



Windfarm committee report

Development proposed:

The Highland Wind Farm – application under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 for the construction and operation of a windfarm and energy storage facility within the Planning Authority of the Highlands Council, of 19 turbines, 14 turbines with a tip height of 200m and 5 turbines with a tip height of 230m. Anticipated generating capacity is 133 MW.

Consultation from: Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit

Reference: 2025/0080/PAC (ECU ref. ECU00005082)

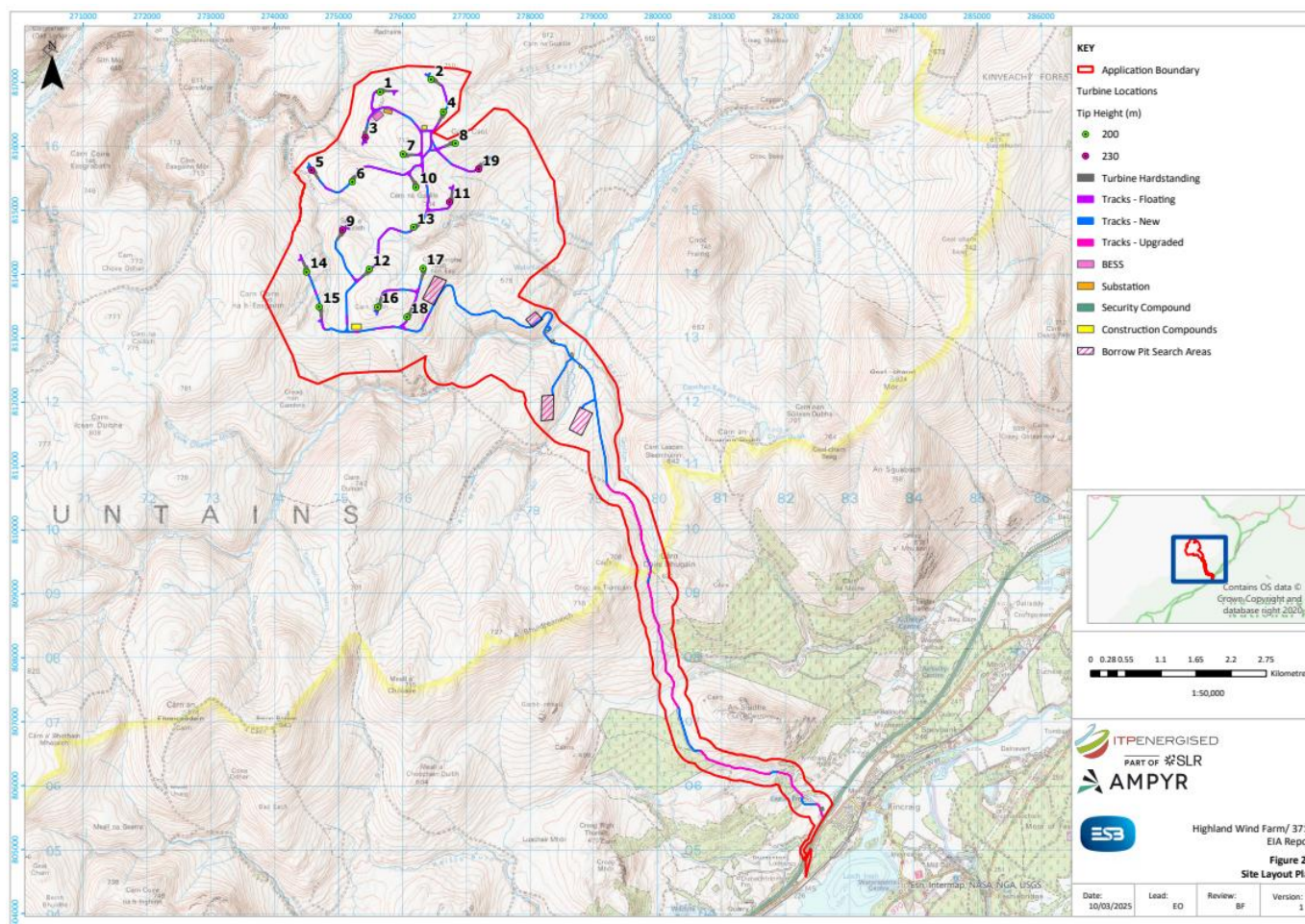
Applicant: Highland Windfarm Ltd.

Date consulted: 4 March 2025

Recommendation:

1. Object – The Highland Windfarm
2. No objection – Access track within the National Park boundary

Case officer: Emma Bryce, Planning Manager (Development Management)



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Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the committee decision and subsequent consultation response to the Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit (ECU) on an application submitted under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 for a proposed windfarm located to the northwest of the Cairngorms National Park. The Scottish Government are the determining authority for this application as the output is more than 50MW. The application is accompanied by an Environmental Report (EIAR), which presents the findings of the applicant's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).
2. The report comprises consideration of two elements:
 - a) The proposed Highland Wind Farm, which lies outwith the boundary of the Cairngorms National Park, and the effects of this on the landscape character and Special Landscape Qualities (SLQs) of the National Park.
 - b) The 8.1km section of access track which lies within the National Park boundary.
3. These two elements for consideration will subsequently be referred to as Part a) and Part b) within this report.
4. Under the current working agreement on roles in landscape casework between NatureScot and the Cairngorms National Park Authority, NatureScot lead on the provision of advice on the effects on the SLQs caused by proposals outwith the Cairngorms National Park. Their advice has been used to inform consideration of Part a) of this report.

Site description and proposed windfarm development - Part a)

5. The windfarm will be located within the Monadhliath uplands approximately 11.5km west of Aviemore, with KinCraig located approximately 0.5 km east of the access area where it joins the A9 trunk road, and 9.2 km from the turbine area. The site covers an area of approximately 2,260 hectares and comprises mainly open heather moorland. The turbines would be sited across an area between an elevation of 540m AOD to a maximum elevation of 790m AOD. The River Dulnain, a tributary of the River Spey, flows north easterly through the centre of the site



(south of the proposed turbine area). The Feithlinn Burn is a tributary of the River Dulnain and also forms a constituent feature of the River Spey SAC within the site. The remaining watercourses include smaller streams flowing north-north-westerly to the River Findhorn, and south-easterly to the River Dulnain, respectively. The site lies adjacent to the National Park with an 8.1km section of access track (which includes 1.5km of new track) within the Park boundary. The nearest turbine would be approximately 4.5km from the Park boundary, with the other turbines, tracks and associated infrastructure located further away from the boundary.

6. The proposed development would comprise 19 turbines, 14 with a maximum height of 200m to the tip of the blade in an upright position and 5 turbines extending to a maximum blade tip height of 230m, and a rotor diameter of 163m. The associated infrastructure will include site access, access tracks within the site, crane hardstandings, turbine foundations, underground cabling, on-site substation and maintenance building, seven temporary construction compounds, laydown area, batching plant, watercourse crossings, security compound, and potential excavations / borrow pit workings. It is expected that the proposed windfarm would have an estimated total installed capacity of 133MW.
7. Theoretical visibility of the proposed windfarm from within the National Park is shown by the applicant's EIAR Figure 6.4.1 (**Appendix I**). When considering cumulative visual effects, the applicant's Figure 6.4.3 Cumulative – ZTV (**Appendix 2**) demonstrates the visibility of the proposed, consented and operational windfarms. The yellow and green areas show the increase in visibility of wind turbines with the introduction of the Highland Wind Farm.
8. Visualisations from 15 viewpoints were provided in the applicant's EIAR to demonstrate the predicted level of visibility that would be had from within / on the boundary of the National Park – refer to **Appendix 1** (Figure 6.4.1 Blade Tip ZTV with Viewpoints) for the locations:
 - VP1: Carn Glas Choire
 - VP2: A938 Carrbridge
 - VP3: Gheal Charn Mor
 - VP4: Meall a' Bhuachaille
 - VP5: Cairngorm



- VP6: Ben Macdui
- VP7: Braeriach
- VP8: Sgor Gaoith
- VP9: B970 near Loch Insh
- VP11: Carn Sgulain
- VP16: Carn Dearg Mhor
- VP17: A938 Carrbridge / Achnahannet junction
- VP19: Craiggowrie (night views)

9. **Committee members should familiarise themselves with the above visualisations online before the meeting.** The visualisations associated with each view point are available to the public by searching the application documents on the [Energy Consents Unit website](#) for the relevant figures within EIAR - Volume 3a, figures 6.13 to 7.19.

Site description and proposed access tracks - Part b)

10. The proposal includes approximately 33.5km of access tracks comprising 17.8km of new cut track, 10.5km of new floating track and upgrades and widening of existing tracks where required. Within the Cairngorms National Park boundary, approximately 8.1km of existing track will be upgraded and 1,500m of new track constructed closely following the route of the existing track. They will be formed largely of locally sourced stone from the on-site borrow pits and will be approximately 6m wide.

Relevant planning history

11. March 2024 - the Park Authority responded to a scoping consultation from ECU for the current application.

Planning policy context

12. Part a) The proposed development is located wholly outwith the National Park and therefore the Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan policies do not apply. However, an assessment of the proposal must be made in accordance with National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and have regard to the National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP).



13. Part b) The section of new and upgraded access track is within the National Park and therefore policies within both NPF4 and the Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan (LDP) are applicable.

National policy - Part a)

14. **National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)** sets out national planning policies that reflect Scottish Ministers' priorities for the development and use of land, as well as for operation of the planning system. It also identifies a series of 'national developments'. The content of NPF4 forms the national element of the statutory development plan, which also includes the relevant Local Development Plan. Decisions on planning applications (and Section 36 applications) are to be made in accordance with the development plan, and as such NPF4.
15. Policy specifically relating to National Parks and development management can be found in Policy 4: Natural Places and Policy 11: Energy. In general terms Policy 4 a) cites that development proposals which by virtue of type, location or scale will have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment, will not be supported.
16. NPF4 Policy 4 c) specifically applies to a National Park and states that "development proposals that will affect a National Park... will only be supported where:
 - i. The objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the area will not be compromised; or
 - ii. Any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of national importance."
17. NPF4 Policy 4 c) clarifies that the policy test applies where development proposals may affect a nationally designated landscape and so can be applied to development proposals outwith the National Park boundary but potentially affecting it. Of relevance to the generation of wind energy development nationally and therefore to the proposed development:
18. NPF4 National Development 3 'Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure' confirms that this class of national development



supports renewable electricity generation, repowering and expansion of the electricity grid. It incorporates three types of development, including on and offshore electricity generation, including electricity storage, from renewables exceeding 50 megawatts capacity. The Highland Wind Farm proposal falls within the scope of National Development 3.

19. NPF4 Policy 11: Energy further clarifies that “b) Development proposals for wind farms in National Parks...will not be supported: and d) Development proposals that impact on international or national designations will be assessed in relation to Policy 4”.

National policy - Part b)

National policy	National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) Scotland 2045 (Policies relevant to the assessment of this application are marked with a cross (x))	
Policy 1	Tackling the climate and nature crises	X
Policy 2	Climate mitigation and adaptation	X
Policy 3	Biodiversity	X
Policy 4	Natural places	X
Policy 5	Soils	
Policy 6	Forestry, woodland and trees	
Policy 7	Historic assets and places	
Policy 8	Green belts	
Policy 9	Brownfield, vacant and derelict land, and empty buildings	
Policy 11	Energy	
Policy 12	Zero waste	
Policy 13	Sustainable transport	
Policy 14	Design, quality and place	X
Policy 15	Local living and 20 minute neighbourhoods	
Policy 16	Quality homes	
Policy 17	Rural homes	
Policy 18	Infrastructure first	
Policy 19	Heating and cooling	



Policy 20	Blue and green infrastructure	
Policy 21	Play, recreation and sport	
Policy 22	Flood risk and water management	
Policy 23	Health and safety	
Policy 24	Digital infrastructure	
Policy 25	Community wealth building	
Policy 26	Business and industry	
Policy 27	City, town, local and commercial centres	
Policy 28	Retail	
Policy 29	Rural development	X
Policy 30	Tourism	
Policy 31	Culture and creativity	
Policy 32	Aquaculture	
Policy 33	Minerals	

Strategic policy - Part a)

20. **The Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) 2022 – 2027** is required under section 11 of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000. It is the management plan for the Cairngorms National Park approved by Scottish Ministers. The NPPP sets out how all those with a responsibility for the National Park will coordinate their work to tackle the most important issues. There is a duty for decision makers to have regard to the NPPP, a requirement set out in Section 14 of the Act. As such, the NPPP is a material consideration in planning decisions.
21. The NPPP identifies that the landscapes of the National Park are valued by many and underpin the area's economy. It contains policies to safeguard landscape interests. Of relevance to windfarm development proposals are policies A4 and C2 a).
22. Policy A4 seeks to conserve and enhance the SLQs. Policy C2 a) seeks to support development of a low carbon economy and increase renewable energy generation where this is compatible with conserving the SLQs. In relation to windfarm development, the policy states that "large scale wind turbines are not compatible with the landscape character or special landscape qualities of the National Park.



They are inappropriate within the National Park or in areas outside the National Park where they adversely affect its landscape character or special landscape qualities”.

Local Policy - Part b)

Local plan policy	Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan (2021) (Policies relevant to the assessment of this application are marked with a cross (x))	
Policy 1	New housing development	
Policy 2	Supporting economic growth	
Policy 3	Design and placemaking	X
Policy 4	Natural heritage	X
Policy 5	Landscape	X
Policy 6	The siting and design of digital communications equipment	
Policy 7	Renewable energy	
Policy 8	Open space, sport and recreation	
Policy 9	Cultural heritage	
Policy 10	Resources	
Policy 11	Developer obligations	

23. All new development proposals require to be assessed in relation to policies contained in the adopted Development Plan which comprises National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and the Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan 2021 (LDP). The full wording of policies can be found at:

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

and at:

<https://cairngorms.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/CNPA-LDP-2021-web.pdf>

Planning guidance - Part b)

24. Supplementary guidance also supports the LDP and provides more details about how to comply with the policies. Guidance that is relevant to this application is marked with a cross (x).

Policy 1	Housing supplementary guidance	
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Policy 2	Supporting economic growth non-statutory guidance	
Policy 3	Design and placemaking non-statutory guidance	X
Policy 4	Natural heritage non-statutory guidance	X
Policy 5	Landscape non-statutory guidance	X
Policy 7	Renewable energy non-statutory guidance	
Policy 8	Open space, sport and recreation non-statutory guidance	
Policy 9	Cultural heritage non-statutory guidance	
Policy 10	Resources non-statutory guidance	
Policy 11	Developer obligations supplementary guidance	

Consultations

Part a)

NatureScot advice

25. In accordance with the NatureScot / Cairngorms National Park Authority casework agreement, NatureScot have provided the Park Authority with advice in relation to the effects on the National Park, of the proposed windfarm both alone and cumulatively with other existing and consented windfarms in the surrounding area – see **Appendix 3**. This advice focusses on the effects of the proposed windfarm on the SLQs of the Cairngorms National Park.
26. The windfarm would be sited to the south of the River Findhorn on an elevated moorland with the Monadhliath uplands just outside the northwestern boundary of the Cairngorms National Park. The Monadhliath are a long range of rolling moorland hills and plateaux with no distinct summits or patterns, extending to between 550 and 850m AOD. These hills provide a backdrop from key slopes and summits from the National Park. The open nature of this landscape affords a high level of intervisibility across the hills. In terms of the baseline conditions, there are several operational and consented windfarms within the area. To the northwest of the National Park, these have limited influence. From the Strathdearn Hills the operational windfarms Glen Kyllachy, Farr, Moy and Tom na Clach are visibly evident, however do not significantly affect the SLQs of the Park. Tom na Clach is the closest to the Park boundary, however it appears a relatively compact



landscape feature given its height (125m to blade tip) and partial screening from landform. Glen Kyllachy and Farr are a larger array, however given the lower blade tip heights (102m – 110m) and greater distance from the Park boundary they do not significantly affect the SLQs.

27. Further south along the Monadhliath the closest operational windfarms are Corriegarth, Dumnaglass, Glen Kyllachy and Far and Stronelaig. Notwithstanding the impacts Stronelaig has on the wildness SLQ from the southwestern boundary, from the northeast, beyond Carn Ballach along the Monadhliath, these windfarm appear relatively distant and compact landscape features due to their heights (less than 150m to blade tip), distance and general containment with upland basins. From higher elevations within the Park, operational and consented windfarms have relatively limited influence, both individually and cumulatively on the SLQs of the Park given their distance, heights (all are below 150m to blade tip), lack of turbine lighting and interspersed pattern of development. From lower levels no operational windfarms are visible.
28. NatureScot advise that the location and height of the proposed development represents a substantial shift in prominence and proximity of windfarms which would have an adverse impact on the SLQs of the Cairngorms National Park. The SLQs affected, in order of relevance are as follows:
- SLQ6 – Landscapes both cultural and natural
 - SLQ10 – The surrounding hills
 - SLQ30 – Grand panoramas and framed views
 - SLQ 32 – Dark skies
 - SLQ28 – Wildness
29. SLQ6 – Landscapes both cultural and natural and SLQ10 – The surrounding hills, are considered together given their similar underlying characteristics relating to upland moorland hill and their perceived wildness. SLQ 6 states *“At lower levels altitudes the land has been long inhabited, with patterns of land use, settlement and transport derived from the primary industries of farming, forestry and field sports. In contrast, the highest ground comprises uninhabited wild land and moor and mountain”*. SLQ 10 states *“The ‘lesser hills’ within the Park have their own*



ridges, summits and plateaux and would be impressive in any other location... They contribute significantly to the wild, untamed appearance of the area”.

30. Following assessment of the development on these SLQs, NatureScot conclude the proposed windfarm would appear as a prominent vertical feature in an area of open moorland and would introduce an incongruous built element to the bare, uninhabited uplands. At distances of 15km-25km, all nineteen turbines would be visible on the skyline from the lower hills and would appear partially back-clothed by dark moorlands from higher summits. Due to their height and siting, the turbines would appear much closer than existing windfarms, diminishing the dominance of nature in the vast rolling upland and, with some full towers visible, would encroach on the containment provided by the hills. This windfarm development on an open moorland, with some fully visible towers would incur a discernible change to the current pattern of development and would erode the distinction between cultural (settled strath) and natural (moorland hills) landscapes and diminish the contribution of the Monadhliath to the ‘wild, untamed appearance of the area.’
31. From lower levels, views are characterised by pastoral farmland, scattered properties and areas of woodland, in contrast to the bare upland moorland backdrop of the Monadhliath. Where visible, the backdrop is an important contribution to SLQs 6 and 10. From these lower areas the windfarm would introduce a large scale vertical man-made focal point into the western area of the undeveloped uplands. The turbines would introduce a prominent change to the simple skyline and the visibility of some full towers would diminish the scale and encroach on the sense of containment provided by the hills. The adverse effects on these SLQs are considered to be significant.
32. SLQ 30 – Grand panoramas and framed views relates to a range of views “*from broad pastoral straths of green, over rolling hills of brown heather moor, with woodland at lower levels: and far, distant exposed mountain terrain... The assemblage of landscape features is aesthetically pleasing with views often framed by vegetation and landform, and the eye led to an inviting arrangement of hill slopes and glens.*” The proposed windfarm is both larger in size and located much closer to the Park than operational windfarms, reducing the perceived depth and scale of the underlying Monadhliath mountains in the middle distance of



western views. NatureScot conclude there would be significant adverse effects on this SLQ as appreciated from a number of summits within the Cairngorm massif, due to the proposal's vertical scale and proximity of the turbines.

33. SLQ 32 – Dark Skies notes *“At night, even the complete absence of colour, a pitch black sky bespeckled only with the light of stars, is a distinctive feature as dark skies become increasingly rare in Britain”*. The proposed turbine lighting would add a new layer of obvious bright red lights to uplands, incongruous with the current development pattern of lighting contained to the straths and would erode the underpinning characteristics of this SLQ. At lower level, the turbine lighting would extend areas of artificial lighting and intrude on the experience of dark skies appearing as a distraction, drawing attention away from the appreciation of the stars and moon on clear nights. It is concluded there would be significant adverse effects on this SLQ across both upland and lower lying areas of the National Park.
34. SLQ 28 – Wildness notes that *“Other areas of the Park are less remote, but the preponderance of near natural vegetation, together with distinctive wildlife and the general lack of development, can still give a perception of the dominance of nature. This includes the managed grouse moors, and the ancient, managed woods and plantations.”* The Highland Wind Farm proposal would form a large and prominent change that would diminish the perceived extensiveness of the vast upland moorland by bringing windfarm development into immediate upland landscape. The influence and visual intrusion of the large-scale human infrastructure would diminish the overarching dominance of nature to a degree that the character would be redefined. The introduction of turbine lights would reduce the current sense of tranquillity and wildness from these parts of the Park to a degree that is considered significant. There would therefore be significant daytime and night-time effects on the Wildness SLQ from the Monadhliath and Strathdearn Hills.
35. Consideration has been given to the cumulative effect the proposal has with the current applications for the adjacent Clune and Balnespick Wind Farms (on the agenda for this planning committee as items 10 and 11). Clune Wind Farm, situated 4.5km north of the Highland Wind Farm, located on the north-eastern Monadhliath, 0.9km from the Park boundary proposes 26 turbines up to 200m to blade tip. Balnespick Wind Farm situated on the Strathdearn Hills and 0.6km from



the Park boundary would comprise 9 turbines up to 200m to blade tip. Balnespick would be located 9.5km north of Clune Wind Farm and 15.8km from the Highland Wind Farm. NatureScot conclude the proposal individually and cumulatively with Clune and Balnespick Wind Farms would significantly adversely affect five of the SLQs of the Cairngorms National Park both during the day and extending effects after dark. These impacts would result in evident and noticeable material changes to the SLQs of the National Park such that the objectives of the designation and overall integrity would be compromised. Accounting for the site's elevation and proximity to the western boundary of the Park, it is considered unlikely that the significant effects could be notably reduced through a reduction in turbine height or number. The effects are unlikely to be overcome through re-design or removal of turbines.

Part b)

36. **CNPA Ecology Officer** states that the proposed development has potential impacts on the River Spey SAC (Designated for Atlantic Salmon, Freshwater Pearl Mussels, Sea Lamprey, Otter), River Spey-Insh Marshes SPA (Designated for Hen Harrier, Osprey, Spotted Crake, Whooper Swan, Wigeon and Wood Sandpiper), River Spey-Insh Marshes RAMSAR (Designated for Mesotrophic Loch, Flood Plain Mire, Alder Woodland, String Sedge, Scandinavian Lesser Reed, Least Water Lily, Cowbane, Shady Horsetail, Pillwort, Invertebrate Assemblage, Otter, Osprey, Spotted Crake, Wood Sandpiper, Wigeon, Whooper Swan).
37. In terms of Protected Species, there will be construction phase impacts, however the implementation of mitigation measures will reduce these. Measures include:
- a) undertaking pre-construction surveys and checks for protected species;
 - b) Employment of an Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW);
 - c) Production of Species Protection Plans (SPP) for key target species to be agreed prior to construction commencing and then implemented in the construction period and immediately prior to it if required;
 - d) All construction activity is buffered by 50m around watercourse, which should reduce the likelihood of impacts on water vole burrows;
 - e) Any requirement for lighting, both during construction and during operation, will be sensitively designed to avoid impacts on bats;



f) Specific mitigation for wildcats to be implemented;

38. In terms of breeding birds, mitigation proposed in the outline CEMP including timing of works to avoid the breeding bird season, if implemented should reduce magnitude of effect to slight. Areas of priority habitat will be permanently lost to this development.
39. The majority of the track section within the national park appears to be mineral soil, but it will pass through Class 1 (Class 1 - Nationally important carbon-rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitats likely to be of high conservation value), Class 4 (heathland with some peat) and Class 5 area (carbon-rich soils (potentially deep peat) lacking characteristic peatland vegetation). Peatland restoration is proposed as the main compensation for the loss of these habitats, in line with NatureScot guidance. An Outline Peatland Restoration and Habitat Management Plan (OPRHMP) will be implemented during the construction and operation phases and will focus on the enhancement and restoration of degraded bog habitats within reasonable distance of proposed development infrastructure. The proposed restoration will include drain blocking, gully and peat hagg restoration, micro-erosion stabilisation and bare peat stabilisation. An area of approximately 560 ha has been identified within the plateau area of the site (outwith the National Park). An additional 247 ha onsite and 674 ha offsite habitat has been identified as being suitable for enhancement. This is above the NatureScot guidance target and takes consideration of anticipated changes to peatland guidance if more peatland restoration is required going forward.
40. Groundwater-dependent terrestrial ecosystems (GWDTEs) are present across the development site. The Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) includes mitigation measures to be implemented during construction to ensure impacts on the water environment and GWDTE will be reduced to negligible.
41. Stretches of access track that lies within the National Park boundaries cross tributaries of the River Spey nine times. These tributaries meet the Spey within the River Spey-Insh Marshes SSSI boundary. The development plans do not indicate direct impacts on this SSSI, however there may be indirect impacts on designated features through pollution events. Implementation of suitable mitigation proposed



in the outline Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP) should reduce the potential significance.

42. There will be loss of small areas of non-designated woodland along the edge of the access track, mainly native woodland. Upland and riparian tree planting is proposed as a biodiversity enhancement, and proposed grazing control will aim to reduce grazing pressure on new woodlands and protect existing juniper and dwarf birch.
43. They recommend conditions ensuring all specified mitigation measures are undertaken.
44. **CNPA Landscape Officer** notes the proposed access track starts from an enlarged access point to the A9 dualled section and mostly runs along the line of an existing track which is intermittent in parts, and no more than a standard track suitable for 4x4 vehicles. The proposed track, however, will be much wider and of greater construction. There will be four sections of completely new track proposed (in total approximately 1km in length). This would be of similar design to the upgraded existing track. The proposed track, either upgraded or new, will be up to three times wider than the existing and its construction would be considerably deeper requiring more excavation.
45. In terms of landscape effects, the applicant's technical report has considered the access track upon Nature Scot's National Landscape Character Type (LCT) areas 221/125 (rolling uplands) and 127 (upland strath). The former includes the upper track sections where they approach and go over the boundary of the CNP and the latter the lower sections from the start of the track at the A9 and where it goes around Leault Farm. In these sections the access track is not considered alone or in detail but in the context of the whole wind farm application and these broad landscape character types.
46. Following a site inspection, it can be added that the landscape effect upon the immediate surroundings would be significant due to the nature and extent of the proposed track. It would likely require steep cuttings and or embankments where the track changes direction on slopes. These landscape effects would be localised



to this area around the track itself and as stated would not affect the whole LCT because this is a large area. The section immediately beyond Leault Farm goes through valuable open woodland and juniper scrub – a Cairngorms Nature priority species. Careful siting and design should allow the effects on this habitat to be minimised. It is likely that there would be a loss of trees at several locations along the track length.

47. The technical report judges visual effects from a single viewpoint (VP9: B790 near Loch Insh). This is approximately 1.9km from the nearest point. The effects are considered to be minor (not significant) from this location judging the visual change to be barely perceptible.
48. The site visit allowed assessment from outwith the site from public roads and adjoining areas. The entrance to the site from the A9 would be seen in context of the relatively new construction for the road dualling as well as the entrance for Leault Farm at that point. Though there would be significantly more tarmac at this point, and changes to the road, this would not be significant due to the similarities to the road construction itself.
49. The track would then pass behind Leault Farm and from this point concealed from wider views by topography and woodland cover. This is also true for the open section between the woodland blocks on the western side of An Suidhe because the levels are relatively flat and the track would not be visible except from much higher levels.
50. The last and highest section north of the Allt Corie Ghleirich burn would be the most prominent as it lacks the cover afforded lower down. The existing track is visible at a number of points along the B970, though intermittently due to tree cover. It can be seen from around the Dell of Killiehuntley until around Lynchlaggan (where the report VP is located). From this area the existing track is visible and would be much more so if upgraded as proposed. However, at these distances, though it would be clearly seen, it would be a small feature at one location in a much wider area and would not be likely to detract from the overall visual amenity. The track would be visible from higher locations further east but at even greater



distances. The track is not visible from the B1952 due to topography and tree cover, nor from the RSPB viewing platform on Insh Marshes (Torcroy).

51. The applicant's technical report does not consider the effects on landscape in great detail. It is likely these would be quite significant on and around the track itself especially in the upper half. Relative to the wider LCT, however, the effects would be small and not significant. The visual effects would likewise be most significant closer to the proposed track. The wider effects are much more limited and not significant to even high sensitivity receptors. There are mitigation measures possible in terms of construction, alignment as well as planting.
52. Should the application be approved the following two conditions are recommended:
 - The details of design and alignment is submitted and approved before construction commences. This is to ensure landscape effects are minimised through the good use of topography and the avoidance of important birch and juniper.
 - That planting of tree and woodland cover is used at various agreed locations to minimise visual effects from areas nearer to the proposal as well as the wider visibility. This would also help to compensate for the loss of tree cover.

Appraisal

Part a)

53. The policies of NPF4 and the NPPP set out how proposals outwith the boundary of the National Park should be considered in terms of effects on the National Park.
54. NPF4 Policy 11: Energy further clarifies that "b) Development proposals for wind farms in National Parks...will not be supported: and d) Development proposals that impact on international or national designations will be assessed in relation to Policy 4".
55. Policy 4 a) cites that development proposals which by virtue of type, location or scale will have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment, will not be supported.



56. Policy C2 a) of the NPPP sets out a test for considering effects on the landscapes of the National Park, in that large scale wind turbines are inappropriate outside the National Park where they 'adversely affect its landscape character or special landscape qualities'. If a proposal fails policy C2 a), it would also be in conflict with NPPP policy A4 which seeks to conserve and enhance the SLQs of the National Park.
57. The proposed windfarm is located within the Monadhliath uplands, on an elevated moorland in close proximity to the National Park boundary. It would introduce visibility of turbines to lower lying areas of the National Park for the first time. From elevated areas, the turbines would introduce prominent and incongruous features, intensifying the presence and influence of wind farm development within a wider context. The proposal both individually and cumulatively with the proposed Clune and Balnespick Wind Farms, would affect five of the SLQs of the Cairngorms National Park during the day and associated lighting would extend these effects after dark. These impacts would result in evident and noticeable material changes to these SLQs such that the objectives of the designation and overall integrity would be compromised.
58. The nature, extent and level of significant adverse effects caused by the addition of the Highland Wind Farm to the baseline of operational and consented wind farms is therefore considered to fail to meet the requirements of NPPP policies C2 a) and A4, and in turn NPF4 Policies 4 and 11. It is recommended that CNPA should **object** to the proposed Highland Wind Farm.

Part b)

Principle

59. The works involve upgrading an existing section of track and forming new sections where it has become disjointed. The track will provide access to the proposed windfarm and, subject to detailed consideration of design and proposed mitigation measures, the principle of a track is considered acceptable.



Environmental Impacts

60. **NPF4 Policy 3: Biodiversity** seeks to ensure that development proposals protect biodiversity, reverse biodiversity loss, deliver positive effects from development and strengthen nature networks. Development proposals must include appropriate measures to conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity, in accordance with national and local guidance. **NPF4 Policy 4: Natural places** seeks to ensure that development proposals protect, restore and enhance natural assets making best use of nature-based solutions. Development that has significant adverse impacts on designated sites, after mitigation, will not be supported.
61. **LDP Policy 4: Natural heritage** seeks to ensure that there are no adverse effects on European Protected Species and other biodiversity interests.
62. The Cairngorms National Park Authority Ecology Officer identifies both construction and operational impacts, however the recommended mitigation should address these and ensure the effects on protected species and biodiversity is slight. Subject to strict adherence to the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and the prescribed mitigation, the environmental impacts of the proposal are considered acceptable. In terms of biodiversity enhancement, the proposed track works are part of the wider windfarm development which includes tree planting and peatland restoration. Should the windfarm development go ahead, the project will facilitate the delivery of wider biodiversity enhancements.

Design and Landscape Impacts

63. **NPF4 Policy 14: Design, quality and place**, seeks to support development proposals that improve the quality of an area regardless of scale and that are consistent with the six qualities of successful places, that is:
- a) Healthy
 - b) Pleasant
 - c) Connected
 - d) Distinctive
 - e) Sustainable
 - f) Adaptable.



64. **LDP Policy 3: Design and placemaking** also seeks to ensure that development meets the six qualities of successful places.
65. **LDP Policy 5: Landscape** presumes against development which does not conserve and enhance the landscape character and special qualities of the National Park and in particular the setting of the proposed development.
66. The proposed track upgrades and widening are of a functional design utilising locally sourced materials from on-site borrow pits. The design of the proposed track, which will extend to 6 metres in width, is of a scale and nature that is appropriate for its intended purpose to serve the proposed windfarm and in particular to accommodate vehicles transporting the required infrastructure during the construction phase. The existing track, a standard scale used for 4x4 vehicles, is visible from the surrounding area, however the proposed upgraded track will inevitably have a more significant visual impact than the existing one given its increased scale. The visual impacts of the proposed track will be more evident in locations that are in close proximity to it with less significant impacts from a further distance. It is recommended that conditions regarding the alignment and associated planting will provide mitigation that will help reduce the effects of the proposed widened track.
67. Notwithstanding the recommendations for appropriate mitigation to minimise the visual impacts, it is considered that in the longer term the track should be scaled back and redesigned to lessen its visual impact. Following the construction phase the use of the track, should not necessitate the type and scale of track proposed. A condition is recommended that the design and scale of the proposed track is temporary and details for a smaller scale track should be submitted for approval and these works undertaken within a specified time period. This would result in a track more in keeping with the existing track, reducing any negative visual impacts in the long term.
68. Notwithstanding it will serve the windfarm development to which there are significant objections, in terms of design and its landscape impacts, subject to the



recommended conditions the proposal track is considered to be acceptable and complies with the above policies.

Recommendation

That members of the committee confirm that:

- Part a) Cairngorms National Park Authority **OBJECT** to the application for the proposed Highland Wind Farm.
- Part b) Cairngorms National Park Authority raise **NO OBJECTION** to the proposed section of access track that lies with the National Park boundary, subject to the following conditions:

1. **No development shall commence on site until details of the design and alignment of the track hereby approved are submitted and subsequently approved.**

Reason: To ensure landscape effects are minimised through the good use of topography and to avoid the loss of important birch and juniper in accordance with NPF4 Policy 3: Biodiversity, Policy 4: Natural Places and Policy 14: Design, Quality and Place, and LDP Policy 3: Design and Placemaking, Policy 4: Natural Heritage and Policy 5: Landscape.

2. **No development shall commence on site until details of the location of tree planting and woodland cover is agreed in writing.**

Reason: To minimise visual effects from areas both in close proximity to the proposal and within the wider context and help to compensate for the loss of tree cover in accordance with NPF4 Policy 3: Biodiversity, Policy 4: Natural Places and Policy 14: Design, Quality and Place, and LDP Policy 3: Design and Placemaking, Policy 4: Natural Heritage and Policy 5: Landscape.

3. **The track hereby approved shall be for a temporary period. Prior to the construction of the windfarm and associated infrastructure, details of a revised design, reducing the scale and width of the track, shall be submitted for written approval. The revised details will be implemented within six months of the date of this written approval.**



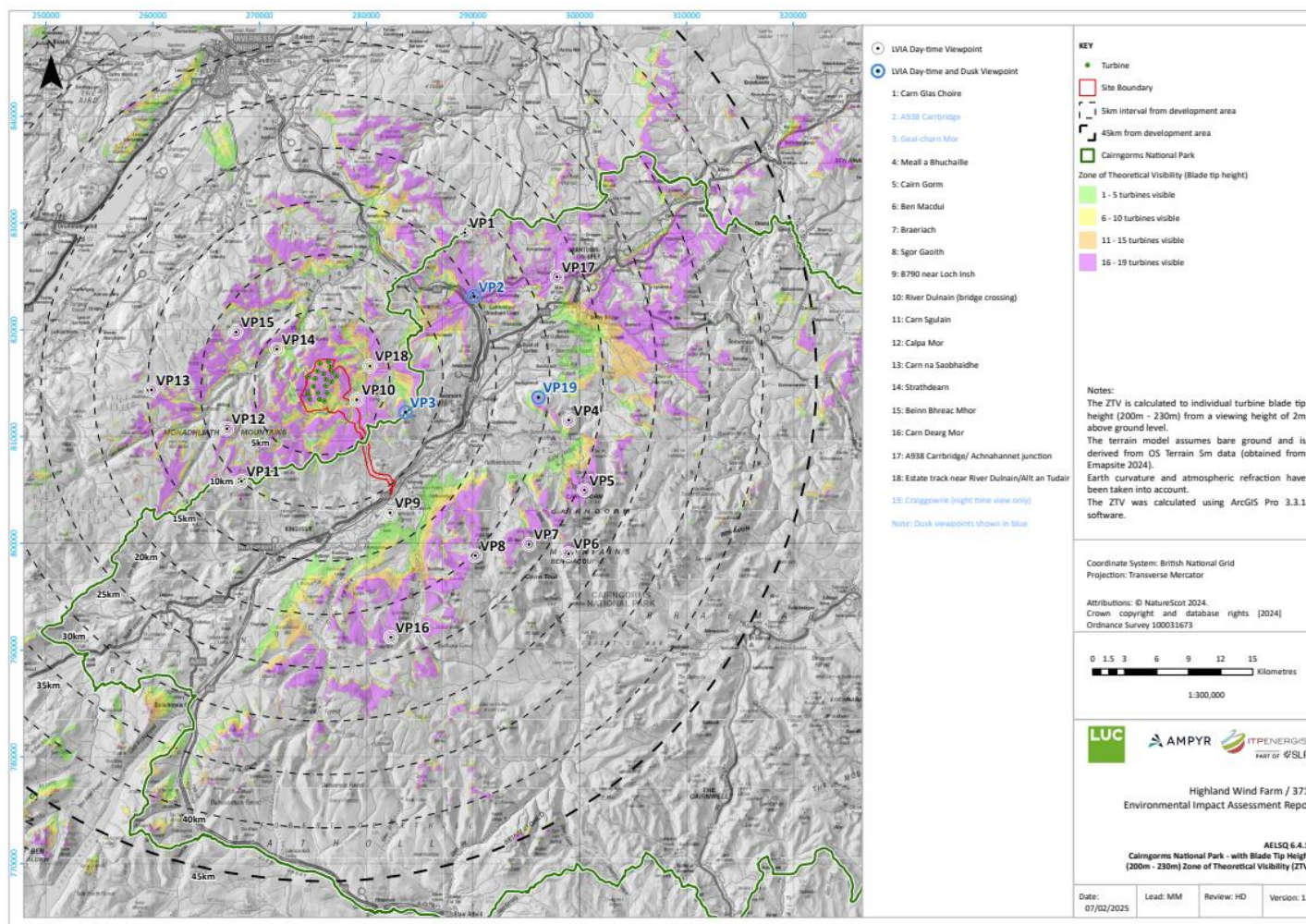
Reason: To minimise visual effects from areas both in close proximity to the proposal and within the wider context in accordance with NPF4 Policy 3: Biodiversity, Policy 4: Natural Places and Policy 14: Design, Quality and Place, and LDP Policy 3: Design and Placemaking, Policy 4: Natural Heritage and Policy 5: Landscape.

4. **The development hereby approved with be undertaken in strict accordance with the approved Construction Environmental Management Plan.**

Reason: In the interests of protecting the biodiversity and the environment in accordance with NPF4 Policy 3: Biodiversity and LDP Policy 4: Natural Heritage.



Appendix I – Highland Wind Farm: Proposed windfarm ZTV





Appendix II - Highland Wind Farm: Cumulative ZTV

