



ARCUS

BAILLIE GREENER GRID PARK

APPENDIX 2: LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

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Statkraft



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1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) undertaken to support the planning application ('the Application'), submitted to Highland Council ('the Council') by Arcus Consultancy Services Ltd ('Arcus'), on behalf of Statkraft UK LTD ('the Applicant') for the development of Baillie Greener Grid Park ('the Development'), within the existing Baillie Wind Farm ('the Site').

The LVA has been undertaken by a Chartered Landscape Architect in accordance with good practice guidance, and is informed by local landscape character assessments, a site survey, and other relevant guidance as specified.

2 SCOPE OF THE ASSESSMENT

2.1 The Development

The Development is located within the operational Baillie Wind Farm and will consist of the following components, as shown on the Proposed Site Layout Plan that accompanies the application (Planning Drawing 2):

- 60 no. battery units (each 12.9m x 2.44m x 2.59m)
- 2 no. Synchronous Compensator building (each 38.6m x 20.7m x 10.0m envelope)
- 2 no. water cooler pump skid (each 6.35m x 2.05m x 2.6m)
- 6 no. switchgear containers (each 12.2m x 2.44m x 3.0m)
- 6 no. inverter units (each 6.1m x 2.44m x 2.59m)
- 1 no. welfare facility (12.9m x 3.45m x 2.59m)
- 1 no. SHETL Distribution Container (12.19m x 3.45m x 2.59m)
- 1 no. Statkraft Distribution Container (12.19m x 3.45m x 2.59m)
- 2 no. Synchronous compensator HV control and protection (12.19m x 3.45m x 2.59m)
- 2 no. LV electrical house (each 12.19m x 3.45m x 2.59m)
- 1 no. Synchronous Compensator Comms House (12.19m x 2.44m x 2.59m)
- 1 no. BESS Comms House (12.19m x 2.44m x 2.59m)
- 1 no. 275kV AIS & Transformer (36.8m x 18.6m x 7.05m)
- 2 no. 2500kVA 690V Transformers (each 4.0m x 4.0m x 2.9m)
- 6 no. 1000kVA 400V BoP Auxiliary Transformers (each 3.0m x 3.0m x 2.14m)
- 2 no. lube oil pump skid (each 2.15m x 1.1m x 1.1m)
- 6 no. air blast coolers (each 9.6m x 2.4m x 2.5m)
- 1 no. emergency diesel generator (5.1m x 2.07m x 1.6m)
- 5 no. security columns of 6 m in height with CCTV cameras located at various points around the site boundary;
- Internal roads;
- 4.0 m high noise attenuation fencing; and
- 3.4 m high palisade gate and electric security palisade fencing.

Most components of the development will be housed in steel container-style units, while the palisade fencing and electric fence provide security. The approach to design included ensuring that the aesthetic of the units was as low-impact on the receiving landscape as possible.

The Development is located in proximity to an electricity tower located within the operational Baillie Wind Farm, which facilitates a direct transmission connection to the proposed on-site infrastructure.

The construction and installation of the Development will take approximately 12 months.

2.2 LVA Methodology & Relevant Guidelines

The methodology for the LVA is included in Annex A.1 and is based on current best practice guidance, namely:

- Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013, *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*, 3rd Edition ('GLVIA3');
- The Landscape Institute (2013), *GLVIA3 Statement of Clarification 1/13*¹;
- Visual Representation of Development Proposals, Technical Guidance Note 2019, The Landscape Institute²;
- Assessing landscape value outside national designations, Technical Guidance Note 02/21, The Landscape Institute (2021)³;
- The Highlands Council Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (November 2016)⁴;
- The Highlands Council Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance Addendum Supplementary Guidance: 'Part 2b' (December 2017)⁵;
- SNH and The Countryside Agency (2002) *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for Scotland and England*⁶; and
- SNH and the Countryside Agency (2002) *Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity*.

2.3 Limitations of the Assessment

The assessment of residential properties includes a number of properties accessed from private farm tracks / roads and due to the limitations of access they have been evaluated from the nearest public road, or footpath, with the aid of aerial photographs. In these cases, the assessment should therefore be regarded as an informed estimate of the likely visual effects.

2.4 Landscape and Visual Assessment Methodology

The two components of LVA referred to throughout the report are based on the following definitions:

- 'Assessment of landscape effects: assessing effects on the landscape as a resource in its own right'⁷; and
- 'Assessment of visual effects: assessing effects on specific views and on the general visual amenity experienced by people.'⁸

¹ The Landscape Institute (2015) *GLVIA3 – Statements of Clarification* [Online] Available at: <https://www.landscapeinstitute.org/technical-resource/qlvia3-clarifications/> (Last accessed 01/11/21)

² The Landscape Institute, *Visual Representation of Development Proposals, Technical Guidance Note 06/19*, 17th September 2019 [Online] Available at: https://landscapewpstorage01.blob.core.windows.net/www-landscapeinstitute-org/2019/09/LI_TGN-06-19_Visual_Representation.pdf (Last accessed 01/11/21)

³ The Landscape Institute, *Assessing landscape value outside national designations, Technical Guidance Note 02/21*, 2021 [Online] Available at: <https://www.landscapeinstitute.org/technical-resource/assessing-landscape-value-outside-national-designations/> (Last accessed 01/11/21)

⁴ The Highlands Council Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance Addendum Supplementary Guidance: 'Part 2b' (December 2017). Available online at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/directory_record/712079/onshore_wind_energy (Last accessed 01/11/21)

⁵ The Highlands Council Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance Addendum Supplementary Guidance: 'Part 2b' (December 2017). Available online at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/18753/addendum_supplementary_guidance_part_2b_december_2017 (Last accessed 01/11/21)

⁶ SNH and The Countryside Agency (2002). *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for Scotland and England* [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2018-02/Publication%202002%20-%20Landscape%20Character%20Assessment%20guidance%20for%20England%20and%20Scotland.pdf> (Last accessed 01/11/21)

⁷ Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013, *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*, 3rd Edition, Routledge, London. Paragraph. 2.21, page 21. (Last accessed 01/11/21)

⁸ Ibid. 1.

The Development may have a direct (physical) effect on the landscape in which it is located as well as an indirect or perceived effect from landscape character areas surrounding it. The potential landscape effects, occurring during the construction of the Development, and operational stages of the Greener Grid Park may therefore include, but are not restricted to, the following:

- Changes to landscape elements: the addition of new elements or the removal of vegetation, and buildings and other characteristic elements of the landscape character type;
- Changes to landscape qualities: degradation, erosion, or reinforcement of landscape elements and patterns, and perceptual characteristics, particularly those that form key characteristic elements of landscape character types;
- Changes to landscape character: landscape and character may be affected through the effect on characteristic elements (including perceptual characteristics), landscape patterns and attributes and the cumulative addition of new features, the magnitude and presence of which is sufficient to alter a notable part of the overall landscape character type of a particular area; and
- Cumulative landscape effects: where more than one development may lead to a potential landscape effect.

Visual effects are concerned wholly with the effect of development on visual receptors and general visual amenity. Visual effects are identified for different receptors (people) who would experience the view such as at their places of residence, during recreational activities, at work, or when travelling through the area. Visual effects may include the following:

- Visual effect: change in the appearance of the landscape as a result of development. This may include changes to the quality of the view, ability of the visual receptor to appreciate the view, or changes to the characteristic elements within the view. These changes can be positive (i.e., beneficial or an improvement) or negative (i.e., adverse or a detraction); and
- Cumulative visual effects: the cumulative or incremental visibility of similar types of development may combine to have a cumulative visual effect.

A detailed description of the methodology used has been provided in Annex A.1.

2.5 Cumulative Assessment

The operational Baillie Wind Farm, operated by Statkraft UK LTD, has been assessed as part of the baseline of the LVA. No other additional developments have been included within the LVA.

2.6 Information Sources

A number of different sources of information are also used to help understand the Site and its surrounding context as follows:

- The Highland-wide Local Development Plan 2012 (the HwLDP)⁹;
- The Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan 2018 (CaSPlan)¹⁰;
- NatureScot (2019) National Landscape Character Assessment¹¹;
- OS mapping at 1:50,000, 1:25,000 and 1:10,000;

⁹ The Highland Council (2012) *The Highland-wide Local Development Plan* [Online] Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/local_and_statutory_development_plans/199/highland-wide_local_development_plan (Accessed 01/11/2021)

¹⁰ The Highland Council (2018) *The Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan* [Online] Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/19712/casplan_adopted (Accessed 01/11/2021)

¹¹ <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/landscape-character-assessment/scottish-landscape-character-types-map-and-descriptions> (Last accessed 01/11/21)

- Aerial Photography;
- Web GIS data bases;
- Google Earth, Street View and Maps; and
- Arcus suite of Figures.

2.7 Scoping Responses and Consultations

On 10th March 2021, Arcus submitted a Pre-Application Advice request to the Highland Council for preliminary advice on the Development. The Council provided detailed pre-application advice, within a meeting with the Highland Council Landscape Architect on 1st July 2021, and in a report dated 25th May 2021. The advice contained within the pre-application response and received during the meeting has influenced the scope of the assessment provided in support of the Application.

The screening opinion concluded that the application did not require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA); therefore, no scoping application was required, and no formal consultee responses were received.

Comments relating to the assessment of the potential landscape and visual effects include the sections 2.71 – 2.7.3 below.

2.7.1 Impact on Landscape

"Policy 61 of HwLDP (Landscape) underlines that development proposals should relate to landscape characteristics of the area and that cumulative effects should be taken into account. As the site sits partially within Landscape Character Area 9 – Farmed Lowland Plains, reference should be made to the NatureScot Landscape Character Assessments (LCAs) which are a starting point on which to base an assessment of landscape and visual impact. It is important to set out who the visual receptors of the development are, what the landscape impacts are and how these two factors relate.

In terms of Landscape character the proposed development concentrates impacts into an area that already contains wirescape and energy related infrastructure, limiting the degree to which the development introduces new characteristics to the landscape. There is likely to be an increase in prominence of the character within the landscape however and the magnitude and significance of this should be carefully assessed, with particular attention to features that may be new in character."

All baseline documents highlighted in the scoping opinion have been referred to within the LVA.

All suggested landscape receptors were visited, and viewpoints used within the LVA to illustrate the landscape baseline of the Site and local area.

2.7.2 Visual Impact

"For the majority of road users the experience of the development is likely to be limited to those elements that may be visible above the intervening topography and forestry from the C1001, which forms part of the National Cycle Route 1, and the Shebster to Achreemie public road. Additionally, public access rights are secured under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and as such recreational walkers may reasonably expect to exercise these rights in the surrounding landscape. It is therefore important to provide some visual analysis of the development's visual impact on road users, recreational users, as well as from residential areas and key visual receptors such as scheduled monuments, and Special Landscape Areas, even if only to screen them out from the assessment. You should also consider the likelihood and effect of tree felling where this would increase visual impacts."

All suggested visual receptors were visited, and viewpoints used within the LVA.

2.7.3 Impact on Trees

"It is not clear from the information included with the application if the development site is designated woodland that has been felled, and therefore may have a restocking order attached to the land. HwLDP Policy 52 - Development in Woodland, requires the applicant to demonstrate the need to develop a wooded site and to show that the site has capacity to accommodate the development. The Council will maintain a strong presumption in favour of protecting woodland resources, and as such development proposals within wooded sites will only be supported where they offer clear and significant public benefit. Where this involves woodland removal, compensatory planting will usually be required. Scottish Forestry will be consulted on any application and therefore you are advised to engage with them early in the process to establish and agree any requirements prior to submitting the application. There are multiple areas of woodland surrounding the site's boundary, which you are required to demonstrate will be protected from damage during construction activities wherever possible. If localised tree felling is required, you should include a map detailing trees marked for retention and removal. Additionally, the potential impact of any new compensatory planting, both short & long term, should be fully assessed if it has potential to affect a Protected Area (e.g. Caithness & Sutherland Peatlands SPA/SAC features or a component SSSI)."

The Development would not result in the felling or removal of any trees on site and is supported by the provision of a landscape mitigation planting plan (Appendix 4), demonstrating new boundary planting to screen the Development, and to improve the biodiversity of the site with native tree planting.

2.8 Study Area

The LVA Study Area is illustrated in Figure 1.1, it covers an area of 5 km radius from the Development, and encompasses the operational Baillie Wind Farm, overhead power lines and pylons which intersect the wind farm in an alignment west to east centrally within the Study Area, open agricultural grazing and arable land to the north, and commercial forestry to the south and south west. There are scattered farm properties within the study area.

A bare earth Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) was produced, which confirmed that visibility of the Development within the wider landscape is very limited. Visibility of the Development within 5km is restricted by the rising local topography to the north of the Development within the wind farm site, and the forest cover to the west, south and east. There are limited open views to Stempster within 2km east of the Development, and open views to the west, from the west facing slopes of the Forss Water Valley, 3 – 5 km east of the Development, near Lythmore. There is extensive commercial forestry to the south of the study area, which restricts visibility of the Development. Whilst the bare earth ZTV illustrates potential visibility to the south, the tree cover restricts views of the Development in the wider landscape (refer to Figure 1.6).

2.9 Field Study

Following the desk-based assessment, fieldwork was undertaken in August 2021.

The key activities during baseline fieldwork were:

- To augment and verify the published descriptions of landscape character with fieldwork observations;
- To undertake an assessment of the quality or condition of baseline landscape and visual resources;
- To identify any significant features and elements in the landscape such as vegetation or built form that would screen the Development and thereby verify or refine the ZTV;

- To visit each viewpoint location identified during the desk study and screening report, and to microsite each viewpoint location in accordance with good practice guidance and obtain accurate coordinates;
- To undertake viewpoint photography at each viewpoint location; and
- To identify landscape features and elements that may be altered or removed as a result of the Development.

The baseline fieldwork also allowed the study area to be refined and therefore the focus of the assessment stage of the LVA.

Fieldwork during the assessment stage included an assessment of effects on the following receptors:

- Landscape resources including landscape character, landscape sensitivity, landscape features and landscape elements;
- Residential and recreational receptors;
- Roads; and
- Core paths and other footpaths / cycleways.

2.10 Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV)

Following identification of the landscape components which define landscape character such as topography, vegetation, built form, infrastructure and land use, the LVA has been informed by a ZTV to help identify the potential landscape and visual receptors. ZTVs are computer generated from a digital terrain model of the 5 km study area, and 2 km detailed study area. They illustrate the theoretical visibility of the Development throughout the study area based on the average eye height (1.7 m) of an adult person.

ZTVs do have some limitations which need to be considered when looking at the theoretical visibility illustrated. Firstly, they do not take account of all screening elements such as buildings or vegetation which can substantially reduce visibility. Notwithstanding their limitations, ZTVs are currently the best tool for predicting the likely visibility of the Development and used to inform viewpoint selection and to refine the scope of the LVA.

2.11 Viewpoints

The selected viewpoints illustrate the landscape context, and views from the local public road network, and to represent the local landscape character.

Viewpoints were selected by analysis of the ZTVs and confirmed through a site visit (refer to Figure 1.8 – 1.11, Annex A.2). Following methodology established in GLVIA3, the viewpoints were chosen based on the following criteria:

- Viewpoints should be representative of the likely impacts;
- Viewpoints should show a range of different types of views;
- Viewpoints should be representative of a range of different receptor groups;
- Viewpoints should be representative of a range of distances and directions; and
- Viewpoints should be representative of the varying image of the Development within the landscape.

A summary of the illustrated viewpoints is provided in Table 2.1 below. All viewpoints are located in the public realm, and focus on the indicative location of the Development. Site photography was undertaken during periods of fine weather and clear visibility, with a little localised cloud. Refer to Figures 1.8 – 1.11 for the baseline landscape photographs.

Table 2.1: LVA Selected Viewpoints

VP No.	Name	VP Grid Reference	Distance to the Site	Receptor Groups
1	Stemster Holdings	E 303861, N 965636	1.48 km NE	The viewpoint is representative of the views available to illustrate the landscape context of the Site, within the Farmed Lowland Plain LCT
2	Local Road, north west of the Site	E 305082, N 966865	3.13 km NE	The viewpoint is representative of the views available for local road users, within the Farmed Lowland Plain LCT
3	Local road, north of the site, near Achreamie	E 301835, N 966615	1.57 km N	The viewpoint is representative of the views available for local road users, within the Farmed Lowland Plain LCT
4	Local road, north of Shebster	E 301815 N 964384	0.78 km SW	The viewpoint is representative of the views available for local road users, within the Farmed Lowland Plain LCT

3 LANDSCAPE LEGISLATION AND POLICIES

This assessment has taken into account the current legislation, policy and guidance relevant to the LVA. The national planning policy framework policies of relevance to the Development are discussed within the Planning Statement.

3.1 Highland-wide Local Development Plan (2012)

The Development is located within the administrative boundary of the Highlands Council (refer to Figure 1.1, Annex A.2).

Formally adopted in April 2012, the Highland-Wide Local Development Plan¹² (the 'LDP') sets out strategic spatial priorities and policies for the Highlands, supported by Supplementary Planning Guidance. Policies have been reviewed and the following apply to the Development.

3.1.1.1 Policy 28 – Sustainable Design

Policy 28 states that the Council will support development proposals that promote and enhance social, economic and environmental wellbeing.

3.1.1.2 Policy 36 Development in the Wider Countryside

Under Policy 36 the extent to which the development proposal meets following criteria is used to determine whether it is an acceptable use in the wider countryside:

- *Are acceptable in terms of siting and design;*
- *Are sympathetic to existing patterns of development in the area;*
- *Are compatible with landscape character and capacity;*
- *Avoid incremental expansion of one particular development type within a landscape whose character relies on an intrinsic mix/distribution of a range of characteristics;*

¹² The Highland Council (2012) *The Highland-wide Local Development Plan* [Online] Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/local_and_statutory_development_plans/199/highland-wide_local_development_plan (Accessed 01/11/2021)

- *Avoid, where possible, the loss of locally important croft land; and Would address drainage constraints and can be otherwise adequately serviced, particularly in terms of foul drainage, road access and water supply, without involving undue public expenditure or infrastructure that would be out of keeping with the rural character of the area.*

3.1.1.3 Policy 51 Trees & Development

Policy 51 states that:

"The Council will support development which promotes significant protection to existing hedges, trees on and around development sites."

And:

"The Council will secure additional tree/hedge planting within a tree planting or landscape plan to compensate removal and to enhance the setting of any new development."

The Development would not result in the felling or removal of any trees on site and is supported by the provision of a landscape planting plan, demonstrating new boundary planting to screen the Development. Overall, this represents a positive measure of planting on the Site and should receive supportive consideration by the Council under Policy 51.

3.1.1.4 Policy 52 Principal of Development in Woodland

Policy 52 requires the Applicant to demonstrate the need to develop on a wooded site. It is noted that no forestry or woodland is currently within the planning boundary for the Development and as such, the Development complies with Policy 52.

3.1.1.5 Policy 61 Landscape

Policy 61 states that:

"New developments should be designed to reflect the landscape characteristics and special qualities identified in the Landscape Character Assessment of the area in which they are proposed. This will include consideration of the appropriate scale, form, pattern and construction materials, as well as the potential cumulative effect of developments where this may be an issue. The Council would wish to encourage those undertaking development to include measures to enhance the landscape characteristics of the area. This will apply particularly where the condition of the landscape characteristics has deteriorated to such an extent that there has been a loss of landscape quality or distinctive sense of place."

The Development is situated within an operational wind farm, which is an existing dominant land use within the local landscape character area. Giving the siting of the Development centrally within the wind farm site, and screened by coniferous woodland to the west, south and east, then there is limited opportunity for the development to exert an influence directly on the local landscape character area, thereby reducing potential direct and indirect landscape effects.

The Development is accompanied by the provision of a Landscape Mitigation Plan illustrating the proposed enhancement measures. There is an absence of native tree and shrub planting within the operational wind farm, and these planting proposals would represent not only a biodiversity enhancement but also increased landscape screening, as mitigation for visual impact from views from the local road network to the north east.

Overall, this represents a positive measure of planting on the Site and should receive supportive consideration by the Council under Policy 61.

3.2 Landscape Planning Designations

This section, which should be read in conjunction with Figure 1.4 (Annex A.2), identifies landscape planning policies, designations and constraints relevant to this LVA. Table 3.1 summarises the constraints within the 2 km study area.

Table 3.1: Landscape Designations and Protected Heritage Assets

Landscape Designations & Protected Heritage Assets	Present Within the Site	Present within Study Area (5 km radius)
National Scenic Areas	None	None
Regional Scenic Areas	None	None
Wild Land Areas	None	None
Green Belt	None	None
Conservation Areas	None	None
Scheduled Monuments	None	Yes
Listed Buildings	None	Yes
Gardens and Designed Landscapes	None	None

4 BASELINE CONDITIONS

The following section describes the existing environment in terms of landscape character and visual amenity, the baseline against which the impacts of the Development will be assessed, including sensitivity of landscape, seascape or visual receptors:

- Landscape Character;
- Landscape Designations; and
- Visual Receptors.

Assessment is also supported by field observations to confirm the key features and characteristics pertinent to the 5 km study area.

4.1 Landscape Character Types

The landscape character is considered at a national/regional setting defined within the NatureScot National Landscape Character Assessment¹³.

At a regional level there are two Landscape Character Types (LCT) within the 5 km Study Area (refer to Figure 1.5, Annex A.2), the Farmed Lowland Plain LCT 143 and the Sweeping Moorland & Flows LCT 134.

The Highland Council's Supplementary Guidance for Onshore Wind Energy – Part 2b Highland Strategic Capacity (SGOWE)¹⁴ defines a number of Local Landscape Character Areas (LLCAs), and identifies their sensitivity to wind energy development. However, these local areas follow the same boundaries and use the same names as the NatureScot LCTs.

¹³ NatureScot (2020) Scottish Landscape Character Types. Available on line at <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/landscape-character-assessment/scottish-landscape-character-types-map-and-descriptions> (Last accessed 01/11/21)

¹⁴ The Highlands Council Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance Addendum Supplementary Guidance: 'Part 2b' (December 2017). Available online at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/18753/addendum_supplementary_guidance_part_2b_december_2017 (Last accessed 01/11/21)

The descriptions of the LLCAs are provided below, and this landscape assessment has addressed potential landscape effects using both the NatureScot and Highland Council landscape character assessments.

4.1.1 Farmed Lowland Plain LCT 143

The Farmed Lowland Plain LCT 143 is located in the far north-east of Caithness. It forms a broad and relatively low-lying plain bounded by the sea and expansive Sweeping Moorland and Flows.

The Development is located within the Farmed Lowland Plain LCT 143.

The key characteristics of the Farmed Lowland Plain LCT 143 include:

- *A generally open, low-lying plain, gently undulating to form shallow broad valleys, which are often filled with lochs and mosses, and subtle low ridges;*
- *Occasional smooth hills rise above the more low-lying plain forming local landmarks;*
- *Agriculture the predominant land cover;*
- *Distinctive Caithness flagstone fences in some parts, creating low, sharp edges to fields;*
- *Sparse woodland, mainly comprising small angular coniferous plantations planted for shelter on farms;*
- *Larger conifer woodlands located at the transition with the Sweeping Moorland and Flows standing out where they are planted on poorer wetter ground on low ridges;*
- *Farm buildings and houses forming focal points within the landscape;*
- *Occasional loose clusters of croft houses located on more marginal upper slopes and near the coast;*
- *A number of historic environment features, including conspicuous castles, Baronial mansions and tall 'Lairds' houses, usually with broadleaf shelter woods planted around them;*
- *Roads reinforce the settlement pattern, often following the field and property boundaries, running straight and then swinging around sharp corners;*
- *Many historic features, including brochs and cairns, dotted across farmland and situated on hills within, or adjacent to, this area;*
- *Small groups of large wind turbines sited on some of the low ridges and hills and prominent visibility of larger wind farms in adjacent Landscape Character Types;*
- *Extensive views due to the openness of the landscape, and the clarity of northern air and light; and*
- *Dramatic views from the northern part of this landscape to Dunnet Head and the distant Orkney islands, and views from the A9 on the western edge of this landscape of the Lone Mountains of Movern and Scaraben seen across the low-lying Sweeping Moorland & Flows.¹⁵*

4.1.2 Sweeping Moorland & Flows LCT 134

The Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT 134 occurs extensively across Caithness and east Sutherland, forming a flat, gently undulating and generally smooth landform.

The Development is located 1.5 km north of the Sweeping Moorland Flows LCT 134 at its closest point, south of Shebster.

Key characteristics of this LCT which apply to the Study Area include:

- *Gently sloping or undulating landform which lies generally below 350 m AOD;*
- *Occasional isolated hills of limited height form local landmark features;*

¹⁵ NatureScot (2020) Scottish Landscape Character Types. Available on line at <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape-character-assessment/scottish-landscape-character-types-map-and-descriptions> (Last accessed 01/11/21)

- *Pockets of improved grazing, mainly within the outer fringes of sweeping moorland;*
- *Coniferous forest forming a dominant characteristic within some parts of this landscape character type;*
- *Very sparsely settled with dispersed crofts, farms and estate buildings largely found on the outer edges of this landscape or near a strath;*
- *Wind farms, transmission lines, the A9 and a network of minor roads are key features within the more modified outer fringes within Caithness;*
- *Long, low and largely uninterrupted skylines offering extensive views across this landscape and result in a feeling of huge space;*
- *Consistent views to the distant Lone Mountains and Rugged Mountain Massif – Caithness & Sutherland;*
- *Great sense of exposure on areas of flat peatland on upland plateau; and*
- *A strong sense of remoteness is associated within the largely uninhabited, inaccessible core flows and moorlands of this landscape.¹⁶*

Landscape characteristics detailed within the LCT profiles are likely to be represented over a wide area of the LCT. As such, any indirect landscape effects arising from the Development, relative to the Sweeping Moorland Flows LCT 134 would be extremely small in scale and are unlikely to impact upon those key landscape characteristics identified for the Sweeping Moorland Flows LCT 134, and therefore this LCT is not included within this assessment.

4.1.3 CT9 North Caithness: Farmed Lowland Plain LLCA

This is the 'host' LLCA for the Development, and any potential landscape effects arising from the Development would be direct within the CT9 North Caithness Farmed Lowland Plain LLCA.

The SGOWE identifies the CT9 North Caithness LLCA with the following characteristics:

- *Whilst a broad, low lying landscape character, there are local undulations in topography which contribute to a local diversity of landscape scale and pattern;*
- *The widely settled character of farm buildings form small point features and coupled with small woodland copses, and a mosaic of fields provides scale indicators which are sensitive to larger scale development;*
- *This sensitivity is reinforced where the historic landscape is more prevalent in stone slab and dyke field boundaries;*
- *Between Spittal and Thurso, there is a greater prevalence of larger scale infrastructure with numerous pylon lines linking into the existing, extended and new substations at Spittal and South Thurso; and*
- *Existing prominent buildings include the Forss Business & Energy Park, Forss Wind Farm, UK Atomic Energy Authority at Dounreay (currently being decommissioned) and Vulcan Naval Reactor Test Establishment (to be decommissioned), and the JGC Engineering Facility (west of Thurso) and some of the larger scale agricultural sheds.¹⁷*

4.1.4 CT 4 Central Caithness: Sweeping Moorland & Flows LLCA

The CT4 LLCA is situated 1.5 km south of the Development. Potential indirect landscape effects may arise as a result of the Development north of the LLCA.

"This LCT occurs extensively across Caithness and East Sutherland. The flat to gently undulating and smooth landform enables wide expansive views across Caithness and south

¹⁶ NatureScot (2020) Scottish Landscape Character Types. Available on line at <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/landscape-character-assessment/scottish-landscape-character-types-map-and-descriptions> (Last accessed 01/11/21)

¹⁷ The Highlands Council Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance Addendum Supplementary Guidance: 'Part 2b' (December 2017). Available online at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/directory_record/712079/onshore_wind_energy (Last accessed 01/11/21)

and west into Sutherland and forms the setting to the Lone Mountains. On the fringes of the character type and into the transition with the farming land to the north are large scale blocks of forestry.

Gently sloping or undulating landform with strong horizontal composition, which whilst expansive and large in scale entails that any vertical features are highly prominent. Simplicity of composition comprising dominant land:sky horizon, which can be interrupted by vertical elements. Long, low and largely interrupted skylines offer extensive views.¹⁸

4.1.5 Landscape Character of the Site Area

The 5 km Study Area is dissected by the A836 to the north, along the coastline, and a minor road, between Westfield in the east and Isauld in the west, 1 km south of the Development.

The land surrounding the Development is rural in nature, comprising of open arable farmland, used for rough grazing, within the Baillie Wind Farm which is a dominant landscape feature.

The Forss Water is located 3.5 – 4 km east of the Development, and network of minor rural roads and tracks link isolated residential / farm properties and small hamlets.

The nearest settlement to the Development is the settlement of Shebster, located 1 km south west of the Development. The closest residential properties are Stemster, Bardneaheigh in the east and south east, and Shebster located approximately 1 km south west of the Development.

The landscape character of the Site:

- **Landform & Scale** – the landscape is simple in form and medium to large in scale. The highest point at 105 m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) and levels gently incline to 115m AOD north. The wind farm is surrounded by conifer woodland along its southern and western boundaries, which enclose the Development to the south, east and west. Land within the wind farm area inclines gently to the north, then falls gradually to the east and north, towards the coastline;
- **Land cover** – the landscape of the Site and surrounding area comprises of simple land cover of arable farmland, used for rough grazing within the operational wind farm;
- **Settlement / Man Made Influences** – the immediate surroundings of the site are very lightly settled. The Site and local landscape are dominated by the operational Baillie Wind Farm and overhead lines and pylons;
- **Movement** – the Site itself is settled in appearance, within the wind farm, and grassland for grazing. The local road to the south is a busy connecting road, as an alternative route to the A836 coastal route, and exerts movement in the landscape;
- **Skylines & Key Views** – the Site is situated in an enclosed landscape within the wind farm, with expansive skyline views to the north east and east. However, views to the north are restricted by the topography which rises in level to north of the site, and the coniferous woodland west, south and east of the Site;
- **Inter-visibility** – the Site is enclosed within the operational wind farm, located between rising land to the north, and commercial forestry to the west, south and east, restricting views across the wider landscape;
- **Perceptual Aspects** – the Site is enclosed in character. The surrounding area is quiet, but with traffic noise evident along the local road to the south.

4.2 Landscape Designation

The Site is located within an undesignated landscape.

¹⁸ Ibid 17, page 99 - 100

Refer to Figure 1.4, Annex A.2.

4.3 Scheduled Monuments

There are two scheduled monuments within 2km of the Development, Cnoc Freiceadain long cairns, 1 km west of the Development and Creag Bhreac Mhor stone rows, 1.5 km north west of the Development.

The intervening woodland cover, and variations in local topography within the Site, reduce the visibility of the Development in views from the west, from the Cnoc Freiceadain long cairns. A local context photograph from the summit is included in Figure 1.12 (Annex A.2) illustrates the view from the Cnoc Freiceadain long cairns, and the view of the Baillie Wind Farm on rising land to the east of the cairns. Given the limited views of the Development from this location, the Cnoc Freiceadain long cairns have not been considered any further within this assessment.

However, the Creag Bhreac Mhor stone rows are situated outwith the ZTV, with no anticipated views, and therefore they have not been considered any further within this assessment.

Refer to Figures 1.4 and 1.12, Annex A.2.

4.4 Listed Buildings

There are two listed buildings 1 km south and south west of the Development, Reay Free Church (including enclosing walls and memorial) (Category B LB14983) and Shebster Barn (Category C LB17593).

However, both listed buildings are situated outwith the ZTV, with no anticipated views, and therefore they have not been considered any further within this assessment.

Refer to Figure 1.4, Annex A.2.

4.5 Visual Receptors

The visual assessment draws from the ZTV, site visits and viewpoint analysis and assesses the potential visual effects on views and visual amenity likely to be experienced by receptors (people) within the landscape as follows:

- Views from residential properties;
- Views experienced while travelling through the landscape (recreational and local road users, walkers, horse riders, cyclists for example); and
- Views from tourist and recreational destinations.

The visual assessment focuses on those receptor areas where significant effects are most likely, as detailed in the sections below.

Visual effects would be experienced by the people who live and work in the area, along with those enjoying recreational activities in this area or simply passing through. Whilst it is people who are the actual receptors of visual effects, it is the places they may occupy, and from which the Development may be seen, that are listed below.

The following three main receptor types have been identified within the Study Area:

- Core paths and recreational receptors;
- Residential properties, encompassing individual and groups of properties; and
- Transport Route users, users of the existing road network, within the Study Area.

4.5.1 Core Paths and Recreational Receptors

Whilst the potential visual effects on tourists, or those engaging in recreation activities, may be brief in nature by passing through the area by vehicle, or on horse, foot or bike,

their sensitivity to landscape and visual change is high because their purpose/activity is to enjoy the landscape and surroundings.

The visual assessment considers views from recreational receptors within 2 km of the Development. Nearby recreational receptors within the study area include:

- Core Path CA13.14, located 800 m west of the Development at the closest point. This is a short route to the summit of Cnoc Freiceadain and the Cnoc Freiceadain long cairns; and
- National Cycle Network Route 1 is located 1km south of the Development at its closest point, following the local road south of the site, between the A836 in the west, to Thurso, in the east. However, this route is situated outwith the ZTV, in the lower lying land to the south of the Development, and therefore has been scoped out of this assessment.

Refer to Figures 1.7 and 1.8, Annex A.2.

4.5.2 Residential Properties & Settlements

Residential properties are considered as being of high sensitivity due to the importance that individuals place on the view from their homes.

The visual assessment considers views from individual residential property within 2 km of the Development (Figure 1.7, Annex B). From a desk-based assessment and site visit, eleven properties were identified within a 2 km radius of the Development.

The nearest settlements, Shebster and Achreamie are 1 km south and 1.5km north of the Development respectively. Both settlements are located outwith the ZTV, and there are no predicted views of the Development. Therefore, both the settlements of Shebster and Achreamie have been scoped out of this assessment.

Refer to Figures 1.7, Annex A.2.

4.5.3 Transport Routes

It is important to take account of how the Development would be experienced from the surrounding road network. The visual assessment considers the potential visual effects likely to be experienced by people travelling through the landscape on main roads and the local road network. Views would vary depending on proximity to the road, the mode of transport, the angle of view, and intervening landscape features.

Within the study area there are the following routes:

- A roads – The A836 road is situated approximately 3 km north west of the Site, at its closest point. This is a well-used road and scenic route, which runs from Thurso to Reay. However, the A836 is situated outwith the ZTV, with no anticipated views, and therefore they have not been considered any further within this assessment; and
- Local un-classified roads within the study area are limited to those areas connecting farm properties and isolated residential properties within the Study Area.

Refer to Figure 1.1, Annex A.2.

4.6 Receptors Scoped Out of the LVA

Further to the information presented above, the following landscape and visual receptors have been scoped out of this assessment:

- Sweeping Moorland Flows LCT 134;
- The settlements of Shebster and Achreamie;
- Scheduled Monuments within 2 km of the Development;
- Listed Buildings within 2 km of the Development;

- Residential properties outwith the ZTV, within 2 km of the Development;
- A836 road;
- C1001 road south of the Development;
- National Cycle Network Route 1 along the C1001; and
- Two listed buildings 1.45 km west of the Development, Drongan House, Byre (Category B LB14328) and Schaw Church (Category C LB14376).

4.7 Night Time Baseline

In general, the study area is devoid of light pollution given the landscape's lack of built development and lack of street lighting on the rural local road network. Sources of light pollution are limited to residential properties. The proposed Development would be unlit, excepting for motion sensor security lighting, therefore no further assessment has been made within the LVA on the impact of the lighting of the Development.

4.8 Future Baseline

It is not anticipated that the baseline conditions as described above would be different to those encountered today, due to the dominant land use of the area being rough grazing and coniferous woodland within an operational wind farm.

5 ZTV ANALYSIS

5.1 General Visibility

Given the rising topography immediately north of the Site, and falling topography to the east and south, the valley of the Forss Water to the east and rising land of the Sweeping Flows and Moorland to the south of the Study Area, the ZTV illustrates limited visibility of the Development within 2 - 5 km radius of the Site, restricted to the west facing hillsides, 1 – 2 km and 3 – 5 km east of the Site.

Predicted visibility in the area is anticipated immediately east the Site, within a 2 km radius and within 1 km to the south west of the Site.

5.2 Weather Conditions

In reality, changing weather patterns and local climatic conditions would influence the visibility of the Development in terms of the extent of view, the colour and contrast of the buildings, and components of the Greener Grid Park within the context of an operational wind farm, largely screened by coniferous woodland, and thus the perceived visual impact. There would be periods of low visibility (i.e. fog, precipitation, low cloud, and bright sunny conditions that are accompanied by haze) as well as periods of high visibility in clear weather.

6 ASSESSMENT OF LIKELY EFFECTS

In order to understand the likely effects of the Development, it is first necessary to understand the construction processes involved, and the components of the Development which would be present during the operational life of the Development.

The likely effects that would arise as a result of the Development can be attributed to either the short-term construction works or the long-term presence of the Development. Site Layout Plan, Planning Drawing 2 shows an illustrative plan of the Development.

6.1 Effects of Construction

6.1.1 Landscape Effects During Construction

The construction phase would result in localised and direct landscape effects on the Farmed Lowland Plain LCT 143 and the landscape elements within the Site itself. Table 6.1 below provides a list of the construction activities to be undertaken together with an appraisal of the level and type of effect predicted.

Construction activities could result in temporary landscape and visual effects during the construction period, specifically:

- Effects on landscape character, based on a current and future baseline, from construction and plant activities within 2 km radius; and
- Effects on visual amenity of surrounding visual receptors based on a current and future baseline, from construction and plant activities within a 2 km radius.

Table 6.1 Landscape Effects during Construction

Construction Activity and Assessment	Landscape Assessment		
	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Level of Effect
<p><u>Temporary Construction Compound</u></p> <p>A temporary construction compound would be situated within the Greener Grid Park Site, within the operational wind farm. Given the limited area affected, the magnitude of change would be small and the temporary landscape effect would be Negligible - Minor, temporary (reversible), direct, and negative.</p>	Low	Small	Negligible - Minor temporary, reversible and direct adverse landscape effect
<p><u>Greener Grid Park Compound</u></p> <p>The Greener Grid Park development would occupy an area of rough grazing farmland within an operational wind farm.</p> <p>The magnitude of change would increase from zero to small, and the landscape effect of the construction activity would be minor, temporary (reversible), direct, and negative.</p>	Low	Small	Negligible - Minor temporary, reversible and direct adverse landscape effect

Taking all the factors above together, the low sensitivity of the landscape of the Site, and the predicted small magnitude of change, results in an overall effect during construction, predicted to be **Negligible to Minor**, short term (reversible), direct, and adverse landscape effects within the Site during the construction process.

6.1.2 Visual Effects During Construction

The visual effects of the Development during the construction period would only be noticeable from distant views of the Greener Grid Park construction, including the creation of layout areas, temporary compound, the enclosed synchronous compensator equipment and construction vehicles using the site access track and entrance.

The Site is visually enclosed by the shelter belt tree cover within, and south of, the Baillie Wind Farm, and rising topography to the north of the Site. There would be distant views of the Development from a short section of the local road 3 km north east of the Site, from the local road 0.78 km south west of the Site, through a gap within the coniferous woodland.

The sensitivity of visual receptors in these locations is medium (road users). The magnitude of visual change would vary over the course of the construction phase in line with the extent of infrastructure present on site. The magnitude of change would be negligible to small, with increasing construction activity, with the level of temporary visual effect during

construction resulting in ***Negligible - Minor***, temporary (reversible), direct, and adverse visual effects from the local road network up to 5 km distance.

However, the level of visual effect towards the end of construction would not exceed that assessed for the operational period where the site would be fully constructed and exerting maximum visual influence.

6.2 Effects of Operation

Compared to the construction phase, the Development would gain a more 'settled' appearance during the operational period when construction activity ceases.

The Development would be visible over a limited area with very limited potential for indirect effects on the surrounding landscape, and surrounding visual receptors.

7 EMBEDDED MITIGATION

The landscape and visual objectives of the embedded mitigation were:

- To screen elements of the Development from key receptor locations, e.g. views from the north east; and
- To reflect existing landscape elements and character in areas of the wider landscape setting.

The embedded mitigation includes the following biodiversity objectives:

- To create new habitats onsite that reflect the natural flora and fauna of the area; and
- To make the most of opportunities to improve biodiversity within the Development site and surrounding area.

For locations and details of proposed embedded mitigation such as quantities and species please refer to the Landscape Masterplan (Appendix 4). Landscape mitigation embedded within the design of the Development, includes the following:

- An area of 1.04 ha of native woodland shelter belt planting which would include a mix of the lower growing species and 143 taller 'standard-size' tree species. The areas of native woodland planting have been located to the eastern, southern and western boundaries, to facilitate screening / filtering of views of the Development from open views from the local road to the south west, where there is a gap in the tree cover, and direct views of the Site, and views from the local road to the north east; and
- An area of 0.88 ha of native grass and wildflower mix along verges within the Site.

8 ASSESSMENT OF RESIDUAL LANDSCAPE EFFECTS

8.1 Assessment of Effects on Landscape Character

An appraisal of the baseline landscape character has been undertaken in order to determine the sensitivity of the landscape and its capacity to accommodate the Development.

The landscape character is considered at two levels:

- Regional setting, in relation to the NatureScot Landscape Character Types; and
- Local setting, based on field observations to confirm the key features and characteristics pertinent to the study area and the application site.

8.1.1 NatureScot Landscape Character Types (LCTs)

Assessment for the effects on landscape character, sensitivity and value is a combination of a review of the conclusions presented in the NatureScot & landscape character assessment, and a review of the conclusions presented in the SGOWE, and professional judgement from field observations.

At a regional level, the study area falls within the Farmed Lowland Plain LCT 143, and a local level the CT9 North Caithness Farmed Lowland Plain LLCA.

8.1.1.1 *Farmed Lowland Plain LCT 143 & CT9 North Caithness Farmed Lowland Plain LLCA*

This is the 'host' landscape for the Development.

There is an overall positive landscape quality within the LCT, but there are some areas of alteration/degradation/erosion of features along the A836 road corridor to the north, Baillie Wind Farm and commercial forestry, electrical substations, pylons and overhead power lines, and UK Atomic Energy Authority at Dounreay, all situated within a modified landscape. Overall, the LCT / LLCA is considered to be of a low - medium landscape quality.

There is a high capacity for the LCT / LLCA to accommodate the Development, which would not detract from the overall existing landscape quality, features and characteristics of the LCT. This results in a low susceptibility to the Development because the landscape would be able to accommodate it without undue adverse effects, taking account of the existing character and quality of the landscape, and other manmade landscape features associated with the Baillie Wind Farm and additional infrastructure, including overhead lines and pylons, to the south of the site.

The landscape is typically open in character, with areas of shelter belt plantation woodland. There are a number of vertical elements within this LCT / LLCA, including wind turbines, pylons and overhead lines neighbouring the Site, which contribute to a more developed landscape character. The Development would be located in an area which features similar electricity generation infrastructure.

There would be little, or no, undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and/or achievement of relevant planning policies / strategies given the Baillie Wind Farm and associated power and communications infrastructure within this LCT / LLCA. The landscape would be able to accommodate the Development, taking account of the existing character and quality of the landscape.

The landscape sensitivity of the LCT / LLCA is low – medium, and low - medium value as an undesignated landscape. The magnitude of change arising from the Greener Grid Park within the LCT / LLCA would be negligible within the LCT as a whole, on completion of the construction works, and any resulting direct and indirect landscape effects within the LCT / LLCA would be **Negligible**, adverse, direct and localised within the Farmed Lowland Plain LCT 143, and CT9 North Caithness Farmed Lowland Plain LLCA.

8.1.2 ***Landscape Character of the Site***

The landscape character of the site has been assessed as having:

- **Landscape value** – the area within the study area is an undesignated landscape, therefore, the landscape of the site is considered to be of a low landscape value;
- **Landscape quality** – the grazing landscape of the Site, within the operational wind farm, is considered to be of a low landscape quality. There are limited landscape features of quality, hedgerows and stone wall field boundaries vary in quality around the Site;
- **Capacity to change** – the surrounding landscape, within Baillie Wind Farm, and associated infrastructure, and the enclosed nature of the site, results in a low susceptibility to the Development. The landscape would be able to accommodate the Development without undue adverse effects, taking account of the existing character and quality of the landscape, and other manmade landscape features; and
- **Landscape sensitivity** – the Site is within an undesignated landscape, therefore, the landscape of the site is considered to be of a low landscape sensitivity.

The magnitude of effect arising from the Development within the Site would be medium where there would be the addition of a variety of manmade, built elements within the Site, alongside the wind turbines and pylons / overhead lines.

The landscape sensitivity of the Site is low. The magnitude of change arising from the Development within the local landscape and the Site, would be medium on completion of the construction works, and any resulting landscape effects within the local landscape, and of the Site, would be **Minor**, and adverse.

Native trees and native woodland planting are included as embedded mitigation in the scheme design. The implementation of these proposals would bring about a positive landscape effect, by introducing new landscape elements, and improving the biodiversity value of the site (refer to Landscape Masterplan, Appendix 4).

9 ASSESSMENT OF RESIDUAL VISUAL EFFECTS

Visual effects are concerned wholly with the effect of the Development on views, and the general visual amenity as experienced by people.

Visual effects are assessed by considering the sensitivity of the receptor (people) against the proposed magnitude of change to determine a level of visual effect. The acceptability of this effect largely relates to the activity and the experience of the viewer and the visual composition, character, context, and the overall ability of the landscape in that view to accommodate the Development in design terms. Visual effects are assessed in relation to the agreed viewpoints, properties and settlements, tourist and recreational destinations including tourist routes as well as main transport routes.

9.1 Viewpoint Assessment

An appraisal of visual effects was undertaken from six viewpoints, which were selected using the ZTV and available views from the closest visual receptors, at varying distances and orientations from the site.

The viewpoint locations are shown on Figure 1.8 (Annex A.2). Photographs of the existing landscape are shown in Viewpoints 1 – 4, Figures 1.8 to 1.11 (Annex A.2).

Viewpoint selection and micro-siting of each viewpoint location accord with technical guidance¹⁹.

9.1.1 Viewpoint 1 – Stemster Holdings

9.1.1.1 Baseline

This viewpoint is representative of views from a track between residential properties at Stemster Holdings, 1.48 km north east of the Development.

The Baillie Wind Farm and pylons are dominant elements within the view from the access track to these properties, and the front elevation and driveway for one of the properties. Rough grazing farmland of the Site extends in the foreground and middle distance towards the wind farm, as the land rises, to the woodland forming the horizon to the west.

Refer to Figure 1.8, Annex A.2.

9.1.1.2 Sensitivity

Visual receptors would include local residents, who would be of a high sensitivity.

¹⁹ Visual Representation of Development Proposals, Technical Guidance Note 2019, The Landscape Institute.

9.1.1.3 Magnitude of Change

There would be no view of the Development from this location, due to the screening of the woodland surrounding the development, and any construction traffic would use the existing wind farm access track which is not visible from this location.

9.1.1.4 Level of Visual Effect

There are no visual effects anticipated from this viewpoint location.

9.1.2 Viewpoint 2 – Local Road, north east

9.1.2.1 Baseline

This viewpoint is representative of views from the local road network, situated 3.16 km north east of the Site.

The Baillie Wind Farm are dominant features within the view from the local road, across low lying Forss Water valley, towards the properties at Shebster in the middle distance and the pylons on the horizon to the west of the viewpoint location. The Development would be situated behind the woodland, on the horizon, within the wind turbine array.

Refer to Figure 1.7, Annex A.2.

9.1.2.2 Sensitivity

Visual receptors would include recreational users of the local road network, which would be of a medium sensitivity.

9.1.2.3 Magnitude of Change

There would be no view of the Development from this location, due to the screening of the woodland surrounding the development, and any construction traffic would use the existing wind farm access track which is not visible from this location.

9.1.2.4 Level of Visual Effect

There are no visual effects anticipated from this viewpoint location.

9.1.3 Viewpoint 3 – Achreamie (north)

9.1.3.1 Baseline

This viewpoint is representative of views from the local road network, near residential properties of Achreamie, 1.57 km north of the Site.

The grazing moorland extends in the foreground of the view, with Baillie Wind Farm on the rising hill to the south of the viewpoint. The wind turbines are dominant features within this view.

Refer to Figure 1.10, Annex A.2.

9.1.3.2 Sensitivity

Visual receptors would include views from the local road network, of a medium sensitivity, and nearby residential properties, which would be of a high sensitivity.

9.1.3.3 Magnitude of Change

There would be no view of the Development from this location, due to the screening of the woodland surrounding the development, and any construction traffic would use the existing wind farm access track which is not visible from this location.

9.1.3.4 *Level of Visual Effect*

There are no visual effects anticipated from this viewpoint location.

9.1.4 **Viewpoint 4 – Local Road, north of Shebster**

9.1.4.1 *Baseline*

This viewpoint is representative of views from the local road network, linking Achrearnie and Shebster, situated 785 m south west of the Site.

The moorland and pasture extends in the foreground, with the Site and open views of the Baillie Wind Farm visible on the horizon to the north east of the road. A small gap in the conifer plantation reveals a direct view to the Site, where the Development connects to the pylon.

Refer to Figure 1.11, Annex A.2.

9.1.4.2 *Sensitivity*

Visual receptors would include views from the local road network, of a medium sensitivity.

9.1.4.3 *Magnitude of Change*

Given the restricted view of the Development, through the gap in the woodland, the predicted magnitude of change arising from the Development would be small, where the Development is visible from the local road for a distance of approximately 800 m, and viewed obliquely, and in the middle distance through a gap in the woodland, and within the context of the operational Baillie Wind Farm.

9.1.4.4 *Level of Visual Effect*

The nature of these effects would be **Minor**, long-term (reversible), and adverse for local road users.

Once the proposed tree planting on the southern boundary of the Site is established, the visual effects would reduce. The magnitude of change would reduce to negligible, and the visual effects would be **Negligible**, long-term (reversible), and adverse.

9.2 **Visual Effects on Views from Residential Properties**

Visual assessment of residential properties within the study area (2 km) has been undertaken. All residential properties are considered to be of high sensitivity in accordance with the GLVIA3.

The effect of the Development on residents, requires particular attention because they may experience the Development from different locations, at different times of the day, usually for longer periods of time and in different seasons. Occupants of residential properties are judged to be of 'high' sensitivity as they are static receptors whose enjoyment of their property is likely to be affected by the quality of views and visual amenity experienced there.

Whilst individual or specific observations are made below concerning views or potential views from properties in the direction of the Development, a 'summation' is offered based on an opinion 'in the round' i.e., taking all relevant factors into account as access to properties is unlikely and often screened by boundary vegetation or fencing. Therefore, this analysis may include potential views from the property itself as well as from the surrounding amenity ground, the access/egress points, and the immediately adjacent highway.

Three properties have been assessed within 2 km via a combination of a site visit to the closest public location in the vicinity of that property (usually the highway), desk-based assessment, and the use of aerial and digital mapping.

All properties outwith the ZTV have not been included within this assessment.

Whilst it is accepted that a number of properties could experience a change to a view or views, considering the location of the Development within the wind farm, and the surrounding woodland screening, it is not considered that any of these properties would suffer unduly from negative visual effects such as visual over-dominance, over-bearance, or blocking of light, which collectively may affect the overall visual amenity, and associated living standards arising from the Development as an individual development, and also cumulatively with the Baillie Wind Farm.

Table 9.1: Visual Effects on Residential Properties

Property	Description of Effect
R1 Stemster Holdings - north (refer to Viewpoint 1 Figure 1.8)	<p>Distance to the Development: 1.5 km</p> <p>Description: A steadings development situated on a private track to Stemster holdings. Woodland vegetation and farm outbuildings screens views from the properties to the west. There is an open farm track to the properties, with views to the operational Baillie Wind Farm, overhead lines and pylons within the landscape to the west of the properties.</p> <p>Magnitude of Change: There would be no views from the properties, nor from the access track to these properties, given the screening of farm buildings and vegetation near the properties, and the woodland surrounding the Site itself.</p> <p>Level of Effect: No visual effects anticipated for the views from these properties.</p>
R2 – Stemster Holdings - south (refer to Viewpoint 1 Figure 1.8)	<p>Distance to the Development: 1.5 km</p> <p>Description: This property is a two storey property, facing west, with garden area and driveway, with primary open views, and a front door and driveway to the west and directly to the Site.</p> <p>Magnitude of Change: There would be no views from the property, nor from the access track to this property, given the screening of the woodland surrounding the Site itself.</p> <p>Level of Effect: No visual effects anticipated for the views from this property.</p>
R3 Bardnaheigh	<p>Distance to the Development: 1.2 km</p> <p>Description: This is a two storey farmhouse property, with primary open views to the south. There are farm buildings to the rear of the property, and the commercial woodland within the wind farm and to the south and east of the site to the north and west of this property.</p> <p>Magnitude of Change: There would be no views of the Development from the property, nor from the access track to this property, given the screening of the woodland surrounding the Site itself. However, there are potential views of the construction traffic using the site access track to the west, from the farm access track. The site access track is currently used by wind farm maintenance vehicles.</p> <p>Level of Effect: The nature of these effects would be Minor – Moderate, temporary and adverse given the views of construction traffic from the access track to the property only, and not from the property / garden areas.</p>

9.3 Visual Effects on Views from Core Path CA 13.14

This section considers the views from the Core Path CA 13.14, situated 800 m west at its closest point. This core path leads from the visitors car park to the Baillie Wind Farm, to the Cnoc Freiceadain Cairns, at an elevation of 132 m AOD at its highest point.

When ascending /descending the hillside, views to the east, towards the Development, are screened by the tree cover within and around the wind farm, restricting views towards the

Development. From the summit there are panoramic views towards the coast to the north and west, and the Flows to the south. There are elevated views of the wind farm to the east.

9.3.1.1 Sensitivity

Recreational users of the core path network would be of a high sensitivity.

9.3.1.2 Magnitude of Change

There is a large scale panoramic view of the from the summit of the core path route

There is no predicted view of the Development from this location. The Development is located adjacent to a pylon within the operational wind farm, and would be screened by the woodland cover to the west of the Development.

9.3.1.3 Level of Visual Effect

No visual effects anticipated for the views from this core path.

9.4 Visual Effects on Views from the Local Road Network

This section considers the views from the local road network, where the Development would be experienced transiently, obliquely, and within 0.78 km distance to the south west, and 3.13 km distance to the north east on a local road between Forss and the C1001.

The local roads were driven in both directions to assess the potential visual effects on the route. The Development would be viewed obliquely and directly within the open agricultural landscape, but viewed in the context of the operational Baillie Wind Farm, and additional power infrastructure of pylons and overhead lines.

Refer to Figures 1.9, 1.10 & 1.11, Annex A.2.

9.4.1.1 Sensitivity

Recreational users of the local road network would be of a medium sensitivity.

9.4.1.2 Magnitude of Change

To the north east, there would be no view of the Development from this location, due to the screening of the woodland surrounding the development, and any construction traffic would use the existing wind farm access track which is not visible from this location.

To the south west, and given the restricted view of the Development, through the gap in the woodland, the predicted magnitude of change arising from the Development would be small, where the Development is visible from the local road for a distance of approximately 800 m, and viewed obliquely, and in the middle distance through a gap in the woodland, and within the context of the operational Baillie Wind Farm.

9.4.1.3 Level of Visual Effect

The nature of these effects would be **Minor**, long-term (reversible), and adverse for local road users.

Once the proposed tree planting on the southern boundary of the Site is established, the visual effects would reduce. The magnitude of change would reduce to negligible, and the visual effects would be **Negligible**, long-term (reversible), and adverse.

10 SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

10.1 Summary of Predicted Landscape Effects

The Development would comprise of a Greener Grid Park including synchronous compensators, batteries and associated site infrastructure.

The Development is situated within the Farmed Lowland Plain LCT within an operational wind farm, and neighbouring pylons and overhead lines. As such the Development is well sited within the landscape, set with a backdrop of the rising topography to the north, tree cover to the west, south and east, which help 'absorb' the proposed Greener Grid Park within the landscape. The Development is located within an enclosed location, but within an open, working rural landscape.

Within the study area the landscape is experienced from the local road network, scattered residential properties from which some experience open views across the broad, open landscape, and a single core path route to the Cnoc Freiceadain Cairns.

Therefore, it is considered that within the context of the operational Baillie Wind Farm, the characteristics of the undesignated farmland landscape, and medium to large scale of the receiving landscape, with a high capacity to accommodate a Greener Grid Park development, the landscape would have the capacity to accommodate the Development.

10.2 Summary of Predicted Visual Effects

The visual appraisal indicates that views of the Development, from the surrounding areas, would include a range ***Negligible to Minor***. This is due to:

- The location takes advantage of the gentle sloping topography, with rising land to the north of the development, and screening by coniferous woodland to the west, south and east. The siting and design of the Development within the operational Baillie Wind Farm allows for visual effects to be concentrated within a 1 km radius, and scattered visibility between 2 and 5km radius, within this lightly settled landscape;
- There would be ***Minor*** visual effects from the Development on viewpoints in proximity to the proposed development with clear and open views across the rough grazed moorland surrounding the Site, from the viewpoints within the Study Area, and within 3.5 km radius of the Development;
- There would be ***Minor*** visual effects from the Development from one residential property within 1.2 km south east of the Development. Of the three properties assessed, two would have no view, or a negligible visual effect, and a one would experience a ***Minor*** visual effect within 2 km south and south east of the Development;
- There would be no visual effects arising from the Development for those recreational receptors using the core path within 2 km of the Development. Where there are predicted view from the core path are screened by woodland within the operational wind farm site; and
- There would be ***Minor*** visual effects from the Development from the local road network, long-term (reversible), and adverse from the local road south west of the Development between Shebster and Achreamie.

10.3 Conclusion

The Development would not exceed the capacity of the Farmed Lowland Plain landscape, nor would it become the dominant characteristic of the landscape. Development is relative to the scale and character of the receiving landscape, and the demonstrated capacity of the landscape to accommodate development alongside the operational Baillie Wind Farm.