	180	9.8 km south-west

⁴⁷ The cumulative data was collated with a cut-off date of 15 September 2020.

⁴⁸ Status of wind farms is as of 15 September 2020.

⁴⁹ A new application for turbines of 200m to blade tip was submitted for Strathy South in August 2020. The application 'Strathy South Variation' is considered in the In-planning Scenario.

⁵⁰ It is noted that this turbine was observed as having been constructed in October 2020, although the status has not been updated for the assessment.

Wind Farm	Status ⁴⁸	Number of Turbines	Blade Tip Height (m)	Approximate Distance
Limekiln Extension	Application	5	149.9	7.5 km east
Strathy South Variation ⁵¹	Application	39	200	13.6 km south-west

6.8.1.1 Development Patterns

The pattern of development shown on Figure 6.8 of all existing, consented, and in-planning sites within 40-45 km is of scattered wind farms at intervals along the south-east coast of Caithness but of varied sizes. Groups of wind farms are forming inland, with clusters around Causeymire and Camster and Bilbster. Along the north coast, wind farms tend to be set inland (with the exception of Forss), there is a series of wind farms at roughly equal distances along the coast.

Considering scenarios within the 25 km Study Area around the Site, from the list in Table 6.7 and Figure 6.8 it can be seen that the consented sites of Achlachan 2 and Strathy South (and its Variation) will be located adjacent to, or close to existing wind farms. These schemes will therefore enlarge existing groups of turbines, but the overall relationship between groups of turbines in the wider landscape will remain relatively unchanged. Limekiln will form a new group of turbines separate from existing groups midway between Baillie and the Development. Dounreay Tri Offshore Wind Farm will form two isolated turbines approximately 10 km offshore to the north.

In the in-planning scenario, Strathy Wood will form part of the Strathy North/South group, with Strathy South superseded by its variation with larger turbines. Limekiln Extension will enlarge Limekiln to the east. Drum Hollistan will form a new group of turbines separate from Limekiln, adjacent to the Development site.

Taking the landscape baseline and the existing and emerging pattern of wind energy development into account, this assessment of cumulative effects on the landscape considers only effects on receptors between Baillie Wind Farm to the east, and the Strathy group of wind farms to the west, as for all other receptors the relationships between existing wind farms and the Development will not be altered by the introduction of consented or in-planning wind farms further away from the Site. In the interest of proportionality, therefore, this assessment focusses on the area where there is the potential for significant cumulative effects to occur (approximately 15 km radius from the Site).

Therefore the cumulative assessment focusses on the following consented and in-planning schemes⁵²:

- Drum Hollistan 2;
- Limekiln;
- Limekiln Extension;
- Strathy Wood;
- Strathy South and its Variation; and
- Dounreay Tri Offshore.

The scope of the cumulative assessment therefore includes the following landscape receptors (in order of distance from the Site):

- LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows;
- LCT 136 Rocky Hills and Moorland;
- LCT 140 Sandy Beaches and Dunes;

⁵¹ The 'Strathy South Variation' supersedes the 'Strathy South' scheme in the In-planning Scenario. There is no alteration to turbine locations, only to the size of turbines proposed.

⁵² Status of wind farms is as of 15 September 2020.

- LCT 142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland;
- LCT 143 Farmed Lowland Plain; and
- LCT 144 Coastal Crofts and Small Farms.

The scope of the cumulative assessment for visual effects considers a wider range of receptors to capture the sense of changing cumulative situation when travelling through the Study Area (sequential experience). The following visual receptors are considered:

- VP2 A836 Dounreay;
- VP3 A836 Reay;
- Reay;
- Reay Core Paths;
- VP4 A836 Layby;
- VP5 A836 Melvich;
- Melvich;
- Melvich Core Path;
- VP6 Portskerra;
- Portskerra;
- Portskerra Core Paths;
- VP7 Strathy Point;
- A836 (NC500) along the coast;
- VP8 Strath Halladale, Calgarry;
- A897 along Strath Halladale;
- VP9 Beinn Ràtha; and
- Thurso – Westfield – Shebster – Reay road (NCN1).

The more distant viewpoints (VP1, VP10-15) were reviewed and found to have negligible cumulative elements to the effects in cumulative scenarios. They are not reported on further.

This assessment of selected receptors for additional cumulative effects is then used to inform the assessment of combined cumulative effects.

6.8.2 Assessment of Additional Cumulative Effects on Landscape Receptors

6.8.2.1 LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows

The LVIA concluded that introduction of the Development within this particular part of the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT will give rise to a significant (major to moderate) landscape character effect within approximately 5-7 km of the Site to the south, and significant (moderate) to the coast northwards. VPs 4, 7, 9 and 13 visualisations are illustrative of the range of character change predicted.

This conclusion reflects the judgement that the addition of the Development will not significantly alter the degree to which the wider LCT overall is already characterised by wind energy development. Experienced in the round, for example travelling in both directions on the A836 and A897, the Development is likely to be perceived as an additional group of turbines in the northern part of the LCT, set back from the coast, separated from the cliffs and sea by sweeping moorland.

Consented Scenario: Regarding the Limekiln and Strathy South schemes located within the LCT, introduction of the Development is likely to cause a medium magnitude of character change at most, marginally greater than in the LVIA, yet not so great as to become a 'high' magnitude of change. This cumulative change will be experienced within approximately 5 km of the Site, towards Reay in particular, where the combined visual influence of Limekiln and the Development will be greatest.

Elsewhere within the LCT, where either Limekiln and Strathy South (or both) consented schemes are visible together with the Development, for example to the south and west of the Site, the magnitude of character change will be less, diminishing with distance.

Considered overall, the likely effect attributable to the Development on the character of the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT will be slightly greater than predicted in the LVIA, but still within the level bracket of **significant (major to moderate)** across the same areas as for the LVIA, i.e. within 5-7 km.

In-planning Scenario: With respect to the Drum Hollistan 2, Limekiln Extension and Strathy Wood schemes also located within the LCT, the addition of the Development adjacent to an implemented Drum Hollistan 2 will form a new wind farm grouping, appearing as a single turbine group seen from the east and west, and a tight pair of wind farms as experienced from the north and south. With Strathy South Variation increasing the turbine sizes on that site, there will be an increased sense of turbines on the moorland to the west of Strath Halladale. Where the Development is seen beyond Drum Hollistan 2 forming a single group (e.g. from the vicinity of Reay to the east), the magnitude of character change will be less than reported in the LVIA, but not so much as to alter the finding in the LVIA.

In the opposite situation (e.g. in the vicinity of Portskerra / Melvich to the north-west) the reverse will apply; the Development will appear in front of (and next to) Drum Hollistan and the perceived character change will be slightly greater than reported in the LVIA, but still within the same range of magnitude predicted. The presence of Limekiln Extension adjacent to Limekiln, and Strathy Wood and the enlarged Strathy South Variation approximately 10 km to the west of the Site would not alter this assessment.

Considered in the round, the overall effect on the character of the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT with Drum Hollistan, Limekiln Extension, Strathy Wood and Strathy South Variation forming part of the landscape baseline will, on balance, be broadly within the same level bracket of effect predicted in the LVIA – **significant (major to moderate)** across the same areas as for the LVIA, i.e. within 5-7 km.

6.8.2.2 *LCT 136 Rocky Hills and Moorland*

The LVIA concluded that the Development will have a not significant (minor) landscape character effect overall on the Rocky Hills and Moorland LCT.

Consented Scenario: Regarding the consented Strathy South and Limekiln schemes, due to the separation distance of the Rocky Hills and Moorland LCT from the Site (in excess of 10 km) combined with the arrangement of cumulative schemes relative to each other and intervisibility factors, it is judged that introduction of the Development will cause a limited magnitude of landscape character change resulting in the same level bracket effect predicted in the LVIA – **not significant (minor)**.

In-planning Scenario: The Development will be introduced adjacent to Drum Hollistan 2 approximately 10 km east of the nearest part of the Rocky Hills and Moorland. Taking into account the presence of Drum Hollistan 2, the addition of Strathy Wood, the increase in turbine sizes at Strathy South Variation, and enlargement of the Limekiln group in the distance by the Extension, it is judged that the Development will cause a limited magnitude of landscape character change, lower than reported in the LVIA, but not such that it would be negligible and still within the same level bracket of effect predicted in the LVIA – **not significant (minor)**.

6.8.2.3 *LCT 140 Sandy Beaches and Dunes*

The LVIA concluded that the Development will have a significant (major to moderate) landscape character effect on the Melvich Bay part of the Sandy Beaches and Dunes LCT within approximately 5 km of the Site and a not significant (minor) landscape effect

beyond 5 km. VPs 5 and 6 visualisations are illustrative of the range of character change predicted.

Consented Scenario: With regard to the consented schemes, there will be no visibility of Strathy South or Limekiln from within the Melvich Bay part of the LCT, due to its enclosed character and the intervening landform. As such, there will be no change to the effect identified in the LVIA – **significant (major to moderate)**.

In-planning Scenario: Drum Hollistan 2 will be visible from Melvich Bay area of the LCT, but other in-planning schemes will not be visible. Introducing the Development adjacent to an implemented Drum Hollistan 2 is likely to be perceived as an additional wind farm, seen as a pair with Drum Hollistan 2. Where Drum Hollistan 2 is visible, the Development will appear in front of it and the character change will be of slightly greater magnitude than reported in the LVIA. That said, the effect on the character of the LCT as a whole will be in the same level bracket as predicted in the LVIA – **significant (major to moderate)**.

6.8.2.4 LCT 141 High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays

The LVIA concluded that the Development will have a significant (moderate) landscape character effect on the High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays LCT for the east side of Strathy Point, between 8-11 km from the Site, and not significant effects on all other parts of the LCT. Viewpoint 7 (Figure 6.18) is illustrative.

Consented Scenario: Regarding the Strathy South and Limekiln schemes, there will be very limited visibility of Strathy South from the eastern side of Strathy Point, and it will be seen beyond Strathy North. Limekiln will be seen along the coast from most of this area of the LCT, and the Development will form an additional wind farms seen along the coast, in seascape views out of the LCT that have Forss, Baillie, Limekiln and Dounreay UKAEA site in them. The character of the coast along from Strathy Point in this scenario will be one with cliffs and headlands and distant wind farms. The Development will be closer than Limekiln, and although the magnitude of change caused by introducing the Development into the views beyond the LCT in this scenario will be slightly reduced relative to that identified in the LVIA, the effect on character will remain in the same level bracket predicted in the LVIA – **significant (moderate)** for the east side of Strathy Point (8-11 km from the site).

In-planning Scenario: Drum Hollistan 2 and Limekiln Extension will be located eastwards along the coast from the Strathy Point area of this LCT, in front of and behind Limekiln respectively. Strathy Wood and Strathy South Variation will also be visible, inland in the same direction as Strathy North. Drum Hollistan turbines will be more prominent than those of Limekiln, above the cliffs of Rubha na Cloiche. With this wind farm present, the introduction of the Development as an additional yet closer wind farm in the context of the coast that has several wind farms, will be reduced. The magnitude of change in this scenario is judged to be low and effect on character will be lower than predicted in the LVIA – **not significant (minor)** for the east side of Strathy Point.

6.8.2.5 LCT 142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland

The LVIA concluded that the Development will have a significant (major to moderate) landscape character effect on the CT10 Strath Halladale part of the Strath – Caithness and Sutherland LCT within 5-6 km, and a not significant (minor to negligible) landscape effect beyond 5-6 km. Viewpoint 8 visualisation illustrates the level of character change predicted within the northern part of the Strath.

Consented Scenario: With regard to the consented schemes, there will be limited visibility of Strathy South and Limekiln from within Strath Halladale, due to its enclosed character and the intervening landform. As such, the magnitude of change caused by

introducing the Development into the neighbouring Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT will remain as predicted in the LVIA – **significant (major to moderate)**.

In-planning Scenario: Within this LCT there will be visibility of Drum Hollistan 2 in the northern part of the strath and the western side, and visibility of Strathy Wood and Strathy South Variation from the eastern slopes. Introducing the Development adjacent to an implemented Drum Hollistan 2 is likely to be perceived as additional turbines from most locations, or as an additional wind farm, the two forming a pair, rather than a new feature in views from the strath. This will result in a slightly reduced magnitude of change compared with the LVIA finding, as there will also be locations where the Development will be visible without Drum Hollistan 2. Notwithstanding this reduction, the effect on the character of the LCT will be in the same level bracket as predicted in the LVIA – **significant (major to moderate)**.

6.8.2.6 LCT 143 Farmed Lowland Plain

The LVIA concluded that the Development will have a not significant (minor to negligible) landscape character effect overall on the Farmed Lowland Plain LCT. Viewpoints 1, 2, 3 and 10 visualisations illustrate the levels of character change predicted within the north-western extremity of the LCT.

Consented Scenario: With Limekiln and Strathy South schemes present, the addition of the Development within the neighbouring Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT will have a limited cumulative effect on the Farmed Lowland Plain LCT. The magnitude of character change is judged to be low at most, experienced in the vicinity of Reay, where the combined visual influence of Limekiln and the Development will be greatest. The change will be marginally greater than in the LVIA, yet not so great as to become 'medium' magnitude. Elsewhere within the LCT, where either or both consented schemes are visible together with the Development, the magnitude of change will be less, as reported in the LVIA, diminishing with distance from the Site. Considered overall, the effect on the character of the LCT will be broadly within the same level bracket predicted in the LVIA – **significant (minor to negligible)**.

In-planning Scenario: Limekiln Extension and Drum Hollistan 2 will be introduced to the west of the LCT, Strathy Wood and Strathy South Variation schemes will be in the distance to the west. The addition of the Development adjacent to Drum Hollistan 2 will result in a slightly reduced magnitude of character change within the north-western part of the Farmed Lowland Plain compared to that recorded in the LVIA. This is due to the presence of Drum Hollistan 2 in the future landscape baseline, seen in front of the Development as experienced from within the LCT to the east of the Site. Notwithstanding this reduction, the effect on the LCT considered overall will be within the same level bracket as predicted in the LVIA – **significant (minor to negligible)**.

6.8.2.7 LCT 144 Coastal Crofts and Small Farms

The LVIA concluded that the Development will have a significant (major to moderate) landscape character effect on the Coastal Crofts and Small Farms LCT within approximately 5 km of the Site, and significant (moderate) effect on the Strathy Point section at -11km from the Site. Viewpoints 5, 6 and 7 visualisations are illustrative of the range of character change predicted.

Consented Scenario: Regarding the Strathy South and Limekiln schemes, there will be very limited visibility of either of them from within the Melvich part of the Coastal Crofts and Small Farms LCT, due to its relatively enclosed context and the intervening landform. Limekiln will be visible from the higher ground at the western edge of the area. As such, it is judged that the magnitude of change caused by introducing the Development into the neighbouring Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT will be as assessed in the LVIA. The

effect on character will therefore be in the same level bracket predicted in the LVIA – **significant (major to moderate)**.

From the Strathy Point tract of the LCT, Limekiln will be visible along the coast, as additional distant turbines. With this wind farm present, the introduction of the Development as an additional yet closer wind farm in the context of the coast and the views to inland moorland will be reduced to a slight degree but the magnitude of change and effect on character will be in the same level bracket predicted in the LVIA – **significant (moderate)**.

In-planning Scenario: Drum Hollistan 2 will be located to the east of Strath Halladale seen from the Melvich/Portskerra area of this LCT. Limekiln Extension, Strathy Wood and Strathy South Variation will not be visible. The addition of the Development adjacent to Drum Hollistan 2 will form a close-knit pair of wind farms. The Development will appear in front of Drum Hollistan 2 and the magnitude of character change will be slightly greater than reported in the LVIA, albeit that the proposed turbine will not be new features in the landscape across the stretch. It is judged that the effect will remain within the same level bracket of effect predicted in the LVIA – **significant (major to moderate)**.

From the Strathy Point tract of the LCT, Drum Hollistan will be visible along the coast, as turbines more prominent than those of Limekiln, above the cliffs of Rubha na Cloiche. With this wind farm present, the introduction of the Development as an additional yet closer wind farm in the context of the coast and the views to inland moorland will be reduced. The magnitude of change in this scenario is judged to be low and effect on character will be lower than predicted in the LVIA – **not significant (minor)**.

6.8.2.8 Summary of Cumulative Landscape Character Effects

The assessment identifies that the key relationship of the Development with other wind farms will be with Limekiln in the Consented Scenario, and with Drum Hollistan 2 in the In-Planning Scenario. Other wind farms proposed in the wider landscape will not greatly alter the inter-relationships of these schemes. The Development will introduce turbines into the northern part of the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT, adjacent to Drum Hollistan 2. The Development will not alter the pattern of development across the wider area, but rather it will extend the series of existing and proposed wind farms west of Thurso slightly beyond Drum Hollistan 2.

6.8.3 Assessment of Additional Cumulative Effects on Visual Receptors

6.8.3.1 Viewpoint 2 A836 Dounreay

LVIA Scenario: The LVIA identified a significant (moderate) effect in the presence of existing wind farms.

Consented Scenario: From this location, the consented Limekiln Wind Farm will be seen to the south, as an array of turbines approximately 5.1 km away. It will be separate from the Baillie turbines to the east and Forss plus Hill of Lybster to the north-east. The baseline will therefore change to one with groups of turbines seen to the east and south, as a series of wind farms along the A836. Dounreay Tri will be visible offshore.

In this context, the Development will be an additional group of turbines in the distance to the west, and will increase the presence of turbines in the views from the A836, particularly for west-bound road users. It will contribute to the series of wind farms spread along the coast, as an additional discrete group. In this view therefore, there will be a series of wind farms across the landscape along the coast, and the Development will be one of them, but not the most prominent in the view. The magnitude of change to the view in this scenario is judged to be medium, greater than in the LVIA yet not so great as to become a 'high' magnitude of change. The visual effect of the Development

in this scenario will be greater than in the LVIA yet still within the level bracket of **significant (moderate)**.

In-planning Scenario: With Drum Hollistan 2 and Limekiln Extension present in the baseline, there will be turbines ahead for west bound road users at this location, as well as behind (Baillie and the Forss group) and to the south (Limekiln and Limekiln Extension).

In this context, the Development will be seen as additional turbines behind those of Drum Hollistan 2, appearing of similar size yet beyond the horizon where Drum Hollistan 2 will be in front. The array of proposed turbines will spread to the right of Drum Hollistan 2, enlarging the group of turbines, but not introducing a new group. In this view therefore, there will be a series of wind farms across the landscape along the coast, and the Development will enlarge one of them, but create a discrete group. The view will remain one with a series of wind farms across 180° of the panorama, and the Development will play a role in the increasing perception of wind farms in the wider area. The magnitude of change to the view in this scenario is judged to be low, less than in the LVIA as the development will be seen behind Drum Hollistan 2. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be less than in the LVIA and reduced to **not significant (minor)**.

6.8.3.2 Viewpoint 3 A836 Reay

LVIA Scenario: The LVIA identified a significant (major) effect in the presence of existing wind farms.

Consented Scenario: From this location, the consented Limekiln Wind Farm will be seen to the south, as an array of turbines approximately 3.4 km away. It will be separate from the Baillie turbines to the east and closer to the viewpoint, located in forest beyond Borlum Rock. The Forss group will be extended by Hill of Lybster, and Dounreay Tri will be visible offshore. The baseline will therefore change to one with groups of turbines seen to the north-east and south, and offshore.

In this context, the Development will be an additional group of turbines over the horizon to the west, and will increase the presence of turbines in views, particularly for west-bound road users. It will contribute to the series of wind farms spread along the coast, as an additional discrete group. In this view therefore, there will be wind farms visible in different directions, and the Development will be one of them, although it will not be the most prominent in the view, being low on the horizon where Limekiln turbines will be seen inland to their full height. The Development will play a notable role in the increasing perception of wind farms in the wider area. The magnitude of change to the view in this scenario is judged to be high, slightly greater than in the LVIA. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be greater than in the LVIA yet still within the level bracket of **significant (major)**.

In-planning Scenario: In this baseline, there will be seven turbines of Drum Hollistan 2 prominent on the west horizon, as well as eastwards (Baillie and the Forss group) and southwards there will be five additional turbines (Limekiln and its Extension).

In this context, the Development will be seen as additional turbines behind those of Drum Hollistan 2, lower on the skyline with the turbines beyond the horizon whilst those of Drum Hollistan 2 will be in front. The array of proposed turbines will appear to be part of the same group and will spread to the right of Drum Hollistan 2 with one hub and two blade tips extending the group of turbines slightly. In this view therefore, there will be groups of turbines seen in different directions of view, and the Development will enlarge one of them with the introduction of additional turbines, but will not make it more prominent. The Development will play a role in the increasing perception of wind farms in the wider area, but will not introduce a new discrete group. The magnitude of change to the view in this scenario is judged to be low, less than in the LVIA as the development

will be seen behind Drum Hollistan 2. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be less than in the LVIA and reduced to **significant (moderate)**.

6.8.3.3 Reay

LVIA Scenario: The LVIA identified a significant (major) effect for the settlement as a whole in the presence of existing wind farms.

Consented Scenario: From different parts of Reay, the consented Limekiln Wind Farm will be seen to the south, as turbines approximately 3.4 km away in the forest. It will be separate from the Baillie turbines to the east. The Forss group will be enlarged by Hill of Lybster and Dounreay Tri will be seen offshore. The baseline will therefore change to one with groups of turbines seen to the north, north-east and south.

In this context, the Development will be an additional group of turbines over the horizon to the west, and will increase the presence of turbines in views, particularly for west-bound road users. It will contribute to the series of wind farms spread along the coast, as an additional discrete group. From different parts of Reay therefore, there will be wind farms visible in different directions, and the Development will be one of them, although it will not be the most prominent in views, being low on the horizon where Limekiln turbines will be seen inland to their full height. The Development will play a notable role in the increasing perception of wind farms in the wider area. The magnitude of change in this scenario is judged to be high, slightly greater than in the LVIA. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be greater than in the LVIA yet still within the level bracket of **significant (major)**.

In-planning Scenario: With Drum Hollistan 2 present in the baseline, there will be turbines prominent on the west horizon, as well as north (Dounreay Tri), north-eastwards (Baillie and the Forss group) and with Limekiln Extension present there will be additional turbines to the south (adjacent to Limekiln).

In this context, the Development will be seen as additional turbines behind those of Drum Hollistan 2, and lower on the skyline. The array of proposed turbines will appear to be part of the same group. In this scenario, there will be groups of turbines seen in different directions of view, and the Development will enlarge one of them, but will not make it more prominent. The Development will play a role in the increasing perception of wind farms in the wider area, but will not introduce a new discrete group. The magnitude of change to the view in this scenario is judged to be low, less than in the LVIA as the development will be seen behind Drum Hollistan 2. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be less than in the LVIA and reduced to **significant (moderate)**.

6.8.3.4 Reay Core Paths (CA11.02-03, CA11.5-09, around Reay, and along tracks inland)

LVIA Scenario: The LVIA identified significant (moderate) effects for these routes collectively.

Consented Scenario: Views from these routes are generally open, and will include views of Limekiln Wind Farm nearby to the south, and Dounreay Tri offshore. The Development will be an additional wind farm to the west on the moorland horizon although not visible from all sections of the routes. The visual effects on these routes around Reay is judged to be slightly higher than in the LVIA, but remaining within the level bracket of **significant (moderate)**.

In-planning Scenario: Limekiln Extension will be located close to core paths to the south, and Drum Hollistan 2 will be visible on the horizon to the west. The Development will be seen behind Drum Hollistan 2, and lower on the horizon, and in some views may not be distinguishable from it. The development will be additional turbines beyond Drum Hollistan 2, rather than a new group of turbines. The closest wind farms will remain Limekiln and its extension, particularly from paths inland. The visual effect of the

Development in this scenario will be less than in the LVIA and reduced to **not significant (minor)**.

6.8.3.5 Viewpoint 4 A836 Layby

LVIA Scenario: The LVIA identified a significant (major) effect in the presence of existing wind farms.

Consented Scenario: From this location, no consented wind farms will be visible, there will be no change in effect from this location, **significant (major)**. The cumulative element will be **none**.

In-planning Scenario: With Drum Hollistan 2 present in the baseline, there will be four turbines prominent on the moorland horizon to the south-east, as one hub and four blades. Neither Limekiln Extension nor Strathy Wood will be visible, but the turbines of Strathy South Variation will be seen as a series of 10 blade tips beyond Strath Halladale to the south-west.

In this context, the Development will be seen as additional turbines on the moorland south of the road, but will be closer than those of Drum Hollistan 2. There will be a slight gap between the two developments, perceptible from this location. In this view therefore, there will be two groups of turbines close to the road to the inland side, and Strathy South Variation further away to the south-west. The magnitude of change to the view in this scenario is judged to be high, slightly greater than in the LVIA due to the juxtaposition of developments close to the road. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be greater than in the LVIA yet still within the level bracket of **significant (major)**.

6.8.3.6 Viewpoint 5 A836 Melvich

LVIA Scenario: The LVIA identified a significant (major) effect in the presence of existing wind farms.

Consented Scenario: From this location, no consented wind farms will be visible, there will be no change in effect from this location, **significant (major)**.

In-planning Scenario: With Drum Hollistan 2 present in the baseline, there will be seven turbines visible on the moorland horizon to the south-east, as two hubs and five sets of blades. Neither Limekiln Extension nor Strathy Wood will be visible.

In this context, the Development will be seen as additional turbines on the moorland across Strath Halladale, but will be more prominent as they will be closer than those of Drum Hollistan 2, and on slightly west facing slopes with the bases of the turbines visible. There will not be a gap in the spread of turbines, but with the Drum Hollistan 2 turbines further away, they will appear as two groups of turbines (particularly for receptors moving along the A836 past the viewpoint). In this view therefore, there will be additional turbines inland on the other side of the Strath, as a second group. The magnitude of change to the view in this scenario is judged to be high, slightly greater than in the LVIA. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be slightly greater than in the LVIA yet still within the level bracket of **significant (major)**.

6.8.3.7 Melvich

LVIA Scenario: For the settlement as a whole, the LVIA identified a significant (major) effect in the presence of existing wind farms.

Consented Scenario: From this settlement, neither Limekiln nor Strathy South will be visible, but the Dounreay Tri turbines will be visible from the northern part of the settlement out beyond the headland of Rubha an Tuir. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be similar to the LVIA but will remain within the bracket of **significant (major)**.

In-planning Scenario: With Drum Hollistan 2 present in the baseline, there will be seven turbines visible on the moorland horizon across the strath to the south-east, as two hubs and five sets of blades. Neither Limekiln Extension nor Strathy Wood will be visible.

In this context, the Development will be seen as additional turbines on the moorland across Strath Halladale, but will be more prominent in some views as they will be further west and closer than those of Drum Hollistan 2. From this linear settlement views will vary, but there will be two wind farms on the moorland horizon opposite and inland. The Development will introduce additional turbines rather than forming a new feature in views. The magnitude of change to the view in this scenario is judged to be high, and different from the LVIA. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be similar to the LVIA yet still within the level bracket of **significant (major)**.

6.8.3.8 *Melvich Core Path (SU19.05, A836 down to the footbridge and up past Bighouse)*

LVIA Scenario: The LVIA identified a significant (major) effect for this route.

Consented Scenario: No consented wind farms will be visible from this route, there will be no change in effect from this route, **significant (major)**.

In-planning Scenario: Drum Hollistan 2 will be visible on the horizon to the south-east from this route. The Development will be seen in front of Drum Hollistan 2 as a separate group of turbines. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be slightly greater than in the LVIA but will remain within the bracket of **significant (major)**.

6.8.3.9 *Viewpoint 6 Portskerra*

LVIA Scenario: The LVIA identified a significant (major) effect in the presence of existing wind farms.

Consented Scenario: From this location, neither Limekiln nor Strathy South will be visible, but the Forss group in the distance to the east will be extended with Hill of Lybster, and Dounreay Tri will be seen offshore to the north-east. The baseline will therefore be one of distant turbines along the coast and two out to sea. The Development will be another, closer group inland to the south-east, bringing turbines on land closer to the viewer. The change will be different from in the LVIA as viewers will be aware of turbine both on land and out to sea, the magnitude of change is judged to be high. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be slightly higher than in the LVIA but will remain within the bracket of **significant (major)**.

In-planning Scenario: With Drum Hollistan 2 present in the baseline, there will be seven turbines visible on the on the open moorland in the distance on the other side of Strath Halladale to the south-east, as two hubs and five sets of blades. It will therefore be a view of the coast with turbines offshore (Dounreay Tri), beyond the Rubha an Tuir cliffs (the Forss group) and inland. Limekiln Extension will not be visible, nor will Strathy Wood or Strathy South Variation.

In this context, the Development will be seen as additional turbines on the moorland set back from the coast across Strath Halladale, further right inland of Drum Hollistan 2, but more prominent as they will be closer than those of Drum Hollistan 2, and on slightly west facing slopes with the bases of the turbines visible. In this view therefore, the Development will form a third group of turbines (with a slight gap between it and Drum Hollistan 2) seen in views along the coast, with turbines offshore also. The Development will be the closest wind farm to the viewer. The magnitude of change to the view in this scenario is judged to be high, greater than in the LVIA. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be greater than in the LVIA yet still within the level bracket of **significant (major)**.

6.8.3.10 Portskerra

LVIA Scenario: For the settlement of Portskerra, the LVIA identified a significant (moderate) effect in the presence of existing wind farms, given some screening by local houses.

Consented Scenario: The Forss group will be extended with Hill of Lybster, and Dounreay Tri will be seen offshore. Strathy South will not be visible from Portskerra. From upper parts of Portskerra, 1-2 tips of Limekiln will theoretically be visible. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be similar to the LVIA except that there will be an awareness of turbines offshore also. The effect of the addition of the Development will be similar to that identified in the LVIA, i.e. **significant (moderate)**.

In-planning Scenario: Drum Hollistan 2 will be seen on the other side of Strath Halladale to the south-east. It will therefore be a view of the coast with turbines both offshore (Dounreay Tri), beyond the Rubha an Tuir cliffs (the Forss group) and inland. Limekiln Extension will not be visible, nor will Strathy Wood or Strathy South Variation.

In this context, the Development will be seen as additional turbines on the moorland set back from the coast across Strath Halladale, further right and inland of Drum Hollistan, but more prominent as they will be closer than those of Drum Hollistan, in front of the horizon. The Development will form an addition group of turbines, separate from Drum Hollistan in most views from the settlement. The magnitude of change to the views from the settlement in this scenario is judged to be medium but slightly less than in the LVIA as the turbines will not be new features in the views across Strath Halladale. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be similar to the LVIA however, and within the level bracket of **significant (moderate)**.

6.8.3.11 Portskerra Core Paths (SU19.08 link between the upper to lower, and SU19.01 cliff-top path)

LVIA Scenario: The LVIA identified significant (moderate) effects for these routes collectively.

Consented Scenario: The Forss group will be extended with Hill of Lybster, and Dounreay Tri will be seen offshore. Neither Limekiln nor Strathy South will be visible from these routes. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be similar to the LVIA but have a slightly increased perception of wind turbines both offshore and onshore. The effect will remain within the bracket of **significant (moderate)**.

In-planning Scenario: Drum Hollistan will be visible on the horizon to the south-east from these routes. The Development will be seen to the right of Drum Hollistan as a separate group of turbines, slightly closer to the routes. The Development will form an additional group of turbines inland, rather than a new feature in the views. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be slightly reduced compared with the LVIA but will remain within the bracket of **significant (moderate)**.

6.8.3.12 Viewpoint 7 Strathy Point

LVIA Scenario: The LVIA identified a significant (major) effect in the presence of existing wind farms.

Consented Scenario: From this location, Limekiln will be visible as a group of turbines low on the horizon to the west along the coast, closer to the viewer than Baillie, and seen beyond Melvich Bay. There will therefore be a series of wind farms seen along the coast, with Limekiln, Baillie then Forss beyond Dounreay. Dounreay Tri will be seen offshore to the north-east. Strathy South will be visible as additional turbines inland to the south, increasing the density of turbines in the Strathy North group but not extending it laterally.

In this context, the Development will be an additional group of turbines in the sequence of wind farms along the coast to the west, but will be more prominent than the other wind farms being closer. The Development will increase the presence of wind farms in the views west from this headland.

In this view therefore, there will be a series of wind farms across the landscape along the coast, and the Development will be the closest one of them. The view will remain one with a series of wind farms across that part of the panorama, but the Development will play a role in the increasing the perception of wind farms. The magnitude of change to the view in this scenario is judged to be medium, slightly greater than in the LVIA yet not so great as to become a 'high' magnitude of change. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be slightly greater than in the LVIA yet still within the level bracket of **significant (major)**.

In-planning Scenario: With Drum Hollistan 2, Limekiln Extension, Strathy Wood and Strathy South Variation present in the baseline, there will be more turbines visible to the south-east, the Strathy group forming a distant yet large group of turbines inland. Drum Hollistan 2 will be seen as seven turbines to the south-east, in front of Limekiln and its Extension and the closest wind farm in the series along the coast.

In this context, the Development will be an additional group of turbines in the sequence of wind farms along the coast to the east, to the right of Drum Hollistan 2 and bringing turbines slightly closer to the viewpoint. The Development will contribute to an increased presence of wind farms in the views east from this headland. The magnitude of change to the view in this scenario is judged to be medium, slightly greater than in the LVIA yet not so great as to become a 'high' magnitude of change. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be slightly greater than in the LVIA yet still within the level bracket of **significant (major)**.

6.8.3.13 A836 (NC500)

LVIA Scenario: The LVIA identified significant effects in the presence of existing wind farms:

- Significant (major) between Reay and Portskerra;
- Significant (moderate) between Forss and Reay and between Armadale and Portskerra; and
- not significant (minor to negligible) east of Forss and west of Armadale.

Consented Scenario: From this route, the consented Limekiln Wind Farm will be seen to the south, as an array of turbines approximately 3 km away from the route at its closest point. It will be visible from Scrabster hill, and from Forss to Drum Holliston Moss. Thereafter it will be seen briefly over Portskerra and by Strathy and Armadale. Hill of Lybster will increase the size of the Forss group. Strathy South will be visible from Drum Hollistan Moss to Strath Halladale and between Portskerra and Bettyhill. Dounreay Tri will be seen offshore from much of the route. Along with the existing wind farms, the baseline will therefore change to one with groups of turbines seen at intervals along the coast road, most inland but Forss on the coastward side of the road and Dounreay Tri out to sea.

In this context, the Development will be an additional group of turbines to the south of the route, set back from the road and the coast, albeit closer to the road than Limekiln. After passing the Forss group, Baillie and Limekiln, road users will pass Ackron with views of Strathy North and South inland. West of Portskerra the topography is such that there will be intermittent views of wind farms from the road. The Dounreay Tri will be a relatively constant presence of turbines out to sea. The Development will increase the presence of wind farms that occur at intervals along the road, and will be the closest wind farm in the section between Reay and Portskerra. It will contribute to the series of

wind farms spread along the coast, as an additional discrete group on the inland side of the route. The Development will play a notable role in the increasing perception of wind farms in the wider area along the coastal road. The magnitude of change to the view in this scenario is judged to be slightly greater than in the LVIA, but not so much as to increase the magnitude of change in any section. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be greater than in the LVIA yet still within the same level brackets as identified in the LVIA:

- **Significant (major)** between Reay and Portskerra;
- **Significant (moderate)** between Forss and Reay, and **Significant (moderate)** between Armadale and Portskerra; and
- Not significant (minor to negligible) east of Forss and west of Armadale.

In-planning Scenario: With Drum Hollistan 2 present in the baseline, there will be another group of turbines to the west of the enlarged Limekiln group (Limekiln and its Extension), as well as additional turbines in the Strathy group to the south (Strathy Wood and Strathy South Variation). Along with the existing and consented wind farms, the baseline will therefore be one with groups of turbines seen at more frequent intervals along the route.

In this context, the Development will be seen as additional turbines behind those of Drum Hollistan inland from the eastern part of the route, to the east of Drum Hollistan Moss. It will not appear to introduce a new group of turbines from this section of the route. Travelling west from Drum Hollistan Moss it will become apparent to road users that the Development forms a separate group of turbines adjacent to Drum Hollistan 2. Once the route passes Portskerra the Development will again line up with Drum Hollistan 2 such that it will not be seen as a separate development.

The Development will play a role in the increasing perception of wind farms in the wider area seen from this route, and although it will introduce a new group of turbines inland, it will not be seen as separate from Drum Hollistan 2 for much of the route. The magnitude of change to the views from this route in this scenario is judged to be less than in the LVIA as the development will be seen behind, adjacent to or in front of Drum Hollistan 2. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be less than in the LVIA, with some sections of the route with reduced effects:

- **Not significant (minor)** between Reay and Forss;
- **Significant (moderate)** between Reay and Drum Hollistan Moss.
- **Significant (major)** between Drum Hollistan Moss and Portskerra;
- **Significant (moderate)** between Armadale and Portskerra; and
- Not significant (minor to negligible) east of Forss and west of Armadale.

6.8.3.14 Viewpoint 8 Strath Halladale

LVIA Scenario: The LVIA identified a significant (major) effect in the presence of existing wind farms.

Consented Scenario: From this location, no consented wind farms will be visible, there will be no change in effect from this location, **significant (major)**.

In-planning Scenario: From this location as the road rounds a corner within Strath Halladale, Drum Hollistan 2 will be glimpsed as a single turbine blade over the horizon to the north-east and will not alter the baseline greatly. Drum Hollistan 2 will be more visible from other locations further south (see A897). Neither Limekiln Extension, Strathy Wood nor Strathy South Variation will be visible.

The Development will be more visible than Drum Hollistan 2 at this point and although it will add more turbines to the view (rather than new features), the magnitude of change to the view in this scenario is judged to remain high as in the LVIA. The visual effect of

the Development in this scenario will be similar to that identified in the LVIA, **significant (major)**.

6.8.3.15 A897 Strath Halladale

LVIA Scenario: The LVIA identified significant (major) effects from Craigton northwards, not significant (minor) effects around Forsinard, and no effects on other stretches of this road in the presence of existing wind farms.

Consented Scenario: From this route, Limekiln will not be visible. Strathy South and Dounreay Tri will be visible from Forsinard and further south only. From around Forsinard Strathy South will be closer to the route, and will extend the presence of turbines to the north-west, and Dounreay Tri will be seen low on the horizon to the north, at 34 km away. In this context the Development will be additional turbines seen to the north in front of Dounreay Tri, but all turbines will be distant (the Development will be 21.3 km from VP14). Strathy South and Dounreay Tri will not be visible from Craigton northwards such that there will be no change in effect for the northern section of this route. The level of effect is judged to remain **significant (major)** from Craigton northwards, and **not significant (minor)** around Forsinard, with no effect on other stretches of this road.

In-planning Scenario: In this situation, Drum Hollistan 2 will be seen from sections of this route around Forsinard, briefly at Craigton and Achiemore, as turbines on the horizon to the north-east along the strath. The baseline will therefore be one of views of several distant wind farms from Forsinard (Strathy North, Strathy South Variation, Strathy Wood, Dounreay Tri and Drum Hollistan 2), and glimpses of Drum Hollistan 2 from sections further north.

The Development will be more visible than Drum Hollistan 2 from the Forsinard section, and will introduce an additional group of turbines seen to the north from this area. However, it will not alter the impression of several wind farms in the distance seen from this part of the route. From Craigton northwards the Development will be seen either on its own or as additional turbines in front of and more visible than those of Drum Hollistan 2. The fact that it will be additional rather than new features in the view will reduce the magnitude of change slightly. The level of effect is judged to remain within the same level bracket as in the LVIA, i.e. **significant (major)** from Craigton northwards, and **not significant (minor)** around Forsinard, with no effect on other stretches of this road.

6.8.3.16 Strath Halladale Core Path (SU19.03 from Upper Bighouse to Kirkton cemetery)

LVIA Scenario: The LVIA identified a significant (major) effect for this route.

Consented Scenario: No consented wind farms will be visible from this route, there will be no change in effect, **significant (major)**.

In-planning Scenario: Drum Hollistan 2 will be visible on the horizon to the horizon to the east. The Development will be seen in front of Drum Hollistan 2 and closer to the route. The Development will introduce additional turbines as more prominent features, rather than new features across the strath. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be similar to that identified in the LVIA, **significant (major)**. Neither Limekiln Extension nor Strathy Wood or Strathy South Variation will be visible.

6.8.3.17 Viewpoint 9 Beinn Ràtha

LVIA Scenario: The LVIA identified a significant (major) effect in the presence of existing wind farms.

Consented Scenario: From this location, Limekiln will be visible below Beinn Ràtha to the east as turbines in the forested area beyond the Helshetter Strath. The closest turbine

will be approximately 2 km away. Forss will be increased with Hill of Lybster, Dounreay Tri will be seen to the north, approximately 15 km away. Strathy South will be visible as a large group of turbines to the south of Strathy North, with clear separation from it. There will therefore be a series of wind farms seen along the coast to the west from this elevated location, two turbines offshore to the north and many turbines visible in the distance to the south-west.

In this context, the Development will be an additional group of turbines in the sequence of wind farms along the coast, but will be to the west of Beinn Ràtha. The Development will increase the presence of wind farms nearby, and will mean that there are wind farms nearby to both east and west.

In this view therefore, there will be a series of wind farms across the landscape along the coast, and the Development will be west of this vantage point. The view will remain one with a series of wind farms but the Development will extend the spread westwards to the other side of the hill. The magnitude of change to the view in this scenario is judged to be high, greater than in the LVIA. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be greater than in the LVIA yet still within the level bracket of **significant (major)**.

In-planning Scenario: With Drum Hollistan 2 present in the baseline, there will be seven turbines visible on the moorland to the north-west below Beinn Ràtha. The five turbines of Limekiln Extension will be visible on the far side of Limekiln, below Beinn Ràtha to the east. Strathy Wood will be visible in the distance, between Strathy North and Strathy South Variation, filling the gap between them. Strathy South Variation will have notably larger turbines than Strathy North, though the differences between it and Strathy Wood will be less apparent.

In this context, the Development will be seen as an additional group of turbines on the moorland to the west of Beinn Ràtha, to the left of Drum Hollistan. The turbines will appear to be of similar size although they will be slightly further away. The Development will be an additional group of turbines in the sequence of wind farms along the coast, but will not be the only wind farm west of Beinn Ràtha. The Development will increase the presence of wind farms nearby.

In this view therefore, there will be a series of wind farms from east to west as well as a large group south-west inland and two isolated turbines offshore (Dounreay Tri). The view will remain one with a series of wind farms but the Development will extend the spread westwards. The magnitude of change to the view in this scenario is judged to be high but different from in the LVIA. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be **significant (major)**.

6.8.3.18 Thurso – Westfield – Shebster – Reay (NCN1)

LVIA Scenario: The LVIA identified not significant (minor) effects to the east of Shebster, increasing to significant (moderate) west of Shebster in the presence of existing wind farms.

Consented Scenario: From this route, the consented Limekiln Wind Farm will be seen inland to the south-west for the whole of the route, and is approximately 3 km from the route at its closest point. It will be on the opposite side of the route from the Baillie turbines, and seen beyond forest plantations. Dounreay Tri will be visible from the section of the route west of Hill of Shebster. Hill of Lybster will increase the Forss group where that is visible. Strathy South will not be visible from this route. The baseline will therefore change to one with groups of turbines seen to the east and south.

In this context, the Development will be an additional group of turbines in the distance to the west, and will increase the presence of turbines in the wider landscape when travelling westwards along this route. It will be more distant from the route than Baillie,

the Forss group or Limekiln but will contribute to the series of wind farms spread along the coast, as an additional discrete group. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be greater than in the LVIA yet still within the level bracket of **significant (moderate)** west of Shebster and **not significant (minor)** effects further east.

In-planning Scenario: With Drum Hollistan 2 present in the baseline, there will be turbines on the horizon to the west, as well as adjacent to the north (Baillie) and more turbines to the south-east (Limekiln and its extension) and more distant to the north (the Forss group and Dounreay Tri). Westbound travel will therefore be between wind farms and towards a wind farm.

In this context, the Development will be seen as additional turbines behind those of Drum Hollistan 2, and indistinguishable from it. The Development will therefore enlarge the group of turbines in the distance to the west, rather than introducing a new group. The visual effect of the Development in this scenario will be less than in the LVIA and reduced to **not significant (minor)** west of Shebster.

6.8.4 Summary of Additional Cumulative Effects

For the landscape and visual receptors assessed in this section, the effects in the cumulative scenarios vary in different situations:

- If no other wind farms (consented or in-planning) are visible, there is no change in the judgement made in the LVIA.
- Where the Development forms an additional, new group of turbines in the panorama (in a new direction) there may be an increase in effect due to the spread of wind energy developments across the view (e.g. VP6 Portskerra).
- Where the Development is seen behind another wind farm, such as behind Drum Hollistan 2 from the Reay area, there will be a reduction in effect as a result of the Development, as it will introduce additional turbines without a new group being formed and with little or no spread of turbines across the panorama.
- Where the Development is seen in front of another wind farm, such as from the lower Strath Halladale area, effects will be similar to or slightly lower than in the LVIA as turbines will have been present in that part of the view in the cumulative baseline.
- Where the Development is seen in as a separate group of turbines but adjacent to another, such as adjacent to and slightly closer than Drum Hollistan from the Melvich and Portskerra area, effects will be different from the LVIA but on balance will not necessarily be higher or lower, as the Development will form an additional group but will not form the first group in that part of the view.

The results of the cumulative assessment are set out in Table 6.8:

Table 6.8: Summary of Cumulative Effects

Receptor	LVIA Effect (for reference)	Consented Scenario Effect	In-Planning Scenario Effect
Landscape Effects			
134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows	<i>To the west and south significant (major) within 2-3 km, reducing to significant (moderate) to 5-7 km significant (moderate) to the coast</i>	To the west and south significant (major) within 2-3 km, reducing to significant (moderate) to 5-7 km significant (moderate) to the coast	To the west and south significant (major) within 2-3 km, reducing to significant (moderate) to 5-7 km significant (moderate) to the coast
136 Rocky Hills and Moorland	<i>Not significant (minor)</i>	Not significant (minor)	Not significant (minor)

Receptor	LVIA Effect (for reference)	Consented Scenario Effect	In-Planning Scenario Effect
140 Sandy Beaches and Dunes	<i>significant (major to moderate) for Melvich Bay</i>	significant (major to moderate) for Melvich Bay	significant (major to moderate) for Melvich Bay
141 High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays	<i>Significant (moderate) for the east side of Strathy Point, 8-11 km away</i>	Significant (moderate) for the east side of Strathy Point, 8-11 km away	not significant (minor) for the east side of Strathy Point
142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland	<i>significant (major reducing to moderate) within 5-6 km</i>	significant (major reducing to moderate) within 5-6 km	significant (major reducing to moderate) within 5-6 km
143 Farmed Lowland Plain	<i>Not significant (minor-negligible)</i>	Not significant (minor-negligible)	Not significant (minor-negligible)
144 Coastal Crofts and Small Farms	<i>significant (major to moderate) within 2-5 km Significant (moderate) within 8-11 km</i>	significant (major to moderate) within 2-5 km Significant (moderate) within 8-11 km	significant (major to moderate) within 2-5 km
Visual Effects			
Viewpoint 2 A836 Dounreay	<i>Significant (moderate)</i>	Significant (moderate)	not significant (minor)
Viewpoint 3 A836 Reay	<i>Significant (major)</i>	Significant (major)	significant (moderate)
Reay	<i>Significant (major)</i>	Significant (major)	significant (moderate)
Reay Core Paths	<i>Significant (moderate)</i>	Significant (moderate)	not significant (minor)
Viewpoint 4 A836 Layby	<i>Significant (major)</i>	Significant (major)	Significant (major)
Viewpoint 5 A836 Melvich	<i>Significant (major)</i>	Significant (major)	Significant (major)
Melvich	<i>Significant (major)</i>	Significant (major)	Significant (major)
Melvich Core Path	<i>Significant (major)</i>	Significant (major)	Significant (major)
Viewpoint 6 Portskerra	<i>Significant (major)</i>	Significant (major)	Significant (major)
Portskerra	<i>Significant (moderate)</i>	Significant (moderate)	Significant (moderate)
Portskerra Core Paths	<i>Significant (moderate)</i>	Significant (moderate)	Significant (moderate)
Viewpoint 7 Strathy Point	<i>Significant (moderate)</i>	Significant (moderate)	Significant (moderate)
A836 (NC500)	<i>Significant (moderate) between Forss and Reay Significant (major) between Reay and Portskerra Significant (moderate) between Portskerra and Armadale</i>	Significant (moderate) between Forss and Reay Significant (major) between Reay and Portskerra Significant (moderate) between Portskerra and Armadale	Not significant (minor) between Forss and Reay Significant (moderate) between Reay and Drum Hollistan Moss Significant (major) between Drum Hollistan Moss and Portskerra Significant (moderate) between Portskerra and Armadale
Viewpoint 8 A897 Strath Halladale	<i>Significant (major)</i>	Significant (major)	Significant (major)
Strath Halladale (Upper Bighouse)	<i>Significant (moderate to major)</i>	Significant (moderate to major)	Significant (moderate to major)

Receptor	LVIA Effect (for reference)	Consented Scenario Effect	In-Planning Scenario Effect
A897 Strath Halladale	<i>Significant (major) north of Craigton</i>	Significant (major) north of Craigton	Significant (major) north of Craigton
Strath Halladale Core Path	<i>Significant (major)</i>	Significant (major)	Significant (major)
Viewpoint 9 Beinn Ràtha	<i>Significant (major)</i>	Significant (major)	Significant (major)
Thurso – Westfield – Shebster – Reay minor road	<i>Significant (moderate) west of Shebster</i> <i>Not significant (minor) east of Shebster</i>	Significant (moderate) west of Shebster Not significant (minor) east of Shebster	Not significant (minor)

It can be seen from the analysis of the additional cumulative effect of selected receptors, that in the cumulative situation, the key relationship of the Development with other wind farms will be with Limekiln in the consented scenario, and with Drum Hollistan 2 in the in-planning scenario. Other wind farms present in the wider landscape will not greatly alter these relationships although they contribute to the awareness of wind farms in the wider landscape (discussed further under combined cumulative effects below).

The Development will introduce a new group of turbines to the landscape to the west of a series of wind farms along the A836, though adjacent to Drum Hollistan 2 should that wind farm be present. It will not alter the pattern of development across the wider area, but will extend the series of wind farms relatively close to the A836 westwards. The Development has been designed to appear as a balanced array when seen from locations in the surrounding area, as a stand-alone scheme rather than trying to appear as an extension to Drum Hollistan 2. There will be localised changes to effects in the cumulative situations (where the cumulative situation will alter the effects compared with the LVIA) where the Development is seen as extending the series of wind farms westwards from certain vantage points (such as locations at the western end of that series e.g. RVP3 Reay or VP9 Beinn Ràtha). There will also be alterations to effects where the Development in the cumulative situation will have lower effects than in the LVIA scenario because of the presence of other wind farms, such as where the Development is seen behind another wind farm.

6.8.5 Combined Cumulative Effects

The assessment of additional cumulative effects above follows current guidance and reports on the effect of the introduction of the Development to the landscape in addition to other wind farms (see also Technical Appendix A6.1). It is acknowledged that this does not provide a view on the role of the Development in the overall combined effect of wind farm developments that may occur depending on which proposed wind farms are consented and built⁵³.

The future pattern of development is likely to lie somewhere between no additional development, and a maximum of all currently proposed (and perhaps more proposals not currently in the planning system) being consented and built. In the minimum scenario, the future pattern of development will be very similar to the current pattern, as assessed in the LVIA. In the maximum development scenario, existing wind farm clusters may be enlarged, others may be introduced, and clusters may start to coalesce. Whilst this may be evident when looking at maps of developments, it will not necessarily be evident when moving around the landscape.

⁵³ The additional effects consider the change with one more wind farm present (the Development as the 3rd, 4th or 8th wind farm for example), whereas combined effects consider the suite of windfarms together, and identify the role of the Development within that experience.

An LVIA assesses the effect on landscape character resulting from introducing the development into the landscape. Several developments of the same type lead to an accumulation of effect on landscape character. In an assessment of cumulative effects on landscape character the increasing influence of turbines on landscape character types or areas may be described with terminologies reflecting a succession of landscape change. Terms may include 'landscapes with occasional wind farms', 'landscapes with wind farms', and 'wind farm landscapes'.

In the Study Area around the Development, the combined effect of all wind farms together in the landscape will lead to an increased presence of wind energy development in this part of the boundary between Sutherland and Caithness.

Existing Scenario: With the existing wind farms, the landscape is one with 'occasional wind farms and turbines', seen intermittently when travelling along the coast on the A836. This sequence includes Bettyhill, Strathy North, Baillie and Forss, and if road users travel on, there is the Causeymire Group and Buolfriuch, or Camster and Bilbster, or Lochend and Stroupster, depending on which route is taken. The Development will contribute to this as an additional 'occasional' wind farm, but will not cause a change in level to a 'landscape with wind farms'. The Development will be approximately 10km from both Baillie and Strathy North Wind Farms. The role of the Development in the changing perception of landscape character and visual amenity of the Study Area in the existing scenario is considered to be **not significant (minor)**.

Consented Scenario: With consented wind farms present as well as existing wind farms, Limekiln will be present approximately 4 km west of Baillie, set in forest to the south of Reay, Forss will be increased by the turbine at Hill of Lybster, Baillie is inland of the Forss group, south of the Dounreay UKAEA station. Dounreay Tri will be visible offshore. Strathy North and Strathy South will form a pair of large wind farms inland to the south-west. The Causeymire group will be enlarged by Achlachan 2, and the Weydale turbine will be located south-east of Thurso. With these wind farms present, the area along the A836 west of Thurso and particularly between Forss and Reay will be a 'landscape with wind farms', spaced relatively regularly along the route.

The Development will introduce an additional group of turbines approximately 5 km west of Limekiln, extending the presence of turbines westwards along the A836. It will extend the impression of this area of Sutherland/Caithness being a 'landscape with wind farms'. It is judged that in this scenario the Development will contribute to the increasing influence of wind farms in this area, and whilst the total or combined effect of all wind farms is judged to be increased, this cannot be attributed to any one wind farm (and not solely to the Development). The role of the Development in the changing perception of landscape character and visual amenity of the Study Area in the consented scenario is considered to be **significant (moderate)** as it will extend the area perceived as being a 'landscape with wind farms' further west.

In-planning Scenario: With consented and in-planning wind farms present as well as existing wind farms, Drum Hollistan 2 will be present adjacent to the Site; further east Limekiln and its Extension will be set in forest to the south of Reay; Baillie and the Forss group will be beyond. Strathy North, Strathy South Variation and Strathy Wood will form a large group inland to the south-west; Dounreay Tri will be present offshore to the north. The Causeymire group will be enlarged by Achlachan 2. With these wind farms present, the area along the A836 west of Thurso will be a 'landscape with wind farms', spaced relatively regularly along the route.

The Development will introduce an additional group of turbines immediately west of Drum Hollistan 2 extending the presence of turbines westwards slightly. It will increase the influence of turbines at the western end of this area visible from the A836 and Melvich by creating a larger group of turbines as a pair with Drum Hollistan 2, but will not alter the impression of this area of Sutherland/Caithness being a 'landscape with wind farms'.

It is judged that the Development will contribute to the increasing influence of wind farms in this area, and whilst the total or combined effect of all wind farms is judged to be increased, this cannot be attributed to any one wind farm (and not solely to the Development). The role of the Development in the changing perception of landscape character and visual amenity of the Study Area in the in-planning scenario is considered to be **not significant (minor)** as it will be adjacent to Drum Hollistan 2, and will not extend the area perceived as being a 'landscape with wind farms'.

6.9 IMPLICATIONS OF EFFECTS FOR DESIGNATED LANDSCAPES AND WILD LAND

There is one designated landscape within 20 km of the Site, namely the Farr Bay, Strathy Point and Portskerra SLA, covering the coastal strip lying within approximately 5-20 km to the north-west of the Site.

The other designated landscapes shown on Figure 6.5 are located over 20 km from the Site, within 25 km at their closest points, and will have little or no visibility of the Development and therefore no likelihood of significant effects on the reasons for which they are designated, and are not assessed further.

6.9.1 *Farr Bay, Strathy Point and Portskerra SLA*

The extent of the Farr Bay, Strathy Point and Portskerra SLA is shown in Figure 6.5 together with an overlay of the ZTV of the Development. The SLA's key landscape and visual characteristics are summarised Section 6.6 under LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows. One key landscape and visual characteristic states:

- "Elevated areas on the intervening high ground between the bays close to the sea provide expansive views both along the coast and out to sea, contrasting with a more enclosed, intimate visual character within the major bays. Views south to the inland mountains are a notable feature of this stretch of coast."⁵⁴

The special qualities of the SLA are described in Highland Council's Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas under the following main headings⁵⁵:

- Dramatically Intricate Coastline and Forceful Sea;
- Moorland and Crofting Mosaic;
- Big Skies and Extensive Views; and
- Historical Dimension.

The ZTV overlay in Figure 6.5 indicates that the Development will be visible intermittently from the closest part of the SLA to the Site between Melvich / Portskerra and Strathy Point, comprising mainly Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT. VPs 6 and 7 visualisations are representative. However, the remaining majority of the SLA will be mainly unaffected visually.

The LVIA predicts a significant change to landscape character in the vicinity of Melvich / Portskerra (within approximately 5 km of the Site), and for the eastern side of Strathy Point (approximately 8-11 km from the Site). VP 6 (Figure 6.17) visualisation illustrates the level of character change at approximately 5 km to the north-west in the vicinity of Portskerra. VP 7 (Figure 6.18) visualisation is representative of levels of character change at approximately 10 km to the north-west on the coast at Strathy Point, judged to be the limit of significant landscape character effects.

Regarding the effect on the SLA's special qualities, it is judged that, although the Development will be visible from within the eastern extremity of the SLA, broadly

⁵⁴ The Highland Council. Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas. (Updated since 2011 but undated). Page 16.

⁵⁵ Ibid, page 17.

speaking as far as Strathy Point, it will not appreciably alter the dramatic intricate coastline of the SLA and forceful sea, the moorland and crofting mosaic, the big skies and extensive views, or the historic dimension of the SLA. Views out from the SLA to east will be affected by the Development on the eastern side of Strath Halladale inland of the coast, and when seen over cliffs from Strathy Point (Viewpoint 7, Figure 6.18). Some views from the SLA are outwards along the coast, as the cliffs within the SLA are not always visible from within the SLA or from locations where people can get to. Significant visual effects have been identified for some views out from the SLA, such as from VP5 Melvich, VP6 Portskerra and VP7 Strathy Point (see Section 6.7). These outward views also include existing development such as Dounreay, Forss Wind Farm and settlement. Views out of the SLA towards the mountains will not be affected as the Development will not be seen in the same direction as views to the mountains (south or south-westwards).

Cumulative effects were found to be slightly increased, but without altering the levels of effect identified in the LVIA.

With regard to the observations made about scale in the SLA citation, it is recognised throughout the LVIA that the tall turbines will be visible in views along the coast, but that they are set well back from settlements, roads and buildings such that they are seen in relation to the large scale moorland rather than the domestic scale of existing buildings and settlements. The scale of the turbines will affect the perceived scale of the Rubha na Cloiche cliffs when seen from Strathy Point (see VP7), but not from elsewhere.

In summary, introduction of the Development will alter neither the physical landscape, nor the character and quality of the landscape experience except for views out of the SLA from its eastern extremity, where they will be seen along the coast and in relation to the large scale moorland to the far side of Strath Halladale. It is judged that the Development will not compromise the reasons for which the Farr Bay, Strathy Point and Portskerra SLA was designated.

6.9.2 39 East Halladale Flows Wild Land Area

A detailed assessment of the effects on the physical attributes and perceptual responses, described collectively as the wild land qualities⁵⁶ of the WLA 39 East Halladale Flows is set out in Technical Appendix 6.4, accompanied by Figures 6.29a and 6.29b. The assessment follows the approach set out in 2020 guidance from NatureScot⁵⁷.

The WLA 39 East Halladale Flows is located to the south-east of the Site, the boundary 1.2km from the nearest turbine at its closest point (the boundary runs to the south of the pylon line). The key qualities of the WLA are:

1. 'An awe-inspiring simplicity of landscape at the broad scale, with a strong horizontal emphasis, 'wide skies' and few foci;
2. A remote, discrete interior, with limited access and a strong sense of solitude;
3. A rugged and complex pattern of hidden burns, lochans and pools at the local level, despite the landscape's simple composition at the broad scale; and
4. A remarkably open landscape with extensive visibility, meaning tall or high features in the distance are clearly visible⁵⁸.

Existing Scenario: The wild land assessment set out in Technical Appendix 6.4 identifies that the Development will be visible from the northern part of the WLA, from west of the Beinn Ràtha to the Sean Airigh ridge (approximately 4-6 km away), and southwards to the subtle ridge at Cnoc Bad Mhairtein (approximately 6-9 km away). The

⁵⁶ NatureScot (2020) Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Areas – Technical Guidance. Paragraph 12.

⁵⁷ NatureScot (2020) Assessing impacts on Wild Land Areas – technical guidance.

⁵⁸ Scottish Natural Heritage (2017) Description of Wild Land Area, Area 39 East Halladale Flows Wild Land Area

Development will form a group of turbines at the northern edge of the WLA, but visible and prominent in those views northwards from within it and within approximately 6-7 km. Views in other directions from within the WLA will not be affected, views of wilder land (with greater strength of expression of wild land characteristics) are southwards away from the coast. The existing wind farms of Baillie, Forss, Strathy North and the Causeymire group are visible from parts of the WLA (Figure 6.29a).

The Technical Appendix identifies that the key qualities 1, 2 and 4 of the WLA (listed above) will be affected in the north-western part of the WLA to the level of a significant effect (within 7-8km) due to the introduction of the turbines as prominent vertical elements close to the WLA boundary that contrast with the horizontal emphasis of the landscape. For the remainder of the WLA beyond 7-8km from the Development, the key qualities will not be affected to a significant level.

Consented Scenario: In the Consented Scenario, the Development will be to the west of Beinn Ràtha, with Limekiln to the east of Beinn Ràtha. For some locations within the WLA, both Limekiln and the Development will be seen on either side of Beinn Ràtha with Dounreay Tri beyond, and Strathy South increasing the presence of wind farms across moorland to the west (see viewpoint B, Figure 6.31). The cumulative effect will relate to the addition of another group of turbines in the panorama to the north towards the settled coast. The Development will increase the presence of wind farms in the landscape surrounding the WLA when experienced from higher ground within the north-western part of the WLA, but will not affect views southward into the interior of the Wild Land Area.

Views towards the WLA from Portskerra will not be altered in this scenario as neither Limekiln Extension nor Strathy Wood will be visible. From Ben Dorrery, Limekiln will be more visible than the Development and the additional blade tips in the distance will not further affect the sense of wildness from there.

It is judged that in this scenario, the key qualities 1, 2 and 4 of the WLA (listed above) will be affected in the north-western part of the WLA to the level of a significant effect (within 7-8km) due to the introduction of the turbines as prominent vertical elements and the cumulative interactions with Limekiln and other wind farms around the WLA. For the remainder of the WLA beyond 7-8km from the Development, the key qualities will not be affected to a significant level.

In-planning Scenario: In the in-planning baseline, the presence of Drum Hollistan 2⁵⁹ will mean that there will be turbines present to the west of Beinn Ràtha, adjacent to which the Development will form a group with a slight separation. The enlargement of Limekiln with its Extension will increase the visual influence of that group to the east of Beinn Ràtha. The enlargement of turbines at Strathy South Variation and the introduction of Strathy Wood will increase the presence of turbines on moorland to the west of the WLA. In this context, the Development will be an additional group of turbines at the northern edge of the WLA, but will not form a new feature in that part of the landscape.

The introduction of the Development will slightly reduce the key qualities that are affected by both Drum Hollistan 2 and the extended Limekiln across the north-western parts of the WLA, and by the enlargement of the Strathy Group, by introducing an additional group of man-made structures between the WLA and the coast, seen in views with Drum Hollistan 2. The north-western part of the WLA will be affected by the baseline presence of consented and in-planning wind farms and the addition of the Development will further affect some of the wildness qualities to a degree.

It is judged that in this scenario, the key qualities of the WLA will be affected by the baseline presence of wind farms, such that the additional effect of the Development will

⁵⁹ It is noted that the cut-off date for the cumulative assessment was 15 September 2020.

be reduced, and will be not significant for all key qualities both across the north-western part of the WLA and for the remainder of the WLA.

6.10 MITIGATION MEASURES AND RESIDUAL EFFECTS

As set out in the methodology (Technical Appendix A6.1), mitigation of landscape and visual effects has been undertaken through design modifications and input to the design process. The design evolution is set out in **Chapter 3: Site Selection and Design** of the EIA Report. Restoration of parts of the Site following construction will follow the Habitat Management Plan (further details provided in **Chapter 7: Ecology**), and with time, vegetation will grow and recover. As all mitigation for landscape and visual effects is embedded within the final design for the Development, all effects identified in this Chapter are residual effects.

6.11 SUMMARY

An assessment has been made of the potential for significant effects of the Development on landscape character and visual amenity. This assessment has identified potential significant residual effects (in terms of the EIA Regulations) on receptors during the construction, operation and decommissioning of the Development.

The significant landscape and visual effects identified are set out in Table 6.9.

Table 6.9: Summary of Significant Effects

Receptor	Effect (LVIA) ⁶⁰	Cumulative Element Consented Scenario ⁶¹	Cumulative Element In-Planning Scenario ⁶¹
Landscape Effects			
Construction			
Site and surroundings	Significant (moderate) effect on the landscape character of the Site and immediately surrounding area (1-2 km)	<i>Not assessed</i>	<i>Not assessed</i>
Operation			
134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows	To the west and south significant (major) within 2-3 km, reducing to significant (moderate) with distance up to 5-7 km at most significant (moderate) to the north between the A836 and the coast	To the west and south significant (major) within 2-3 km, reducing to significant (moderate) with distance up to 5-7 km at most significant (moderate) to the north between the A836 and the coast	To the west and south significant (major) within 2-3 km, reducing to significant (moderate) with distance up to 5-7 km at most significant (moderate) to the north between the A836 and the coast
140 Sandy Beaches and Dunes	significant (major to moderate) for Melvich Bay	significant (major to moderate) for Melvich Bay	significant (major to moderate) for Melvich Bay
141 High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays	significant (moderate) on the east side of	significant (moderate) on the east side of	<i>(Not significant (minor))</i>

⁶⁰ Effects for other receptors in the LVIA not listed here are as identified as not significant.

⁶¹ Effects not listed here have been reduced to not significant in the cumulative scenarios.

Receptor	Effect (LVIA) ⁶⁰	Cumulative Element Consented Scenario ⁶¹	Cumulative Element In-Planning Scenario ⁶¹
	Strathy Point (8-11km away)	Strathy Point (8-11km away)	
142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland	significant (major reducing to moderate with distance) within 5-6 km	significant (major reducing to moderate with distance) within 5-6 km	significant (major reducing to moderate with distance) within 5-6 km
144 Coastal Crofts and Small Farms	significant (major to moderate) within approximately 2-5 km Significant (moderate) within 8-11 km	significant (major to moderate) within approximately 2-5 km Significant (moderate) within 8-11 km	significant (major to moderate) within approximately 2-5 km
Visual Effects			
Viewpoint 2 A836 Dounreay	Significant (moderate)	Significant (moderate)	<i>(Not significant (minor))</i>
Viewpoint 3 A836 Reay	Significant (major)	Significant (major)	significant (moderate)
Viewpoint 4 A836 Layby	Significant (major)	Significant (major)	Significant (major)
Viewpoint 5 A836 Melvich	Significant (major)	Significant (major)	Significant (major)
Viewpoint 6 Portskerra	Significant (major)	Significant (major)	Significant (major)
Viewpoint 7 Strathy Point	Significant (major)	Significant (major)	Significant (major)
Viewpoint 8 A897 Strath Halladale	Significant (major)	Significant (major)	Significant (major)
Viewpoint 9 Beinn Ràtha	Significant (major)	Significant (major)	Significant (major)
Melvich	Significant (major)	Significant (major)	Significant (major)
Portskerra	Significant (moderate)	Significant (moderate)	Significant (moderate)
Reay	Significant (moderate)	Significant (moderate)	<i>(Not significant (minor))</i>
A836	Significant (moderate) between Forss and Reay Significant (major) between Reay and Portskerra Significant (moderate) between Portskerra and Armadale	Significant (moderate) between Forss and Reay Significant (major) between Reay and Portskerra Significant (moderate) between Portskerra and Armadale	<i>(Not significant (minor) between Forss and Reay)</i> Significant (moderate) between Reay and Drum Hollistan Moss Significant (major) between Drum Hollistan Moss and Portskerra Significant (moderate) between Portskerra and Armadale
A897	Significant (major) effects from Craigton to the A836	Significant (major) north of Craigton	Significant (major) north of Craigton
Thurso – Westfield – Shebster – Reay minor road	Significant (moderate) west of Shebster	Significant (moderate) west of Shebster	<i>(Not significant (minor))</i>
Core paths Reay (CA11.02-03 and CA11.05-09)	Significant (moderate)	Significant (moderate)	<i>(Not significant (minor))</i>
Core path Melvich (SU19.05)	Significant (major)	Significant (major)	Significant (major)

Receptor	Effect (LVIA) ⁶⁰	Cumulative Element Consented Scenario ⁶¹	Cumulative Element In-Planning Scenario ⁶¹
Core paths Portskerra (SU19.01 and SU19.08)	Significant (moderate)	Significant (moderate)	Significant (moderate)
Core Path Strath Halladale (SU19.03)	Significant (major)	Significant (major)	Significant (major)
Role of the Development in the combined cumulative effects on the perception of the landscape and visual amenity of the Study Area	<i>(Not significant (minor))</i>	Significant (moderate)	<i>(Not significant (minor))</i>

6.11.1 Concluding Statement

The LVIA sets out a thorough examination of the potential landscape and visual effects of the Development. It considers the effect of the introduction of the Development to the existing landscape, which includes existing wind farms. It also includes an assessment of effects should the Development be introduced to a future landscape in which not only existing wind farms, but also consented or in planning windfarms may be present (the cumulative assessment).

The LVIA identifies that the Development will be a prominent feature on its site, located to the east of Strath Halladale, and visible from a wide area. The likely key effects of the Development identified by the LVIA include effects on:

- The A836 which is part of the NC500 tourist route;
- Views from around Melvich and Portskerra;
- Views from around Strath Halladale;
- Views from around Reay;
- Views and the experience of coastal landscapes and local landscape character;
- Wild land qualities of the East Halladale Flows Wild Land Area;
- Cumulative interaction with Limekiln Wind Farm (consented); and
- Cumulative interaction with Drum Hollistan 2 Wind Farm (in-planning).