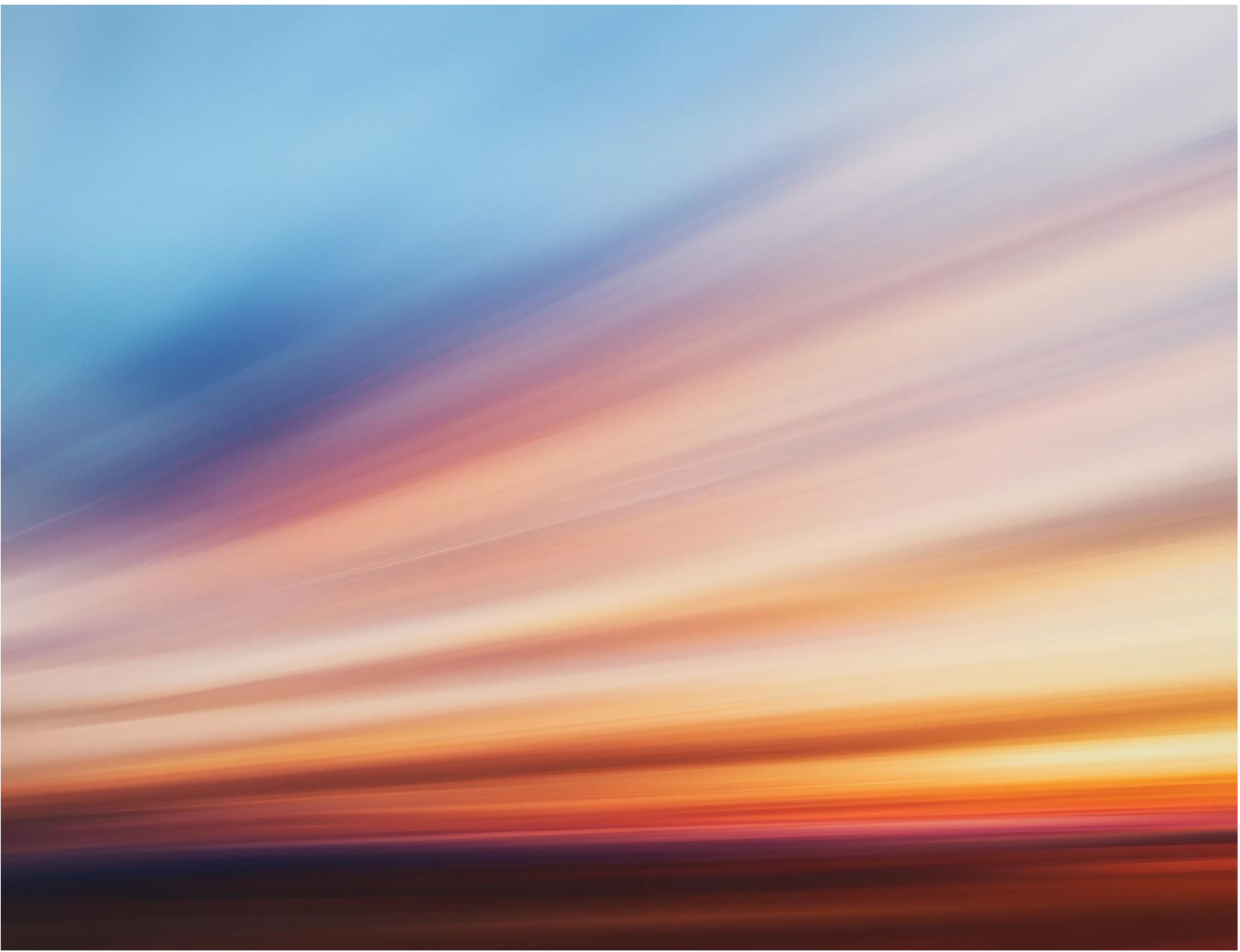


Craig Watch Wind Farm

Grid Connection Appraisal

April 2026



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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Craig Watch Wind Farm Limited (hereafter referred to as 'the Applicant'), submitted an Application to the Scottish Ministers on 14 June 2022 seeking consent pursuant to Section 36 of the 1989 Act, together with a request for planning permission to be deemed to be granted pursuant to Section 57(2) of the 1997 Act, for the construction and operation of the Craig Watch Wind Farm and associated infrastructure (hereafter referred to as the 'Proposed Development').
- 1.1.2 The Proposed Development comprises the construction and operation of up to 10 wind turbines with a maximum blade tip height of 200 m, foundations, crane hard standings and adjacent laydown areas, access tracks, watercourse crossings, a temporary borrow pit, temporary construction compounds, substation and control building, meteorological mast and ancillary infrastructure, located approximately 8 km south east of Dufftown, Moray in Scotland (hereafter referred to as 'the Site').
- 1.1.3 In May 2025, Moray Council objected to the Application, and the determination was referred to the Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA). The development proposal is currently going through the Public Local Inquiry (PLI) process (ECU Ref: ECU00002177).
- 1.1.4 At the time of writing (April 2026), it is anticipated that the Proposed Developments grid connection will be made to a new transmission Switching Station (SS), within the broad area of Dufftown (approximately 5 to 6 km north of the Site). These details have been refined from those provided in the *Applicant's Response to Request for Further Information Circulated by Reporters on 23 March 2026*¹ (submitted as part of the PLI Process) which anticipated a Tee point '8-9 km from the boundary of the Proposed Development'. The information provided in this appraisal is the most up to date and based on a detailed desk study rather than an initial analysis which informed the response in March 2026.
- 1.1.5 It is understood that the new SS location is currently under consideration by the Transmission System Operator (TSO), Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks Transmission (SSEN-T), with further details understood to be released at a later date.
- 1.1.6 Once defined, the grid connection infrastructure would be progressed through one or more separate consent applications, submitted by the relevant parties. These applications would be accompanied by appropriate detailed environmental assessment.

1.2 Document Purpose

- 1.2.1 On 17 February 2026, the Inner House of the Court of Session delivered a decision in *Raeshaw Farms Limited v Scottish Ministers* [2026] CSIH 10. The Court quashed the planning permission for the Wull Muir Wind Farm on the basis that the reporter appointed by the Scottish Ministers had, in granting consent, failed to lawfully consider whether the wind farm and its grid connection formed a single project for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) purposes and irrationally weighed the benefits of connected and operational renewable generation without considering the environmental impacts of the grid connection required to deliver those benefits.
- 1.2.2 The Court did not, however, hold that a single consent application is required for the whole project; rather, it confirmed that grid connection may form part of the 'project' for EIA purposes whilst being capable of being the subject of a separate consent application. The identity of the 'project' is therefore a matter of evaluative judgment, having regard to factors such as functional interdependence.
- 1.2.3 Having regard to the non-exhaustive criteria set out in *R (Wingfield) v Canterbury City Council* [2020] JPL 154 (common ownership, simultaneous determinations, functional interdependence, and stand-alone project status) the grid connection will be consented under a separate consenting regime, with the application for consent likely to be submitted by SSEN. The grid connection will be undertaken and owned by SSEN. The site of the Proposed Development and the grid connection works are in separate ownership. The Applicant acknowledges that a grid connection will be required to connect the Proposed Development to the National Grid and, consequently, there is a degree of functional interdependence between the Proposed Development and any grid connection infrastructure.
- 1.2.4 The Applicant has prepared this proportionate Environmental Appraisal (EA) of the Indicative Grid Connection Corridor (IGCC) and associated SS Study Area, should the Reporters or the Scottish Ministers consider that they are functionally 'one project' with the Proposed Development for EIA purposes. This EA is based on the information known at the time of writing (April 2026) and demonstrates that the likely effects of the IGCC and SS have been identified and understood as is reasonably practical and proportionate given their stage of development and given that they are being promoted by other

¹ <https://www.dpea.scotland.gov.uk/Document.aspx?id=1177329>

entities. As construction and operation of the grid connection infrastructure will be subject to a separate consenting process and will be the responsibility of the Transmission System operator in due course, precise details on construction and operation methodologies (together with appropriate mitigation) remain unknown, and there are limitations on the level of detail currently available.

1.3 Document Structure

1.3.1 This document covers the following:

- Which grid route and connection point have been assessed and why this particular route has been chosen for assessment.
- Grid connection infrastructure components.
- Grid reform.
- The environmental appraisal methodology applied to the assessment.
- The grid connection environmental appraisal.
- An overview of the TOs routing process which includes standard best practice for route selection.
- A summary of the identified potential significant effects.

2. Grid Connection

2.1 Indicative Grid Connection Corridor

2.1.1 An IGCC and SS Study Area has been identified as shown in **Figure 1, Annex A**.

2.1.2 The SS Study Area was informed by SSEN-Ts quarterly Transmission Owner Reinforcement Instruction (TORI) report², as well as high level discussions between the Applicant and SSEN-T. This area is not fixed but shows the approximate area under consideration for the point of connection (PoC). The SS is proposed to be utilised by other projects in addition to the Proposed Development.

2.1.3 An IGCC has been identified between the Proposed Development Red Line Boundary and the SS Study Area. This corridor is approximately 5 km long and 3.2 km wide and has been guided by high level discussions with SSEN-T. It is therefore likely that any grid connection routing design refinement will be located within the IGCC, although specific options for the direct route are unknown at this stage. The TORI Report states that this is proposed to be a shared use circuit with another development, Coreen Hills Wind Farm, however the status of that development is currently unknown therefore it is considered within this report that the grid route as identified would be constructed regardless of Coreen Hills Wind Farm gaining consent.

2.2 Grid Connection Components

2.2.1 The grid connection for the Proposed Development would be likely to comprise the construction of a new double circuit 132 kV overhead line (OHL), supported by either steel lattice pylons or wood poles, between the Proposed Development substation and the PoC. To connect to the SS, a short section of underground cable (UGC) would be required. To facilitate the transition from OHL to UGC, a cable sealing end (CSE) compound would be required.

2.2.2 The specific configuration will be determined once the PoC is confirmed, and will depend on a balance of environmental sensitivity, technical feasibility, operational requirements, maintenance considerations and construction practicalities. The likely infrastructure components are described below.

Overhead Lines

2.2.3 OHLs transmit electricity using conductors suspended above ground on either wood poles or steel lattice pylons.

2.2.4 OHLs are regarded as the most cost-effective and operationally dependable method of electricity transmission, as they are straightforward to maintain, easy to inspect, and relatively quick to repair in the event of a fault.

2.2.5 Their overall visual impact depends on the height and spacing of the supporting structures as well as the surrounding landform and vegetation, which can significantly influence how visible the line appears in

² https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/globalassets/documents/transmission-owner-reinforcement-instruction-tori-quarterly-update-reports/shet_tori_quarterly_reports_q3_2025.pdf

the wider landscape. Many OHLs also incorporate an earth wire positioned above the conductors to provide lightning protection and enhance operational resilience.

Steel Lattice Pylons

- 2.2.6 Steel lattice pylons are used where greater conductor height, longer spans or additional circuit capacity is required.
- 2.2.7 The structures are fabricated from galvanised steel sections bolted together, providing a durable and long-lasting support system with an operational life of around 80 years. Lattice pylons offer greater strength and flexibility than wood poles, making them suitable for locations where challenging ground conditions, larger clearances, or double-circuit arrangements are required.
- 2.2.8 Pylons can vary in height, typically ranging from 27 - 42 m and can have a span length ranging from of 200 - 280 m, depending on the specific design, terrain and required clearance to maintain safety standards. The pylon location footprint can vary depending on design factors, with a maximum of 15 m x 15 m. Pylons would be grey in colour. A typical steel lattice pylon is included as **Plate 2-1**.
- 2.2.9 Three types of pylons, as described below:
- Suspension pylons: these are used for straight sections of OHL where there is no need to terminate the conductor;
 - Angle / tension pylons: these are typically used where there is a need to change the orientation of the OHL; and
 - Terminal pylons; where the OHL transitions to UGC, via a CSE compound.
- 2.2.10 There are two possible foundations for the construction of steel lattice pylons (pad and column or piled); the selection of which is dependent on ground conditions and type of loads (to be considered at detailed design stage).

Plate 2-1: Typical Steel Lattice Pylon (L7)



Wood Poles

- 2.2.11 Wood poles are usually employed for single circuit 132 kV connections and offer a lighter, less visually prominent alternative to steel lattice pylons.
- 2.2.12 Constructed from pressure-impregnated softwood and fitted with galvanised steel cross-arms and insulator assemblies, wood poles weather naturally over time, often blending more readily into rural landscapes. Their operational life is generally around 40 years. Wood pole solutions are often preferred where landscape sensitivity is high or where the technical requirements do not necessitate the use of larger pylon structures.

- 2.2.13 Wood poles typically range from 14 - 16 m in height and achieve span lengths of between 80 - 100 m, with longer spans of up to 120 m possible in favourable terrain.
- 2.2.14 In addition, there is the potential the OHL could comprise composite poles. Composite poles utility poles are made from fibre reinforced polymer (FRP) composites rather than traditional materials like wood, steel, or concrete. However, it is unlikely that SSEN-T would adopt these composite poles due to anticipated public opposition.

Plate 2-2: Typical 'H' Wooden Pole



Underground Cable

- 2.2.15 UGC provides an alternative means of transmitting electricity where OHL routing is unsuitable due to environmental or technical constraints. UGC systems involve burying insulated conductors within a trench, typically around 1.3 m deep, with a trench width of between 1.5 - 2 m, although this may increase where ground conditions or construction access requires additional working room. A typical UGC trench is included as Plate 2-2.
- 2.2.16 UGCs are installed with specially prepared thermal backfill materials to ensure they operate efficiently and safely. Where UGC transitions to an OHL, above-ground infrastructure such as sealing-end compounds or terminal poles are needed to facilitate the connection. While UGC avoids the visual impact associated with OHL structures, it can involve a greater degree of construction disturbance, longer repair times in the event of faults and generally higher installation and maintenance costs.

Plate 2-3: Typical UGC Trench**Cable Sealing End**

- 2.2.17 To facilitate the transition from OHL to UGC, a cable sealing end (CSE) compound would be required. A typical CSE tower would be approximately 28 m (+/-3 m) in height from ground level and be supported by below-ground foundations at each tower leg.
- 2.2.18 CSE compounds have a footprint of approximately 50 m x 50 m, surrounded by a permanent fence up to 2.4 m in height.
- 2.2.19 Foundations may take the form of a reinforced concrete pad and column design, raft foundation, single or grouped piled foundations or rock anchor foundations. Foundation types and designs for the tower would be confirmed following detailed geotechnical investigation at each tower position.

Switching Station

- 2.2.20 A SS is an essential component of the grid connection, and used to control, route and isolate electricity circuits within the power network, allowing power flows to be managed safely and efficiently without changing voltage levels. They enable sections of the network to be connected, disconnected or isolated for maintenance or fault response, supporting resilient and reliable operation of the electricity system and the integration of renewable energy.
- 2.2.21 A new SS will be required to connect the Proposed Development to the transmission system. SS facilities usually include switchgear, protection and control equipment, together with dedicated control building housing communications and Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) systems. The SS would require a construction compound which would contain internal access tracks, hardstanding areas and a secure perimeter fence to ensure safe operation and restrict unauthorised access.
- 2.2.22 The size and layout of the SS will depend on the voltage of the connection, the number of incoming and outgoing circuits and the specific requirements of the SSEN-T.

2.3 Grid Reform**Introduction**

- 2.3.1 Through grid reform, the National Energy Systems Operator (NESO) and the network partners, who are responsible for operating the electricity networks across the UK, aim to achieve a refined queue of viable, 'real' projects that would facilitate in achieving the UK Government's Clean Power 2030 (CP30) Action Plan³ ambitions and eliminate all stalled projects⁴. This is an important overhaul replacing the no longer fit for purpose first-come first-served grid connection processes with a more "first ready, first needed and

³ UK Government. Clean Power 2030 Action Plan. Available at: [Clean Power 2030 Action Plan - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100000/clean-power-2030-action-plan.pdf) (Accessed 16/04/26)

⁴ i.e. projects that are currently taking up grid capacity that will not progress and are blocking other real projects from progressing.

connected” approach. The grid reform will facilitate SSEN-T and NESO to plan and develop the transmission network that is vital for Clean Power and Net Zero targets amid growing demands.

- 2.3.2 Gate 2 to the Whole Queue (G2TWQ) is a one-time exercise that intends to apply the new grid reform criteria retrospectively to all existing connections. Through the G2TWQ process, the TOs and NESO are restudying and/or optimising how the projects that remain in the refined queue will connect to the transmission network. As a result, the points of connection, and the grid route, for most projects are subject to change, while maintaining the most economic and efficient design.

Grid Reform Gate

- 2.3.3 As part of the reformed connections process, projects are assessed and assigned a status (Gate 1 or Gate 2) based on their readiness and strategic alignment with the UK’s energy goals as defined in the CP30 Action Plan.³

- Gate 1 applies to projects that do not meet the Gate 2 criteria. Gate 1 projects will not be assigned a confirmed connection date but may progress through future windows if readiness is demonstrated.
- Gate 2 applies to projects that meet the new requirements for readiness and strategic alignment. These projects can secure a confirmed connection date, connection point, and queue position.

- 2.3.4 Projects must meet and maintain Gate 2 readiness criteria:

- meet minimum acreage requirements;
- provision of Original Red Line Boundary for site on which project is located; and
- secured Land Rights.

- 2.3.5 And meet one of the Gate 2 Strategic Alignment Criteria:

- eligible for relevant ‘protections’;
- aligned to the capacities within the CP30 Action Plan³ as described in the Connections Network Design Methodology;
- designated as described in the Project Designation Methodology; or
- a project not within scope of the CP30 Action Plan³.

Craig Watch Status

Grid Reform Gate

- 2.3.6 The Proposed Development has been allocated a Gate 1 status. However, since the Proposed Development had submitted its planning application before 20 December 2024, it is eligible for Protection 3a.
- 2.3.7 Protection 3a means that the wind farm is guaranteed a Gate 2 offer in a future gated application window should the project achieve planning consent and will be allowed to exceed both the zonal and Great Britain’s permitted capacities (as set out within the CP30 Action Plan³).
- 2.3.8 The Proposed Development will be required to re-apply at the next gated application window following consent. Currently the dates of the gated windows have not been made public.
- 2.3.9 Until the Proposed Development receives a Gate 2 Offer³, the connection date, grid connection point and route connecting the Proposed Development to the grid network will not be known.
- 2.3.10 This document provides a proportionate Environmental Appraisal of a grid connection route within the IGCC between the Proposed Development and the proposed SS. The grid connection route has been identified on the basis of professional judgement, taking into account standard best practice regarding route selection, is speculative at this stage and is likely to change. It is expected that this would be comprised of a section of underground cable with the majority of the route comprising an OHL (supported by either steel lattice towers or wood poles) to a SS location in the vicinity of Dufftown. The Applicant is not seeking consent for this indicative grid connection route, which will be subject to a separate routeing process, application for consent, and environmental survey and assessment as appropriate, by the TO.
- 2.3.11 It is the TO’s responsibility to design, consent, build and operate the grid connection from the wind farm to the transmission substation.

3. Environmental Appraisal

3.1 Scope and Methodology

- 3.1.1 As identified in **Chapter 2** the IGCC may be subject to change following both the outcome of G2TWQ analysis and the TOs design and assessment processes, over which the Applicant does not have control.
- 3.1.2 This EA is therefore proportionate and presents, in an appropriate manner in light of the circumstances relating to the proposed grid connection infrastructure (primarily the uncertainties involved with the routing and connection point), a high-level appraisal, based on the information available at the time of writing (April 2026), with cognisance given to the Holford Rules⁵ (**Annex B**) and SSEN-T routing guidance⁶. There has been no additional survey work or consultation undertaken as part of the appraisal.
- 3.1.3 This EA has been informed by the following sources:
- Relevant online resources to inform the baseline including:
 - Aberdeenshire and Moray Historic Environment Record (HER).⁷
 - NatureScot (2019) National Landscape Character Assessment.⁸
 - Carol Anderson Landscape Associates (2018) Moray Local Landscape Designation Review.⁹
 - Craig Watch Wind Farm Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) and supporting documents, submitted in 2022.
 - Craig Watch Wind Farm Supplementary Environmental Information (SEI) and supporting documents, submitted in 2024.
- 3.1.4 This EA assesses the potential for likely significant effects for identified environmental receptors, as shown in **Figure 1, Annex A**. It does not determine the significance of the effect (i.e. major, moderate, minor or negligible). It identifies the key constraints and receptors for each technical issues and assessment is made on whether significant effects are likely to arise due to the grid connection on its own or in-combination with the Proposed Development.
- 3.1.5 The potential environmental impacts identified in the Craig Watch Wind Farm EIAR and SEI which may also arise from the grid connection include:
- Landscape and visual;
 - Ecology and ornithology;
 - Geology, hydrology and peat;
 - Traffic and transport; and
 - Noise.
- 3.1.6 Impacts from/upon socio-economics, climate change, air quality, shadow flicker, aviation, and telecommunications will not be caused by the grid connection infrastructure in its own right and therefore these issues are scoped out of further assessment within this document. No impacts were identified that would only be caused by the grid connection infrastructure that have not been considered for the wind farm.
- 3.1.7 This EA is based on the assumption that the grid connection would be likely to comprise the construction of a new double circuit 132 kV OHL, supported by either steel lattice towers or wood poles (as described in **Chapter 2**), between the Proposed Development and the PoC. The precise configuration can only be determined after final route selection and detailed design.

⁵ Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission Limited (SHETL) (2004). The Holford Rules: Guidelines for the Routing of New High Voltage Overhead Transmission Lines. Available at: <https://www.nationalgrid.com/sites/default/files/documents/13795-The%20Holford%20Rules.pdf> (Accessed: 16/04/26)

⁶ SSEN Transmission (2018). Procedures for Routing Overhead Lines of 132kV and above. Available at: <https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/globalassets/projects/2030-projects/2030-project-documents/routeing-overhead-lines.pdf> (Accessed: 16/04/26)

⁷ Aberdeenshire and Moray Historic Environment Record (HER) [Home - Aberdeenshire Council Historic Environment Record](#) (Accessed 22/04/26)

⁸ NatureScot (2019) National Landscape Character Assessment. Available at: [Scottish Landscape Character Types Map and Descriptions | NatureScot](#) (Accessed 22/04/26)

⁹ Carol Anderson Landscape Associates (2018) Moray Local Landscape Designation Review. Available at: <http://www.moray.gov.uk/downloads/file124520.pdf> (Accessed 22/04/26)

3.2 Environmental Appraisal

Landscape and Visual including Residential Visual Amenity

Baseline

- 3.2.1 The landscape and visual baseline conditions across the Study Area for the IGCC are described below. The landscape baseline description sets out the landscape character types and designated landscapes which are considered in the appraisal. The visual baseline description sets out the different visual receptors found within the Study Area which are considered in the appraisal.
- 3.2.2 Following a desk-based review of relevant online resources, the following key constraints were identified within the Study Area:
- Landscape character
 - Locally designated landscapes
 - Visual amenity including residential visual amenity.

Study Area

- 3.2.3 For the purposes of the Landscape and Visual appraisal, the Study Area was defined as a 1 km offset from the IGCC shown on **Figure 1 (Annex A)**. This is based on the extent of likely visibility of the infrastructure.

Landscape Character

- 3.2.4 The NatureScot digital map-based National Landscape Character Assessment¹⁰ was used to identify Landscape Character Types (LCTs) across the Study Area, as shown in **Figure 2 (Annex A)**. There are two LCTs within the Study Area: LCT 292 - Open Upland in the south of the Study Area; and LCT 289 - Upland Farmed Valleys in the north. The grid connection would pass through both LCTs. It is noted that two existing OHL pass through LCT 289 – Upland Farmed Valleys, in a broadly north-east to south-west alignment, including the OHL associated with Dorenell Wind Farm (operational).
- 3.2.5 The key characteristics of LCT 292 - Open Upland are described at the link below¹¹ (and listed in **EIAR – Volume 02 – Chapter 5**):
- *“Open, expansive landscape of smooth and steep-sided hills and exposed, rounded fractured rock summits which coalesce across elevated moorland valleys to form an arc of high ground.*
 - *Simple, large scale vegetation patterns and managed moorland of hill tops and sides, with occasional large conifer plantations.*
 - *Contrasting small scale pattern of land use at lower levels and close to minor roads, consisting of farmsteads, peat cuts, and rough pastures, sometimes integrated with small forest plantations.*
 - *North-east to south-west orientated burns and rivers with natural, meandering courses, and associated with ribbons of native woodland on the sheltered, steeper valley sides.*
 - *Broad, farmed and sparsely settled central basin, almost encircled by the arc of hills.*
 - *Few roads and structures, other than occasional farms, cottages and abandoned stone buildings in lower areas.*
 - *Sense of remoteness, isolation and openness, resulting from the wide, sweeping scale of the internal landscape and limited settlement and roads, and presence of ruins and relicts.”*
- 3.2.6 The key characteristics of LCT 289 – Upland Farmed Valleys are described in the link below¹² (and listed in **EIAR – Volume 02 – Chapter 5**):
- *“Network of long, elevated, well-drained, connected valleys containing rivers and large burns.*
 - *Extensive forest plantations on hillsides and some broad summits linked to the network of broadleaf woodlands, policy plantings, smaller forests and tree belts at lower levels, which are integrated with farmland.*
 - *A mix of larger, fields on gentler slopes, and more complex pattern of small and irregular fields on steeper slopes, upper margins, and in folds and indentations on hill sides.*

¹⁰ NatureScot (2019) National Landscape Character Assessment. [Online] Available at: <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=e3b4fbb9fc504cc4abd04e1ebc891d4e&extent=-2030551.0017%2C6851563.2052%2C1100309.6769%2C8923312.4198%2C102100>

¹¹ NatureScot (2019) National Landscape Character Assessment. Landscape Character Type 292: Open Upland [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/LCA/LCT%20292%20-%20Open%20Upland%20-%20Final%20pdf.pdf>

¹² NatureScot (2019) National Landscape Character Assessment. Landscape Character Type 289: Upland Farmed Valleys [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/LCA/LCT%20289%20-%20Upland%20Farmed%20Valleys%20-%20Final%20pdf.pdf>

- *Containment of the River Spey provided by the spurs and steep sides of the western slopes.*
- *Relatively sparse, historic settlement pattern and distilleries, focussed in valleys, and connected by a simple framework of winding roads, with few areas of new development.*
- *Contrast between the intimate views in narrower, undulating, wooded valleys, and the views from broader valleys which open up to reveal longer distance views of hills in surrounding landscapes, and to the coastal farmlands.”*

Locally Designated Landscapes

- 3.2.7 Areas of landscape which are recognised as ‘areas of high amenity value’ (as noted in Holford Rules 1 and 2, **Annex B**), are afforded protection at a local level through their designation including as Special Landscape Areas (SLA). The Ben Rinnes SLA is found within the Study Area, to the north-west of the Site and west of the IGCC. The most eastern extent of the SLA, to the east of the A941 and to the south of the A920, falls within the IGCC.
- 3.2.8 The Statement of Importance¹³ for Ben Rinnes SLA notes several special qualities of relevance, including:
- *“Uplands between Glen Rinnes and Glen Fiddich have a sinuous sculpted appearance with flowing slopes and rounded tops, deeply dissected by narrow valleys.*
 - *The narrow Glen Fiddich is more remote.*
 - *The 14th century Auchindoun Castle, a former tower house with a great vaulted hall, occupies a strategic position, set on a knoll high above a loop in the River Fiddich. Extensive birch woodlands trace the river and extend into the steep-sided gullies which cut into the hills which provide a dramatic immediate setting to the castle to the south-east.*
 - *The hills between Glens Rinnes and Fiddich are less frequented but accommodate a network of Heritage Routes used by mountain bikers and walkers.”*
- 3.2.9 Given its designated status, it is expected that the SLA would be avoided if possible during route selection.

Visual Receptors

- 3.2.10 There are a number of visual receptors within the Study Area. These include:
- Residents in properties located across the landscape, and in the settlement of Dufftown (including **SEI - Volume 02B - Visual 03.10a-)**;
 - Road users travelling along the A941, A920 and B9014, as well as other minor roads in the area;
 - People travelling along the Keith and Dufftown Railway line; and
 - People engaging in recreational activity, including hill walkers and people travelling along the Core Path network and, those visiting Auchindoun Castle (including **EIAR – Volume 04 – TA 5.7**).

Appraisal of Potential Effects

Construction

Potential Sources of Effects

- 3.2.11 The construction works required for the installation of the OHL and steel lattice towers/wood pole supports may result in the following activities:
- Vegetation removal (including hedges, scrub, trees and woodland). Wayleaves may be required through areas of woodland and shelterbelts if they cannot be avoided, although typically they would be avoided where possible;
 - Construction of temporary construction compounds, which would be reinstated after use;
 - Construction of temporary access tracks, which would be reinstated after use;
 - Potential need for watercourse crossings for temporary access track construction;
 - Excavation of pits for steel lattice tower/wood pole foundations, installation of foundations and steel lattice towers/wood poles, and stringing of the overhead cables;
 - Construction of the proposed switching station;

¹³ Carol Anderson Landscape Associates (2018) Moray Local Landscape Designation Review. [Online] Available at: <http://www.moray.gov.uk/downloads/file124520.pdf>

- Removal of temporary infrastructure and reinstatement of the ground; and
- The presence of people, and movement of associated construction vehicles and plant, including any lighting.

3.2.12 The majority of the effects which could occur during the construction phase would be short-term and largely reversible.

Landscape Effects

3.2.13 Construction activity is likely to have physical impacts on the landscape of the LCT 292 – Open Upland and LCT 289 - Upland Farmed Valleys. Physical impacts arising during construction would include the construction of the steel lattice towers or wood poles which could result in the removal of some landscape features such as woodland/scrub, and disturbance to pastural or arable fields and moorland. Physical impacts could also include the introduction of temporary access tracks, compounds, and construction activity including the movement of construction vehicles and plant.

3.2.14 Construction activity could have some localised physical or indirect effects on the special qualities of the Ben Rinnes SLA (unless completely avoided), including potentially in relation to the “14th century Auchindoun Castle... [which] occupies a strategic position, set on a knoll high above a loop in the River Fiddich“ as, depending upon the detailed routeing, construction activity may be visible in views to and from Auchindoun Castle, and could result in the loss of some vegetation, for example down by the River Fiddich, subject to the detail of the final alignment. This could require spanning of the “steep-sided gullies... which provide a dramatic immediate setting to the castle”. Avoidance of areas close to and seen in association with the castle, and of the areas with steeper gradients is likely to be sought as part of the design.

3.2.15 Construction activity could alter views of the landscape, looking towards the uplands between Glen Rinnes and Glen Fiddich which have a “sinuous sculpted appearance with flowing slopes and rounded tops”. Construction activity could result in short-term, reversible and what would be expected to be localised impacts on the special qualities of the SLA during construction, but this would be dependent on the final alignment and design of the OHL.

3.2.16 Given the temporary and largely reversible nature of construction activity, significant effects on the landscape character of LCT 292 and 289 are unlikely. The effects of construction would be localised and largely short term.

3.2.17 As well as embedded mitigation achieved by good routeing and design (following Holford Rules), construction activity is likely to be mitigated by adhering to best practice guidance, which would include commitments to minimise disturbance and to restore any disturbed land following completion of construction. Specific details of construction mitigation and restoration would be detailed in a Construction Environmental Management Plan (Refer to **EIAR – Volume 04 – TA 2.1**).

Visual Effects

3.2.18 Depending on the final alignment, there is potential for construction activity to be visible in views experienced by residents in residential properties, people travelling along the A941, and those engaging in hill walking, such as on ascent of and at the summit of The Scalp. Residential properties are well spaced in this landscape, and so it should be possible to avoid locating the OHL in close views experienced from them.

3.2.19 Some views of the OHL, supported by steel towers or wood poles, would be partially obscured by intervening landform and vegetation (forestry, riparian woodland, and roadside vegetation), particularly that found along the main roads and around residential properties and farms.

3.2.20 Views of construction activity may be available from Auchindoun Castle, depending upon the design of the infrastructure, and the routeing of the OHL. Given the prominence of the surrounding elevated landform from this location, it is likely that views of construction activity would be backclothed by rising landform behind it or afforded some screening by intervening landform or vegetation. This would help reduce the visual prominence of construction activity in the landscape.

3.2.21 Given the presence of roadside vegetation along the A920 and B9014, views of construction activity from these routes is expected to often be screened. Likewise, the presence of buildings and vegetation around Dufftown could screen views of construction activity from these receptors.

3.2.22 Given the temporary and largely reversible nature of construction activity, significant effects on views and visual amenity are unlikely. Most construction activities are on or close to the ground and therefore views of these activities would be localised.

Operation*Potential Sources of Effects*

- 3.2.23 The effects of the Grid Connection on landscape and visual amenity, once operational, is likely to be associated with the long-term presence of the steel towers/wood poles supporting the new OHL, in the landscape and views, as well as the permanent presence of the switching station.
- 3.2.24 The majority of the effects which could occur during the operational phase would be long-term and largely reversible.

Landscape Effects

- 3.2.25 The southern part of the OHL (connecting into the Site) would pass through LCT 292 – Open Upland, whilst the northern part of the OHL would pass through LCT 289 - Upland Farmed Valleys. Both these LCTs have existing human influence within them, including extensive areas of coniferous forestry, high voltage OHLs, wind turbines, main and minor roads, Keith and Dufftown railway line, settlements and scattered properties, farms and distilleries.
- 3.2.26 These LCTs are considered to be of reduced susceptibility to OHL development given the presence of existing man-made features and their relatively simple landcover. The Glen Fiddich area within LCT 289 - Upland Farmed Valleys is of localised higher susceptibility given the smaller, more intimate scale of the valley, the more complex topography, and the presence of trees and scrub. Across both areas, a key sensitivity is the nature and grain of the topography, which would be considered as part of detailed routeing.
- 3.2.27 In accordance with Holford Rule 4⁵ (**Annex B**), the selected route alignment should avoid crossing high points where the OHL would be seen against the sky and should utilise backclothing provided by landform where possible. Within LCT 292, an alignment which is located across the lower slopes and therefore backclothed by the smooth hills of Ben Main or The Scalp would help reduce the prominence of the OHL in the landscape. The OHL is likely to be more prominent in the landscape if it was sited further up-slope, where it could be seen to diminish the scale of the local landform of Ben Main or The Scalp. This would not be in accordance with the Holford Rules (included as **Annex B**) and is therefore likely to be avoided.
- 3.2.28 The northern part of the OHL (within LCT 289 - Upland Farmed Valleys) would pass through areas of farmland, as it heads north towards the area of search for the Siting Station, near Tulloch and Haggish Woods. This LCT contains large-scale rolling farmland, with a relatively simple landcover of fields, forestry and riparian woodland along rivers and burns. The rolling landform restricts longer ranging views across the LCT, and therefore the OHL is likely to be afforded some screening and backclothing throughout the LCT. The presence of woodland and forestry may also help reduce the perceived scale of the steel tower/wood pole OHL, and the potential for sky lining. These factors would help reduce the prominence of the OHL in the landscape, and it is unlikely that a steel tower/wood pole OHL would affect the perceived scale of the landscape. Depending on the final alignment, localised areas of vegetation may need to be removed to facilitate a wayleave. For example, when crossing the River Fiddich. This could result in some impacts on the landscape character; however, the direct physical effects would be localised. In accordance with the Holford Rules (**Annex B**), smaller areas of high amenity value (e.g., areas of woodland) should be avoided.
- 3.2.29 A section of the OHL may pass through the Ben Rinnes SLA, to the east of the A941, unless the SLA is avoided. This could result in physical effects on the landscape and could impact the special qualities of the SLA, to a localised degree. The introduction of the OHL could influence the special quality associated with Auchindoun Castle which states that the castle “*occupies a strategic position, set on a knoll high above a loop in the River Fiddich*” as the OHL is likely to be visible in the landscape, albeit it is likely to be backclothed by landform and partially screened by intervening vegetation in some locations.
- 3.2.30 There could be in-combination cumulative effects arising from interactions between the existing OHL in the landscape (passing to the west of the Castle – see **Figure 1, Annex A**) and this proposed OHL, including the potential for partial encirclement if passes to the east of the castle, depending on the final alignment. This issue should be considered as the routeing, and design, is developed and avoided if possible. The presence of the proposed OHL may affect views looking towards the uplands between Glen Rinnes and Glen Fiddich which have a “*sinuous sculpted appearance with flowing slopes and rounded tops*” by introducing angular vertical man-made features. The OHL could result in long-term localised impacts on the special qualities of the SLA, but this would be dependent on the final alignment of the OHL. Design embedded mitigation, achieved by landscape-led routeing, should reduce the potential for significant effects. Holford Rule 6 (**Annex B**) requires the spacing of OHL, to avoid a concentration or ‘wirescape’, and the resulting cumulative effects. Adherence to this rule should help reduce the potential for cumulative effects.

Visual Effects

- 3.2.31 There are a number of residential receptors located within the Study Area, including a larger concentration in the settlement of Dufftown, and scattered properties (including residential properties) elsewhere throughout the Study Area. From the settlement of Dufftown, the OHL would be largely screened by intervening landform and vegetation, and effects on these receptors are unlikely to be significant.
- 3.2.32 More open views may be experienced from some scattered residential properties within the valley. However, it is expected that the OHL would be afforded backclothing by both landform and forest/woodland or trees. Intervening vegetation, including vegetation within the curtilage of properties, forestry blocks, riparian woodland and woody vegetation along field boundaries, would help to provide some screening or filtering of the OHL in views.
- 3.2.33 Several transport routes pass through the Study Area, including the A941, A920 and B9014, and a number of minor roads. The Keith and Dufftown Railway run broadly adjacent to the B9014. Roadside vegetation along the A920 and forestry either side of the B9014 and the railway line would help screen views out across the landscape from these routes. Therefore, views of the OHL are likely to be glimpsed, and experienced as transient rather than continuous views. More open views are available from the A941, in the west of the Study Area. People travelling along this route may experience more visibility of the OHL, depending on its alignment and design. However, the OHL is likely to be backclothed by rising landform in the distance and may also be partially screened by roadside vegetation and rising landform near Auchindoun Castle and Tomnoan. Therefore, the effects which are experienced are unlikely to be significant, particularly as the OHL would be seen at an oblique direction to travel and would be transient in nature.
- 3.2.34 Recreational receptors, including those walking in the hills or along Core Paths may experience views of the OHL in the landscape. It is noted that most of the Core Paths are located in Dufftown and are unlikely to enable visibility due to intervening buildings, vegetation and landform. Likewise, the Core Path along the River Fiddich (west of the A941) is well contained by forestry, and more open views to the east would be very limited. When viewed from hill summits, including The Scalp (487m AOD), the OHL is likely to be seen backclothed by landform, and would be seen in the context of other human infrastructure such as other high voltage OHLs, wind turbines, roads and settlement. Therefore, effects on these receptors are unlikely to be significant, and if significant, the effects would be localised, given OHL infrastructure is relatively lightweight in design, and typically not widely seen.
- 3.2.35 Given the width of the IGCC, it is considered likely that sufficient distance could be maintained between the OHL and Auchindoun Castle so as to reduce the visual impact. Given the presence of smooth hills in this area, the OHL is likely to be seen backclothed by landform, and depending on final alignment and design, may be afforded some screening by nearby forestry and woodland. This would help reduce the prominence of the OHL in views. Therefore, effects on these receptors are unlikely to be significant.
- 3.2.36 In terms of cumulative visual effects with the existing OHL, there is potential for localised significant effects, but this would be governed by the approach to routeing and particularly adherence to Holford Rule 6, to avoid a concentration or 'wirescape'.

Conclusions

- 3.2.37 The Grid Connection associated for the Proposed Development may result in some localised effects during construction. However, these would be temporary and largely reversible and are unlikely to be significant. Likewise, the operational phase of the OHL may result in adverse effects on landscape character and views experienced by visual receptors within the Study Area. These effects would be experienced over the longer term, however in most cases are not expected to be significant as the OHL is likely to be afforded some backclothing and screening, or filtering by vegetation, which would reduce its prominence in the landscape and views, and ensure effects are localised.
- 3.2.38 With regards to cumulative effects, Auchindoun Castle is a particularly sensitive receptor which may experience cumulative effects due to interactions with the existing OHL for Dorenell Wind Farm. Careful attention to routeing and design would be required to avoid this potential effect, with reference to Holford Rules 2 (refers to setting) and 6 (refers to avoiding concentration or a wirescape). Rule 1 requires, if possible, the avoidance of areas of highest amenity value even if total length is increased. Rule 3 requires the most direct line to be selected, avoiding sharp changes of direction and the need for angle towers. All Rules would need to be carefully considered to balance and reduce potential impacts on Auchindoun Castle.
- 3.2.39 The extent of significance of the stand alone and cumulative effects would depend largely on the final alignment and design of the OHL, and how it sits within the landscape. Other receptors, including those

travelling along the A941 may also experience some cumulative visual effects, however these views would be transient and largely seen at an oblique direction to travel.

- 3.2.40 It is not considered that the landscape and visual effects of the OHL would be any greater than the effects already identified for the Proposed Development (albeit they would extend over a different area). Effects of the OHL would not increase the significance already identified for the Proposed Development when considered both in combination with and in addition.
- 3.2.41 As the design and alignment are refined, opportunities to minimise co-visibility, avoid skyline locations, and utilise existing landscape features for filtering or screening would further reduce the likelihood of significant in-combination effects. This is in accordance with best practice on the routeing of overhead transmission lines, as set out within the Holford Rules¹⁴. Once alignment has been finalised, the Grid Connection would be subject to an EIA, including a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment or Appraisal, which would fully assess the landscape and visual effects of the OHL.
- 3.2.42 Given the size of the IGCC, it is considered that there is adequate space to accommodate an OHL whilst achieving sufficient separation from residential properties, such that the Residential Visual Amenity Threshold would not be breached.
- 3.2.43 Overall, the addition of the OHL is not expected to materially increase the significance of landscape and visual effects already identified for the Proposed Development, and refinement of the alignment would help minimise opportunities for co-visibility and skyline intrusion.

Cultural Heritage

Baseline

- 3.2.44 Known heritage assets within the IGCC and SS Study Area have been identified via review of National Record of the Historic Environment (NHRE) databases as maintained by Historic Environment Scotland (HES), as shown in **Figure 3 (Annex A)**. The online version of the Aberdeenshire and Moray Historic Environment Record (HER) was also viewed on 13th April 2026.
- 3.2.45 Within the IGCC, the NRHE identifies one Scheduled Monument (SM), Auchindoun Castle (**SM90024; EIAR – Volume 04 – TA 6.1 - Asset No. 115**), which is also a Property in Care; one Category B Listed Building (LB), Auchindoun Mill (**LB15853; EIAR – Volume 04 – TA 6.1 - Asset No. 141**), 19 non-designated heritage assets and one previous archaeological assessment. The HER identifies a further c. 31 non-designated heritage assets within the Study Area. Non-designated assets range in date from the prehistoric period to the modern period and primarily comprise settlement and agricultural remains.
- 3.2.46 Key constraints are likely to relate to the potential for impacts upon the setting of the designated heritage assets identified including Auchindoun Castle (**SM90024; EIAR – Volume 04 – TA 6.1 Asset No. 115**) and the Category B Listed Auchindoun Mill (**LB15853; EIAR – Volume 04 – TA 6.1 - Asset No. 141**).
- 3.2.47 Within the SS Study Area, the NRHE identifies two SMs, Wood of Furlhead, settlement and field systems (**SM3685; EIAR – Volume 04 – TA 6.1 - Asset No. 113**) and Balvenie Castle (**SM90028; EIAR – Volume 04 – TA 6.1 - Asset No. 1114**). Balvenie Castle is also a Property in Care of Scottish Ministers. Ten Listed Buildings are also located within the Study Area including the Category A Listed Drummuir Castle (**LB2296; EIAR – Volume 04 – TA 6.1 - Asset No. 124**), eight Category B Listed Buildings and one Category C Listed Building. The majority of the Listed Buildings are associated with Drummuir Castle and the settlement of Drummuir. In addition to the designated assets noted above, the NRHE records c. 40 non-designated heritage assets and the HER record a further c. 20 non-designated heritage assets. Non-designated assets range in date from the prehistoric period to the modern period and primarily comprise settlement and agricultural remains; many of which are associated with Wood of Furlhead settlement; a number of recorded remains are also associated with St Fumac's Church at Drummuir.
- 3.2.48 Key constraints are likely to relate to the potential for impacts upon the setting of the designated heritage assets identified including, in particular, Balvenie Castle (**SM90028; EIAR – Volume 04 – TA 6.1 - Asset No. 1114**), Drummuir Castle (**LB2296; EIAR – Volume 04 – TA 6.1 - Asset No. 124**) and Wood of Furlhead, settlement and field systems (**SM3685; EIAR – Volume 04 – TA 6.1 - Asset No. 113**). However, it should also be noted that the SS Study Area appears to be one of high archaeological potential and there is potential for direct physical impacts upon known and potential archaeological remains.

Appraisal of Potential Effects

- 3.2.49 The enabling/construction works required for the installation of the OHL may result in direct physical impacts upon known and previous unrecorded archaeological remains, though this would largely depend on final routeing. Given the nature of the grid connection infrastructure and the density of known heritage assets within the IGCC, it is likely that physical impacts upon known heritage assets can be avoided by

¹⁴ <https://www.nationalgrid.com/sites/default/files/documents/13795-The%20Holford%20Rules.pdf>

design with the location of wooden poles/towers for the OHL and any temporary access roads or construction compounds being placed away from known assets.

- 3.2.50 Depending on the final route, there would also be potential for physical impacts upon previously unknown archaeological remains. An understanding of this potential is likely to be refined through further archaeological and cultural heritage assessment, including a full desk-based assessment to Chartered Institute for Archaeologist (ClfA) Standards and Guidance¹⁵ and an archaeological walkover survey. Where there remains potential for the construction and enabling works to impact upon unrecorded remains this could likely be mitigated by the implementation of a programme of archaeological works, secured via a suitably worded planning condition, which would aim to identify any such previously unrecorded remains and, where they could not be preserved in situ, preserve them by record through archaeological excavation, recording and post-excavation analysis.
- 3.2.51 In addition to the potential for physical impacts upon archaeological remains, there is potential for there to be temporary setting impacts upon the Scheduled Auchindoun Castle (**SM90024; EIAR – Volume 04 – TA 6.1 - Asset No. 115**). Though as noted above, impacts would depend on the final route and would be temporary and unlikely to exceed operational effects upon setting.
- 3.2.52 Operational effects of the grid connection may result from impacts upon the setting of heritage assets; namely the Scheduled Auchindoun Castle (**SM90024; EIAR – Volume 04 – TA 6.1 - Asset No. 115**) and the Category B Listed Auchindoun Mill (**LB15853; EIAR – Volume 04 – TA 6.1 - Asset No. 141**). Auchindoun Castle will require particular consideration during route selection and design refinement. It sits at the centre of the IGCC and is highly sensitive to changes to its setting. In addition to consideration of impacts of the proposed OHL grid connection on its own, consideration will need to be given to potential cumulative impacts upon the castle's setting when considered in combination with the Proposed Development and with the existing Dorenell Wind Farm grid connection.
- 3.2.53 Design refinement should include seeking opportunities to minimise co-visibility, avoid skyline locations, and utilise existing landscape features for screening to reduce the potential for significant in-combination effects.
- 3.2.54 The enabling/construction works required for the construction of the SS may result in direct physical impacts upon known and previous unrecorded archaeological remains, though this will largely depend on final location. Where possible, physical impacts upon known heritage assets would be avoided by design.
- 3.2.55 Depending on the location of the proposed SS, there would also be potential for physical impacts upon previously unknown archaeological remains. An understanding of this potential is likely to be refined through further archaeological and cultural heritage assessment, including a full desk-based assessment to Chartered Institute for Archaeologist (ClfA) Standards and Guidance and an archaeological walkover survey. Where there remains potential for the construction and enabling works to impact upon unrecorded remains this could likely be mitigated by the implementation of a programme of archaeological works, secured via a suitably worded planning condition, which would aim to identify any such previously unrecorded remains and, where they could not be preserved in situ, preserve them by record through archaeological excavation, recording and post-excavation analysis.
- 3.2.56 Operational effects of the SS may result from impacts upon the setting of heritage assets. In particular the location of the SS should aim to avoid or minimise impacts upon the settings of Balvenie Castle (**SM90028; EIAR – Volume 04 – TA 6.1 - Asset No. 1114**), Drummuir Castle (**LB2296; EIAR Asset No. 124**) and Wood of Furlhead, settlement and field systems (**SM3685; EIAR – Volume 04 – TA 6.1 - Asset No. 113**); with Balvenie Castle and Drummuir Castle being considered to be highly sensitive to changes to their settings. Where the proposed SS would be visible from these assets design refinement would consider height, massing and use of existing landscape features for screening to minimise setting impacts.
- 3.2.57 Given the impacts upon these assets from the Proposed Development (as assessed in **EIAR – Volume 02 - Chapter 6**) and the topography within the SS Search Area it is unlikely that the SS would result in cumulative setting impacts and assuming sensitive location and design, significant setting effects during the operational period are considered unlikely.

Ecology and Ornithology

Non-Avian Ecology

Baseline

- 3.2.58 The River Spey Special Area of Conservation¹⁶ (SAC) flows through the northern section of the IGCC Study Area and then along the western extents of the SS Study Area. Tips of Corsemal and Tom Mor

¹⁵ Chartered Institute for Archaeologists. ClfA Codes, regulations and Standards, and guidance. Available at: <https://www.archaeologists.net/work/standards> (Accessed 17/04/26)

¹⁶ Qualifying interests include otter, freshwater pearl mussel, sea lamprey and Atlantic salmon.

Site of Special Scientific Interest¹⁷ (SSSI), and Den of Pitlurg¹⁸ SSSI are within 5 km of the SS Study Area.

- 3.2.59 There are small pockets of Ancient Woodland (AW) throughout the IGCC, with larger sections present in the SS Study Area, bordering the B9014. The majority of AW is classed as Long-Established Plantation Origin, however there are small areas noted as Semi-Natural origin along the River Spey and to the West of the SS Study Area. Additionally, a review of the Habitat Map of Scotland (HabMoS) suggests that the dominant habitats across the Study Areas consist of heathland (priority habitat) and grassland, interspersed with pockets of blanket bog (priority habitat), arable land and woodland.
- 3.2.60 Ecological walkover surveys (to include a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Survey) would be undertaken within the IGCC, once a preferred route had been identified, which would serve to identify the presence and/or potential presence of protected species, with appropriate species-specific surveys undertaken where necessary to further inform the requirement for mitigation including route design and/or licencing from NatureScot (NS).

Appraisal of Potential Effects

- 3.2.61 The potential for habitat loss or impact to designated sites would be expected to be mitigated through design. Where the grid connection would use UGC (ie. connecting into the SS), any habitat loss is assumed to be temporary, reversible and guided by an Ecological Clerk of Works (EcoW) such that impacts would be expected to be minimised and managed. It is anticipated that OHL route selection would be used to avoid or reduce the land take on priority habitat or through AW, where possible. In accordance with Policy 3 of the NPF4¹⁹ the grid connection development would contribute towards the enhancement of biodiversity.
- 3.2.62 Whilst impacts on protected or notable species are theoretically possible during the construction of the grid connection and the associated SS, it is expected that standard good practice biodiversity measures will be implemented (as per **EIAR – Volume 02 - Chapter 7**) to manage disturbance, injury or loss to biodiversity, such as completion of standard pre-work checks in relation to vegetation clearance. The presence of an EcoW would be expected to ensure identification and avoidance of protected or notable species. Refer to the Outline Habitat Management Plan (**SEI- Volume 04 – TA 5.1**) for likely habitat management measures.
- 3.2.63 Once operational, no notable impacts would be expected in relation to overhead implementation (including cable sealing end) of the grid connection and the associated SS.
- 3.2.64 Provided appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures are implemented, potentially significant effects upon ecological receptors are not anticipated.
- 3.2.65 Decommissioning impact would be expected to be similar or less than the construction phase. On this basis, no notable impacts on habitats, statutory sites or species would be expected.
- 3.2.66 Overall, the addition of the OHL (and associated SS) is not expected to materially increase the significance of any ecological effects already identified, when considered both in-combination and in addition to the Proposed Development.

Ornithology

Baseline

- 3.2.67 The Tips of Corsemaul and Tom Mor SPA is located within 5 km of the Study Areas and supports a breeding population of European importance of the regularly occurring migratory species Common gull *Larus canus*.
- 3.2.68 Ornithological surveys would be undertaken for the connection route (and associated SS) to establish the baseline bird assemblages (breeding and wintering) within the Study Areas; to help inform the route design and ensure any additional mitigation measures are in place.

Appraisal of Potential Effects

- 3.2.69 Whilst statutory designated sites could be avoided, there remains the potential for birds to be impacted during the enabling and construction works of the grid connection (including the SS), such as through vegetation clearance or management. In accordance with standard practice, clearance works would be expected to be undertaken outside of the breeding bird season (March to August inclusive), and vegetation should be checked by a suitably qualified ecologist within a suitable time period prior to the works being undertaken. Should a nest be identified, a buffer should be implemented, and works would be required to stop until re-instructed by a suitable qualified ecologist. Subject to the implementation of

¹⁷ Consists of moorland habitat supporting internationally important breeding colonies of common gull.

¹⁸ Designated for biologically important fen wetlands and ancient woodland habitats.

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/>

all standard practice measures (as per **EIAR – Volume 02 - Chapter 8**), no unacceptable impacts would be expected on birds during construction.

- 3.2.70 Once operational, there is also the potential of bird collision such as common gulls as well as roosting/foraging geese (as per **EIAR – Volume 04 – TA 8.2**). When considered together with existing and proposed energy and grid infrastructure in the area, there is potential for in-combination cumulative impacts on bird populations. Collision Risk Modelling would be undertaken as part of the EIA process, with mitigation measures put in place, if required. There is the potential for post-construction monitoring to be required, however this would be agreed with NatureScot.
- 3.2.71 Although the grid connection could result in some small-scale temporary habitat loss and disturbance of birds, it is envisaged that the effects on ornithology, with good practice measures adopted, would not be significant.
- 3.2.72 Decommissioning effects would be similar or less than the construction phase, and subject to similar environmental management controls. On this basis, no notable impacts on birds would be expected.
- 3.2.73 Overall, the addition of the OHL (and associated SS) is not expected to materially increase the significance of any ornithological effects already identified, when considered both in-combination and in addition to the Proposed Development.

Geology, Hydrology and Peat

Baseline

- 3.2.74 According to the British Geological Survey (BGS) 'Geology of Britain Viewer' website²⁰, the underlying bedrock across the majority of the IGCC and SS Study Areas is underlain by the Findlater Flag Formation, comprising metamorphic psammite and semipelite. To the south of the IGCC there are areas shown to be underlain by the Blair Atholl Subgroup comprising metamorphic pelite and semipelite.
- 3.2.75 The BGS 'Geology of Britain Viewer' website shows that the superficial deposits underlying the Study Areas, where present, comprise a large area of Devensian Till (Diamicton) and alluvium and river terrace deposits (undifferentiated). There are also areas where no superficial deposits are shown on the mapping, and it is assumed that there no significant superficial deposits present or could be indicative of shallow deposits or rock outcropping.
- 3.2.76 A Geological Conservation Review site, Auchindoun Castle, is present in the south of the IGCC and has been designated as it includes an example of the youngest stratigraphical division of the Precambrian strata of Scotland.
- 3.2.77 There is an active limestone quarry for agricultural use located in the SS search area as well as several disused quarries, mainly around Dufftown, north of IGCC and west of SS Study Area.
- 3.2.78 Land use within the SS and route corridor search areas predominantly comprise agricultural and forestry uses, with evidence of peat cuttings, heather management and forestry management.
- 3.2.79 Available peat depth information indicates that the majority of the IGCC is without peat deposits of any depth. A small area of Class 1 peatland is located in the southeast of the IGCC, whilst Class 2 peatland is situated adjacent in the south of the Study Area. Peatlands which are classified as Class 1 and Class 2 are considered to be of national importance and are defined as 'nationally important carbon rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat', and 'likely to be of high conservation value'.

The IGCC Study Area interests with several existing watercourses, such as the River Fiddich. A number of watercourses are also located across the SS Study Area including Back Burn, Glack Burn and its subsequent tributaries.

Appraisal of Potential Effects

- 3.2.80 The enabling/construction works required for the installation of the overhead line (OHL) and SS may result in potential effects on the constraints listed above, dependent on the route/site selection process.
- 3.2.81 There is potential to effect peat and carbon rich soils during the construction phase through changes that could occur due to:
- Compaction of soils/peat from vehicles and infrastructure;
 - Potential for increased erosion of peat soils through disturbance, either through direct disturbance or localised drying caused by infrastructure;
 - Potential for peat slide caused by the construction of infrastructure which could affect human and environmental receptors;
 - Loss of peatland habitats and carbon rich soils through excavations for infrastructure;

²⁰ [BGS Geology Viewer \(BETA\)](#)

- Increased erosion of peat impacting the River Spey SAC; and
 - Interactions with watercourses.
- 3.2.82 The location of the SS and OHL should avoid constraints including peat, the Geological Conservation Review site, and the active limestone quarry.
- 3.2.83 The proposed OHL may require localised crossings of Class 1 and/or Class 2 peatland. Where this occurs, potential effects would be minimised through the application of embedded mitigation measures, including micro-siting of poles/towers to avoid the deepest peat where practicable, and adherence to best practice peat management and reinstatement measures to maintain hydrological function and peat stability.
- 3.2.84 It is assumed that the route will be an OHL, this will involve wooden poles/towers or steel lattice pylons on either side of the watercourse crossing with an appropriate buffer zone implemented from the watercourse to avoid any interactions. It is also understood that there would be no increasing in hardstanding or flood risk with an OHL. The location and layout of any proposed SS infrastructure would avoid areas identified as being at high risk of flooding, and an appropriate buffer would be maintained around all watercourses to minimise potential impacts on the water environment.
- 3.2.85 It is expected that standard and best practice construction measures would be adhered through to the implementation of the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) (an outline is included as **EIAR – Volume 04 – TA 2.1**), such as ensuring construction machinery is well maintained and presence of readily available spill kits to ensure pollution prevention and control. With the implementation of best practice construction methods, no adverse effects are anticipated during construction.
- 3.2.86 The operation of the proposed SS and overhead line is not likely to result in adverse effects on geology, soils or hydrology. The operational phase involves no ground disturbance, no changes to subsurface loading or groundwater flow, or activities that could cause soil contamination, erosion or ground instability. Any minor, localised disturbance is confined to the construction phase and will be addressed through standard mitigation and reinstatement measures. With the implementation of routine maintenance and standard pollution-prevention measures, no operational impacts to soil quality, geological stability or hydrology are anticipated.
- 3.2.87 It is anticipated that decommissioning work would be completed without any direct interaction with the water environment. On this basis, no notable impacts on water receptors would be expected.
- 3.2.88 Overall, the grid connection is not expected to materially increase the significance of geology, soils or hydrological effects already identified for the Proposed Development, when considered both in-combination and in addition to the Proposed Development. Refinement of the OHL during the alignment stage would further minimise opportunities for disturbance to geology and soils.

Traffic and Transport

Baseline

- 3.2.89 The wider area is serviced by a number of major and minor roads, which provide access and transport routes to settlements, individual residences, and the wider strategic road network. The IGCC intersects with an A road and a small section of a core path and is located in close proximity to a number of additional core paths. Key road links within the IGCC and SS Study Areas are captured within **EIAR – Volume 03a – Figure 10.1**.

Appraisal of Potential Effects

- 3.2.90 The construction of the grid connection infrastructure will require temporary access to each pylon location along the OHL and at locations along the section of UGC, dependant on the technology chosen.
- 3.2.91 Due to the nature, design and rate of construction of the grid connection, it is anticipated that vehicle movements at any location would be limited over the course of the construction period which will not lead to any noticeable increase in traffic volumes on the surrounding road network, albeit there will be a slight change in traffic composition as HGVs will be required to deliver materials for both the OHL and UGC sections.
- 3.2.92 It is likely that a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) will be implemented for the grid connection to manage traffic movements on the surrounding public road network, and this would be coordinated with the construction of the Proposed Development should construction works overlap. Additionally, an Access Management Plan (AMP) would be required where the grid connection intersects with the identified recreational route.
- 3.2.93 During operation there would be infrequent visits by maintenance teams and therefore significant effects as a result are unlikely to arise.

- 3.2.94 Given the small number of anticipated vehicle movements associated with its construction and operation, it is considered unlikely that the grid connection route would give rise to significant construction or operational traffic and transport effects.
- 3.2.95 Decommissioning effects would be similar or less than the construction phase, and subject to a CTMP. On this basis, no notable impacts on traffic and transport would be expected.
- 3.2.96 Overall, the addition of the OHL (and associated SS) is not expected to materially increase the significance of any traffic and transport effects already identified, when considered both in-combination and in addition to the Proposed Development.

Noise

- 3.2.97 The EA considers the potential for noise effects related to both the construction and the operation of the grid connection and the SS.

Baseline

- 3.2.98 A desktop study has been undertaken to identify the presence of Noise Sensitive Receptors (NSRs) along the IGCC and within the SS study area. The closest NSRs with a high level of sensitivity are all identified as residential receptors. The location of residential receptors is shown on Figure 1 Environmental Constraints.
- 3.2.99 Both the IGCC and the SS Study Area are located in a rural setting, where baseline noise levels are expected to be low. Although some levels of increased noise would occur for short periods of time due to local road traffic, for the majority of the time the local noise environment is expected to primarily be influenced by natural sounds, such as water flowing, wind in foliage, birdsong etc. The exception to this would be in the immediate area close to Dufftown, where noise levels may be elevated by human activity and commercial and industrial operations.
- 3.2.100 BS 5228-1 Code of Practice for Noise and Vibration Control on Construction and Open Sites – Noise sets out a method to assess the potential for significant effects and compares predicted or measured construction noise to thresholds that have been set based on the existing ambient noise levels in the area. The thresholds are categorised as A, B and C, with category C thresholds used for locations where ambient noise levels have been measured as relatively high, and Category A, where ambient noise levels have been measured as relatively low.
- 3.2.101 It is assumed that all of the nearest residential NSRs within and close to the IGCC and the SS study area would be located in areas where the Category A thresholds would be most appropriate. This would equate to a potential significant effect where construction noise levels are regularly above 65 dB LAeq(t) during the daytime, 55 dB LAeq(t) during evenings and weekends and 45 dB LAeq(t) during the night-time.

Appraisal of Potential Effects

Construction Noise

- 3.2.102 Construction of the grid connection would result in short term, temporary noise impacts, however, due to the nature of the development in the IGCC, i.e. the installation of fixed assets along a linear path, construction activities at any one location would be very limited in duration, as the plant and construction activities are continuously moving along the route. Accordingly, no significant noise impacts are anticipated.
- 3.2.103 Construction of the SS would occur in a single location and for a longer duration, therefore, depending on the final location of the SS, it may be necessary to undertake a construction noise impact assessment to ensure that noise levels can be kept below the BS 5228 Category A threshold levels. Nonetheless, BS 5228 provides guidance on best practice measures that can be implemented to manage construction noise and these can be incorporated into the CEMP to minimise any impacts.

Construction Traffic Noise

- 3.2.104 It is generally recognised that an increase in road traffic flow of 25 % leads to a noise level increase of approximately 1 dB. As noted in paragraph 3.2.90, it is anticipated that vehicle movements at any location would be limited over the course of the construction period, which will not lead to any noticeable increase in traffic volumes on the surrounding road network. Accordingly, any noise level increases would be less than 1 dB, which would not be perceptible.

Operational Noise

- 3.2.105 During operation, noise generated from the grid connection would be negligible. Although corona discharge noise may be noticeable from time to time at locations close to the overhead lines, the noise level associated from this phenomenon in 132 kV connections is generally very low level.
- 3.2.106 The SS is also unlikely to generate any significant noise. Although substations are known to generate noise during operation, a switching station is different in that it does not contain any of the noise

generating elements of a typical substation. Equipment is limited to passive switches, buss bars, circuit breakers, and similar, which are used to route the electricity between circuits. This is in contrast to a substation, which is required to change the voltage of the incoming and outgoing electricity, and requires the use of noise generating plant, such as transformers, reactors and capacitors. Accordingly, no operational noise impacts are anticipated.

4. Approach to Routeing the Grid Connection

- 4.1.1 As highlighted above, the grid connection required to export electricity from the Proposed Development does not form part of the Section 36 Application and will instead be progressed by others under a separate consenting process. This reflects standard industry practice, as the design, routeing and delivery of grid infrastructure is usually undertaken by the relevant electricity network operator once sufficient generating capacity has been secured. Electricity network operators are bound by obligations under the Electricity Act 1989 in terms of the development and operation of electricity transmission and distribution lines and associated development, including the factors that must be taken into account in developing overhead lines.
- 4.1.2 At the time of preparing this EA, the following aspects of the grid connection remain undetermined:
- Point of connection (PoC) to the distribution or transmission network;
 - voltage level;
 - balance of OHL and UGC sections;
 - likely corridor or route alignment; and
 - required switching station configuration.
- 4.1.3 Because this information is unavailable, the design and environmental assessment of the grid connection cannot be progressed in detail at this time. However, given that the Proposed Development cannot operate without a grid connection, based on what can reasonably be predicted, this section provides a high-level appraisal of:
- the planning and design principles likely to inform the grid connection;
 - how environmental considerations will be embedded in its development; and
 - the feasibility of achieving a compliant and environmentally acceptable connection.

4.2 Stepwise Approach

- 4.2.1 The design of the grid connection will need to follow a structured and iterative process, summarised below. This approach would allow the applicant at the time to increasingly reduce uncertainty, gather technical and environmental information needed to make informed decisions, and refine the design in a logical and transparent manner. As each stage is completed, the range of options becomes more focused, while still ensuring that reasonable alternatives are considered. In this way, the grid connection can move from a broad strategic concept to a feasible final alignment.

Stage 1: Confirmation of PoC

- 4.2.2 The relevant network operator will, following application by the wind farm developer, identify a technically viable and robust PoC based on network capacity, reinforcement needs, and system stability. This often includes power system studies, capacity modelling, and future network scenario analysis.

Stage 2: Identification of Feasible Corridors

- 4.2.3 Once the PoC is known, wide search corridors will be mapped within the IGCC. These corridors are usually several kilometres wide and take into account topography, existing infrastructure, designated sites, forestry blocks, settlements and hydrology.

Stage 3: Constraint Mapping and Holford-Rules-Led Refinement

- 4.2.4 Environmental constraints such as ecological designations, heritage assets, peat soil, sensitive receptors, and sensitive landscapes will be mapped using GIS. The Holford Rules⁵ (**Annex B**) will guide the avoidance of areas where OHL routeing could result in significant effects. Additionally, section 38 and Schedule 9 to the Electricity Act 1989 impose obligations on licence holders, including transmission operators, to take account of the preservation of amenity and fisheries in formulating any proposals. Specifically, they:

4.2.5 shall have regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty, of conserving flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest and of protecting sites, buildings and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest; and

4.2.6 shall do what he reasonably can to mitigate any effect which the proposals would have on the natural beauty of the countryside or on any such flora, fauna, features, sites, buildings or objects.

Stage 4: Identification of Suitable Technology

4.2.7 The balance between OHL, UGC and hybrid solutions will be assessed. Factors include:

- environmental sensitivity;
- constructability;
- effects on agriculture and forestry;
- cost and deliverability, and
- long-term operability.

Stage 5: Environmental Impact Assessment

4.2.8 In the event that OHL were utilised, the final route would undergo screening for a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to accompany the separate grid application, supported by baseline surveys, stakeholder engagement and iterative design.

4.2.9 This structured approach ensures that the final grid connection is deliverable, environmentally responsible, and follows best practice.

4.3 Holford Rules

4.3.1 The Holford Rules, which seek to minimise landscape, visual and environmental impacts, provide the basis for the high-level assessment set out in this section. These rules, and their supplementary notes, provide a design framework for OHL routeing in the UK. Further details of the Holford Rules are available in **Annex B**.

4.4 Future Assessment Method

4.4.1 It is expected that a full EIA will be undertaken when the final grid connection route and technology options are known. This assessment will draw on a combination of GIS-based constraints mapping and detailed field surveys to establish a robust understanding of the environmental baseline across the chosen corridor. The GIS mapping will collate key environmental and technical information, including ecological designations, hydrological features, landscape character, cultural heritage assets, noise-sensitive receptors, agricultural land classifications, soil types and forestry cover. Field surveys will then refine and validate this information, ensuring that any on-site sensitivities are fully understood.

4.4.2 The EIA process will involve an iterative option appraisal, allowing the route and design to evolve in response to emerging constraints. This staged refinement will help reduce potential impacts before the final alignment is selected. As part of this process, OHL, UGC and hybrid solutions will be compared to determine the most appropriate configuration, taking account of technical feasibility, environmental sensitivity and overall deliverability.

4.4.3 The EIA is likely to consider a wide range of environmental topics, including:

- landscape and visual amenity;
- ornithology and terrestrial ecology;
- cultural heritage;
- water, ground conditions and peat soils;
- noise, EMF and residential amenity;
- forestry and woodland;
- agriculture and soils; and
- traffic, access and transport.

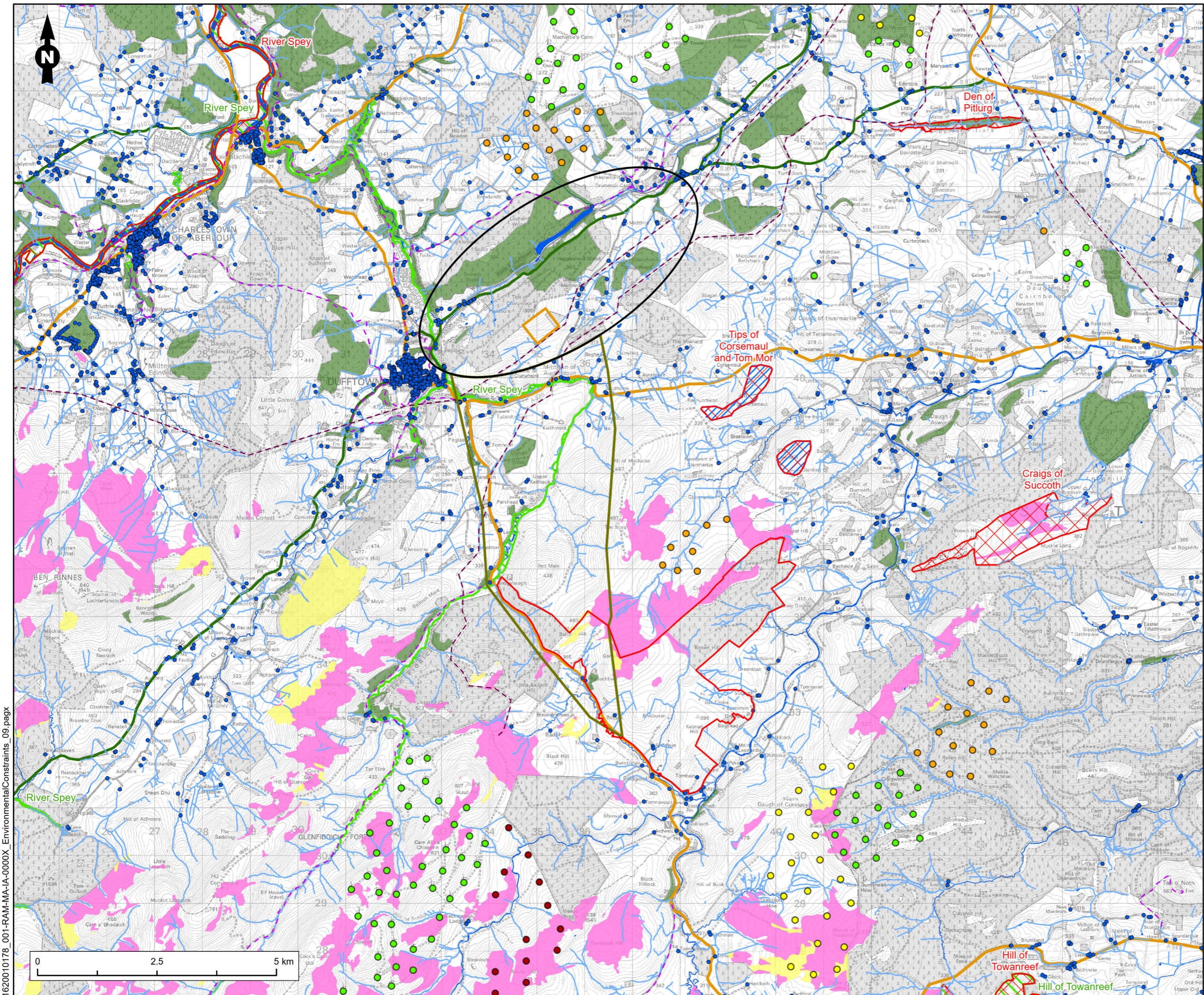
4.4.4 Mitigation will need to be developed in accordance with the recognised mitigation hierarchy. First, seeking to avoid impacts wherever possible, then reducing them where avoidance is not achievable, and finally applying offsetting or compensatory measures where necessary. This approach ensures that the

final grid connection design is environmentally responsible and that any significant effects are appropriately minimised.

5. Summary

- 5.1.1 This Report provides a reasonably practical and proportionate EA of the IGCC and associated SS Study Areas, based on the information known at the time of writing (April 2026) and in an appropriate manner in light of the circumstances and uncertainties relating to the proposed grid connection infrastructure. As the PoC has not yet been confirmed, key parameters such as voltage, alignment, technology choice and SS configuration remain unknown.
- 5.1.2 This EA has provided a high-level appraisal of the potential for likely significant effects for identified environmental receptors. It identifies the key constraints and receptors for each technical issues and assessment is made on whether significant effects are likely to arise due to the grid connection on its own or in-combination with the Proposed Development.
- 5.1.3 Following the above appraisal, it is considered that likely environmental effects could be managed through application of the mitigation hierarchy in the design and implementation by avoiding constraints, reducing impact to acceptable levels through the use of appropriate design, best practice construction methods and implementation of well-established standard mitigation. Therefore, a grid connection is considered achievable in principle.

Annex A: Figures



Legend

- Proposed Craig Watch Wind Farm Site Boundary
- Indicative Switching Station Location
- Indicative Grid Connection Corridor
- Switching Station Study Area
- Residential Property
- Existing OHL
- A Road
- B Road
- Core Path
- Watercourse
- Waterbody
- Special Area of Conservation
- Special Protection Area
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Ancient Woodland

Carbon and Peatland Importance

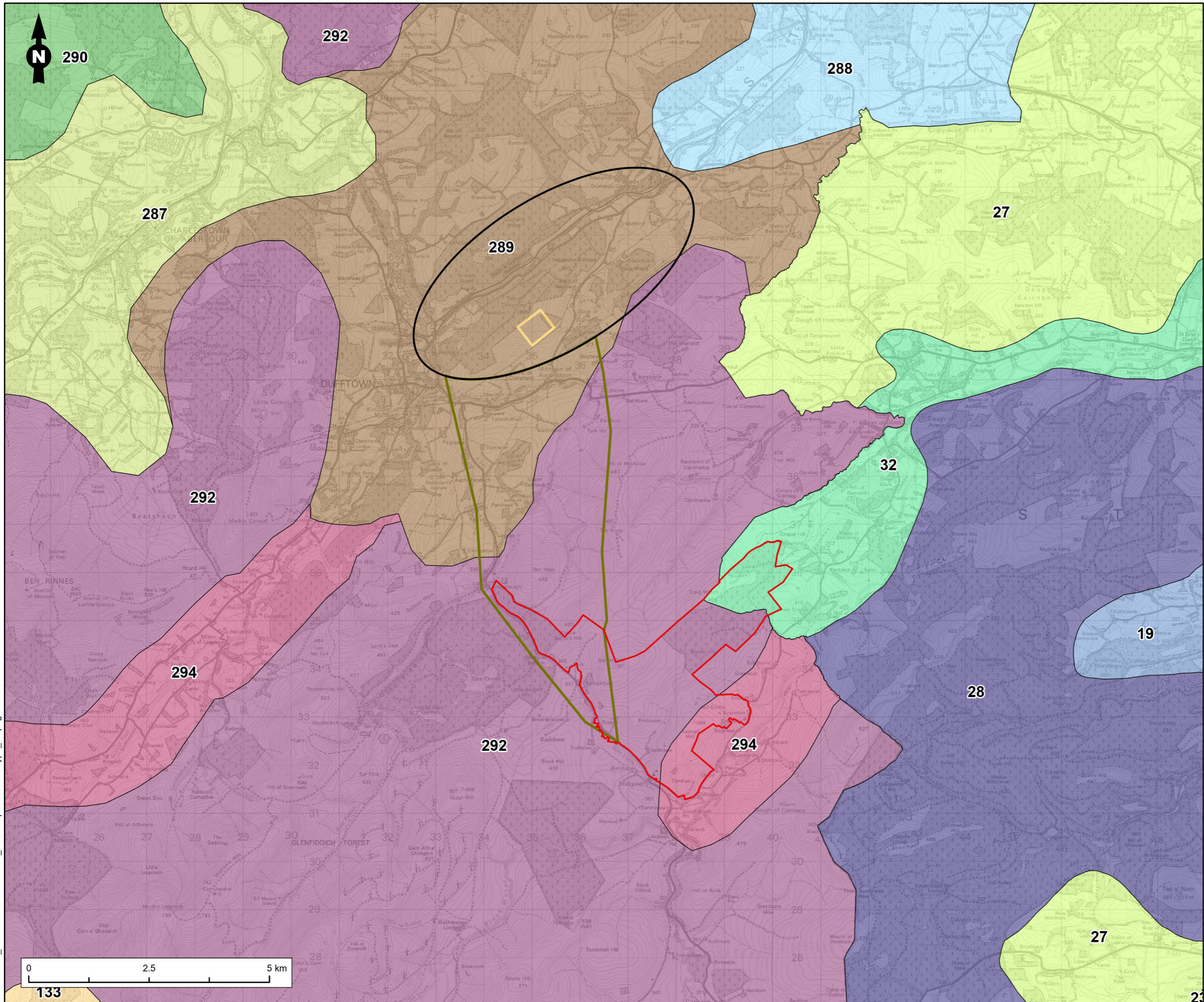
- Class 1
- Class 2

Cumulative Wind Turbine

- Operational
- Consented
- In Planning
- Scoping

Figure Title Environmental Constraints		
Project Name Craig Watch Wind Farm Planning Services		
Project No./Filey ID 1620010178-001		
Date April 2026	Figure No. 1	Revision 1.0
Prepared By CT / RD	Scale 1:75,000 @A3	
Client Statkraft Sf		

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Legend

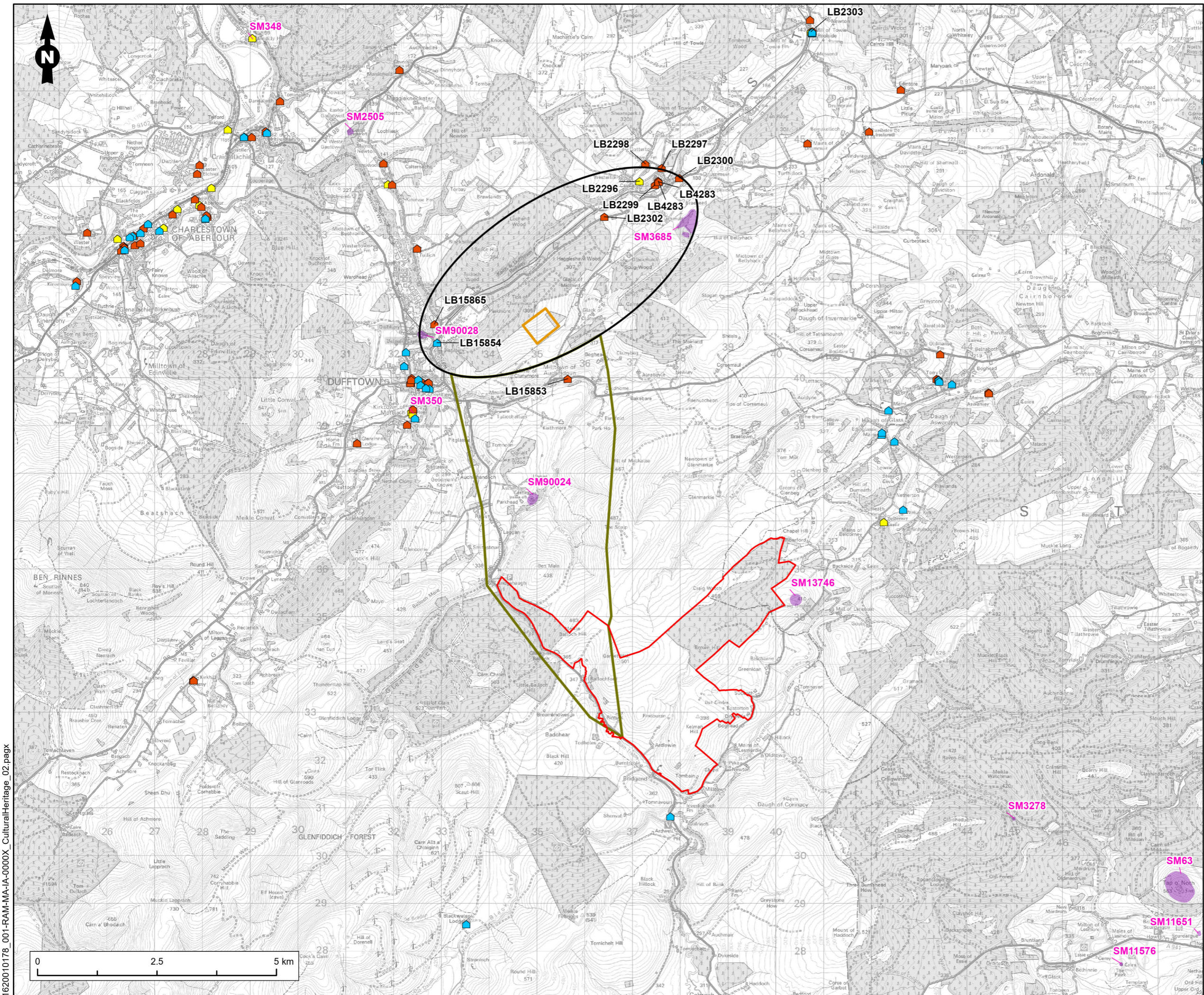
- Proposed Craig Watch Wind Farm Site Boundary
- Indicative Switching Station Location
- Indicative Grid Connection Corridor
- Switching Station Study Area

Landscape Character Type

- 19 : Farmed Rolling Ridges and Hills
- 23 : Farmed Basin - Aberdeenshire
- 27 : Farmed Moorland Edge - Aberdeenshire
- 28 : Outlying Hills & Ridges
- 32 : Farmed and Wooded River Valleys
- 133 : Farmed Straths and Glens
- 287 : Broad Farmed Valley
- 288 : Upland Farmland
- 289 : Upland Farmed Valleys
- 290 : Upland Moorland and Forestry
- 292 : Open Upland
- 294 : Upland Valleys - Moray & Nairn

Figure Title		
Landscape Character Type		
Project Name		
Craig Watch Wind Farm Planning Services		
Project No./Filey ID		
1620010178-001		
Date	Figure No.	Revision
April 2026	2	1.0
Prepared By	Scale	
RD	1:75,000 @A3	
Client		
Statkraft Sf		
		

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Legend

- Proposed Craig Watch Wind Farm Site Boundary
- Indicative Switching Station Location
- Indicative Grid Connection Corridor
- Switching Station Study Area
- Scheduled Monument

Listed Building

- ▲ Listed Building - Category A
- ▲ Listed Building - Category B
- ▲ Listed Building - Category C

Figure Title
Cultural Heritage Assets

Project Name
Craig Watch Wind Farm Planning Services

Project No./File ID
1620010178-001

Date April 2026	Figure No. 3	Revision 1.0
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Prepared By
RD

Scale
1:75,000 @A3

Client
Statkraft Sf

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Annex B: Holford Rules

GUIDELINES FOR THE ROUTEING OF NEW HIGH VOLTAGE OVERHEAD TRANSMISSION LINES

Rule 1:

Avoid altogether, if possible, the major areas of highest amenity value, by so planning the general route of the first line in the first place, even if the total mileage is somewhat increased in consequence.

Note on Rule 1

Investigate the possibility of alternative routes, avoiding if possible the areas of the highest amenity value. The consideration of alternative routes must be an integral feature of environmental statements.

Areas of highest amenity value are:

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

National Parks

Heritage Coasts

World Heritage Sites

Rule 2:

Avoid smaller areas of high amenity value, or scientific interests by deviation; provided that this can be done without using too many angle towers, ie the more massive structures which are used when lines change direction.

Note on Rule 2

Some areas (e.g. Site of Special Scientific Interest) may require special consideration for potential effects on ecology (e.g. to their flora and fauna).

Where possible choose routes which minimise the effects on the setting of areas of architectural, historic and archaeological interest including Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, Listed Parks and Gardens and Ancient Monuments.

Rule 3:

Other things being equal, choose the most direct line, with no sharp changes of direction and thus with fewer angle towers.

Note of Rule 3

Where possible choose inconspicuous locations for angle towers, terminal towers and sealing end compounds.

Rule 4:

Choose tree and hill backgrounds in preference to sky backgrounds wherever possible; and when the line has to cross a ridge, secure this opaque background as long as possible and cross obliquely when a dip in the ridge provides an opportunity. Where it does not, cross directly, preferably between belts of trees.

Rule 5:

Prefer moderately open valleys with woods where the apparent height of towers will be reduced, and views of the line will be broken by trees.

Note on Rules 4 & 5

Utilise background and foreground features to reduce the apparent height and domination of towers from pan viewpoints.

Minimise the exposure of numbers of towers on prominent ridges and skylines.

Where possible avoiding cutting extensive swathes through woodland blocks and consider opportunities for skirting edges of copses and woods.

Protecting existing vegetation, including woodland and hedgerows, and safeguard visual and ecological links with the surrounding landscape.

Rule 6:

In country which is flat and sparsely planted, keep the high voltage lines as far as possible independent of smaller lines, converging routes, distribution poles and other masts, wires and cables, so as to avoid a concentration or 'wirescape'.

Note on Rule 6:

In all locations minimise confusing appearance.

Arrange wherever practicable that parallel or closely related routes are planned with tower types, spans and conductors forming a coherent appearance; where routes need to diverge, allow where practicable sufficient separation to limit the effects on properties and features between the lines.

Rule 7:

Approach urban area through industrial zones, where they exist; and when pleasant residential and recreational land intervenes between the approach line and the substation, go carefully into the comparative costs of the undergrounding, for lines other than those of the highest voltage.

Note on Rule 7

When a line needs to pass through a development area, route it so as to minimise as far as possible the effect on development.

Alignments should be chosen after consideration of effects on the amenity of existing development and on proposals for new development.

When siting substations take account of the effects of the terminal towers and line connections that will need to be made and take advantage of screening features such as ground form and vegetation.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

Residential Areas

Avoid routeing close to residential areas as far as possible on grounds of general amenity.

Designations of County, District and Local Value

Where possible choose routes which minimise the effect on Special Landscape Areas, areas of Great Landscape Value and other similar designations of County, District or Local value.

Alternative Tower Designs

In addition to adopting appropriate routeing, evaluate where appropriate the use of alternative tower designs now available where these would be advantageous visually, and where the extra cost can be justified.