



Agenda item 4

Appendix 3

2025/0034/DET

Supporting information – detailed capercaillie
assessment

Annex II – detailed capercaillie effects assessment

Q1. Is the proposed development likely to change levels of human activity or patterns of recreation around the proposed development/associated settlement?

Q1: This and Q2 are included as screening questions to filter out any developments that aren't likely to have changed levels or patterns of recreation.

Yes, in relation to access to habitats in the immediate vicinity of the proposed site:

See map below for location of the development site on Lettoch road, Nethy Bridge. Based on the proposed 35 housing units, and an estimate of 1.9 people per dwelling, we would envisage a resident population of approximately 67 people. The site itself will provide a play area for children, some green space and private gardens.

The proportion of UK households owning a dog was thought to be 36% in 2024¹. Therefore, approximately 13 of the 35 households may include dogs. The dogs will need to be exercised and toileted particularly in the mornings, lunchtimes and the evenings. Some owners may decide to use the convenient woodland loop to the north.

The woods directly to the north of the site offer informal footpaths which connect to make a ~1.3km/0.8miles circular route and are likely to be used by the residents for short walks/ walking the dog and by children playing.


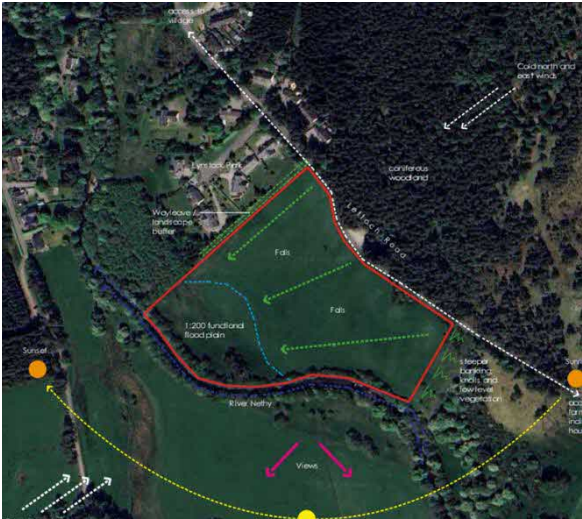
There are existing residential developments in this part of Nethy Bridge, so the nature of people's behaviour is unlikely to be significantly different, but we would expect some increased use of the woodlands to the north of the site.

This site is considered as a potential dispersal route for capercaillie as it is a connecting wood between the Abernethy Forest SPA and Craigmore Woodland SPA and the closest lek to the development in the Abernethy Forest SPA is expanding. The site is therefore being treated as a capercaillie woodland for the purposes of this assessment.



¹ Evidence from <https://www.ukpetfood.org/industry-information/statistics-new/uk-pet-population.html>

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<p>Q2. Are capercaillie woods significantly more accessible from this development site than from other parts of the associated settlement?</p> <p><i>Q2: This is included to ensure the effect of otherwise small-scale development sites particularly close to capercaillie woods are adequately considered. Evidence from settlements in Strathspey where houses are adjacent to woodlands indicates that networks of informal paths and trails have developed within the woods linking back gardens with formal path networks and other popular local destinations (eg primary schools). Such paths are likely to be used by visitors.</i></p>	<p><u>Yes. Woodland north of the proposed site (west of Garlyne Moss).</u></p> <p>Despite there being no capercaillie records the site is a connecting woodland between Abernethy Forest SPA and Craigmore SPA, connecting with Culstank Moss and School Wood so likely serves as part of a dispersal corridor and is therefore considered a capercaillie woodland. It is necessary that sites with potential to accommodate capercaillie movement are conserved/remain available to maintain connectivity (capercaillie framework 2015, p21-22). This woodland site is approximately [REDACTED] from an expanding capercaillie lek, and well within range for dispersing male capercaillie (max dispersal distance 5km) and female dispersal (max dispersal distance 30km). Further justification for including this site as a capercaillie woodland is provided in the final 'Reasons mitigation needed' section below.</p> <p><u>No. Forest Lodge/ Dell Wood area within Abernethy Forest SPA.</u></p> <p>The proposed development site on Lettoch Road is separated from Abernethy Forest by the River Nethy. The site is approximately 900m from the edge of the Abernethy Forest SPA (Dell Woods area), if accessed via a footbridge over the River Nethy near Lynstock Crescent. The footbridge is ~450-500m from the site. Approximately 140 existing Nethy Bridge properties on the north/ east side of the River Nethy are within 500m of the foot bridge. A further 90 properties along Dell Road are significantly</p>

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	<p>closer to the edge of the Abernethy Forest SPA on the south side of the River Nethy. Therefore, the woodland would not be significantly more accessible from the development than from existing parts of the associated settlement.</p> <p>The main lek area confirmed by RSPB is to [REDACTED] away from the development as the crow flies). One area likely to be impacted by disturbance would be [REDACTED] to the east of the main path. See further information provided in Q7.</p> <p><u>No, Craigmore Woods</u></p> <p>Other capercaillie woods at Nethy Bridge are not as close and would require a much more committed journey from the development so are not considered beyond question 2. These include Craigmore SPA and Garten woods within the Abernethy Forest SPA. Whilst Craigmore Wood contains an active capercaillie lek site and is [REDACTED] other walk locations are available closer by, so Craigmore Wood is not significantly more accessible from the location on Lettoch Road. Garten Woods is 1.7 miles walk from Lettoch Road. It does not contain an active capercaillie lek site and access is via Nethy village centre so this is not considered significantly more accessible from the development site and no detectable change to existing levels/patterns of use are expected.</p>
<p>If Q1 & Q2 = No, conclusion is no significant disturbance to capercaillie and assessment ends here</p> <p>If Q1 or Q2 = Yes, continue to Q3</p>	
<p>Q3. Which capercaillie woods are likely to be used regularly for recreation by users of the development site at detectable levels? (list all)</p> <p><i>Q3: This is included to identify which capercaillie woods are likely to be used for recreation by users of non-housing development sites at levels that would be detectable. The answer will be assessed using professional judgement based on knowledge of existing patterns of recreation around settlements and in the local area, the relative appeal of the capercaillie woods concerned compared to other recreational opportunities in the area, the volume of recreational visits likely to be generated by the development site, and informed by national</i></p>	<p><u>Abernethy Forest SPA (Dell Woods area)</u>– medium length walks, medium length dog walking, cross country MTB</p> <p><u>Woodland north of proposed site</u> – activities here by residents could include playing by children, short walks and short dog walks.</p> <p>Despite there being no capercaillie records the site is a connecting woodland between Abernethy Forest SPA and Craigmore SPA, connecting with Culstank Moss and School Wood so likely serving as part of a dispersal corridor and is therefore considered a capercaillie woodland. It is necessary that sites with potential to accommodate capercaillie movement are conserved/remain available to maintain connectivity (capercaillie framework 2015, p21-22). The site is approximately [REDACTED] of an expanding capercaillie lek near [REDACTED] and well within range for dispersing male capercaillie (max dispersal distance 5km) and female dispersal (max dispersal distance 30km). A map showing potential connectivity and a map demonstrating dispersal distances are shown below. Further justification for including this site as a capercaillie woodland is provided in the final 'Reasons mitigation needed' section below.</p>

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*survey data (eg on the distances people travel
recreational visits).*



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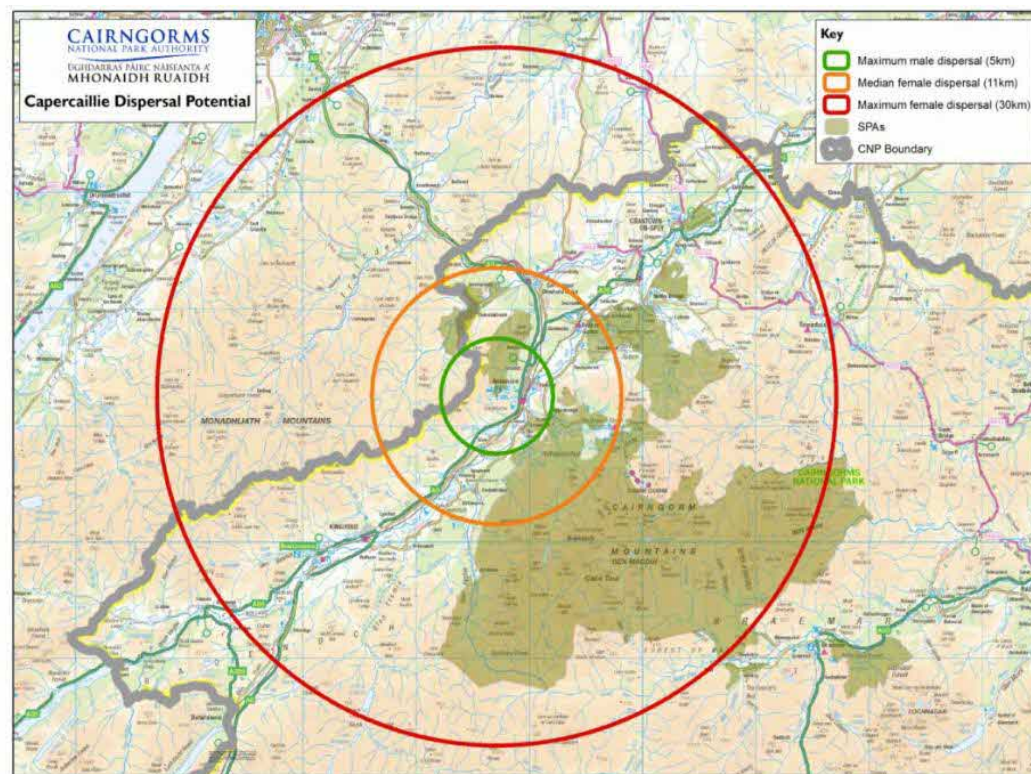


Figure 9. Dispersal potential of male and female capercaillie from a set point

Continue to Q4

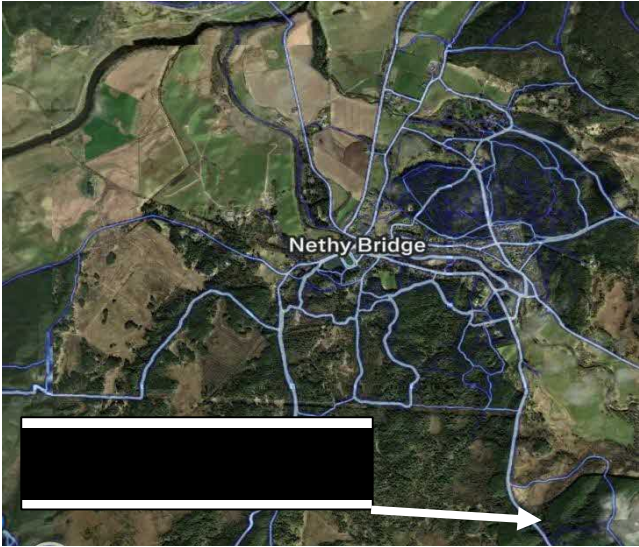
Q4. Are residents / users of this development site predicted to undertake any off path recreational activities in any of the woods identified at Q3 at detectable levels?

Q4: This is included because any off path recreational use in capercaillie woods will result in

Yes, Abernethy Forest SPA

There is potential for dogs to be let off their leads by dogwalkers. However, the use by dogs in this area is currently low (see information provided for Q7). The low level of dog walking activity may be due to other dog walking routes around the village being preferred for early morning/late evening walks, and/or inhibition due to the presence of ranger patrols and successful messaging from the *Lek It Be* campaign (Ref: [Lek It Be](#)) raising awareness about the impacts of recreational disturbance on capercaillie. There are over 140 existing properties in the east of Nethy Bridge which are a similar distance or closer to Abernethy, so it is unlikely that residents of the proposed development site would undertake a

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<p><i>significant disturbance and require mitigation.</i></p>	<p>different pattern of use compared to existing residents.</p> <p>No other off-path activities are predicted - cross country MTB activity / gravel riding may increase in Abernethy, but this activity is more likely to use existing trails. Abernethy Forest is not a popular downhill mountain biking area.</p> <p>An area of Abernethy Forest close to the development called Thompson's Brae includes at least two hand-built / informal mountain biking trails. These are included in the Mountain Biking Recreation Management Plan which was developed with the mountain biking community as part of the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project. It is considered unlikely that more trails will be built by residents of the development as informal trail building is a relatively niche activity and the Mountain Biking Recreation Management Plan is in place to manage this issue and reduce impacts caused by informal trail building.</p> <p><u>Yes, Woodland north of proposed site</u></p> <p>Potential for dogs to be let off their leads by dogwalkers. Children may roam off paths. It is expected there would be a detectable level of change to off path activities here.</p>
<p>If Q4 = No for any woods, continue to Q5 If Q4 = Yes for any woods, mitigation is needed. Note and continue to Q5.</p>	
<p>Q5: Are each of the woods identified at Q3 already established locations for recreation?</p> <p><i>Q5: This is included because if users of the development site are likely to access previously infrequently-visited capercaillie woods, or parts of these woods, for recreation, significant disturbance is likely and mitigation is needed. This will be answered on the basis of professional knowledge.</i></p>	<p><u>Yes, Abernethy Forest SPA</u></p> <p>People already walk, exercise dogs and mountain bike in Abernethy Forest. A look on Strava shows existing activity levels by runners (see map below).</p> 

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The Dell of Abernethy is a venue for events, hosts holiday makers and encourages people to benefit from visiting the woods (see google maps snip below). It is located close to a sensitive area of Abernethy forest. The [holiday rentals](#) have a total capacity of 30 people and welcome dogs. Along with visits by locals and tourists, the woodlands here are already likely to be receiving visits. The Strava image (above) helps to identify the routes used.



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The CNPA and other partners working to safeguard the remaining capercaillie population have access to comprehensive data on path usage. Further information on this is provided in Q7.


Yes, Woods north of the site.

The majority of activity here occurs in the west part of the woodland, associated with proximity to Mackenzie Crescent and Lynstock Crescent. Activity is indicated by the number of interconnecting paths and dens here by local children using the woodland. The area of woodland to the east appears to be relatively undisturbed with a high-quality field and shrub layer including blaeberry, heather and juniper. See photos from April 2025 below. An ecological survey for a previous planning application considered this area to be of good quality. (Further information provided in final section Reason for mitigation')

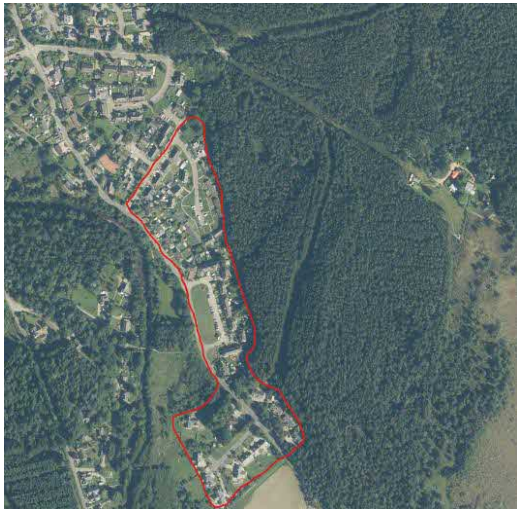


*A photo provided by Alba ecology in 2019
(phase 1 survey) in the east of the wood*

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<p>If Q5 = No for any woods, mitigation is needed. Note and continue to Q6.</p> <p>If Q5 = Yes for any woods, continue to Q6</p>	
<p>Q6: For each of the woods identified at Q3, are users of the development site predicted to have different temporal patterns of recreational use to any existing visitors, or to undertake a different profile of activities? (eg. more dog walking, or early morning use)</p> <p><i>Q6: This is included because some types of recreation are particularly disturbing to capercaillie; and increased levels of these types of recreation will cause significant disturbance and require mitigation. This will be answered on the basis of professional knowledge on existing patterns of recreational use and whether each location is sufficiently close and/or convenient in relation to the development site and patterns of travel from there, to be used by users of the development for different recreational activities or at different times of day. For example, capercaillie woods with safe routes for dogs that are located close to development sites are likely to be used for early morning &/or after work dog walking.</i></p>	<p><u>Yes, Woodland north of development site:</u></p> <p>While the most westerly area of this wood appears to be well used by residents of Nethy Bridge, the proximity to the new development site may result in additional early morning and evening use by dog owners for short walks. Dogs not on leads may stray further into the good quality habitat to the east, making this woodland less attractive for potential dispersing capercaillie.</p> <p><u>No, Abernethy Forest SPA:</u></p> <p>A safe and attractive loop south of Dell Lodge in Abernethy Forest is accessible for longer walks (6.6km/3.9miles) from development site, which would be ideal for dog walkers. There is likely to be some increased use of this area of Abernethy Forest as access has recently been made easier through the replacement of a stile with a gate. The Strava image (see Q5 above) confirms that this route is used by runners. Over 140 existing properties in the east of Nethy Bridge are of a similar distance or closer to this walking route, so there is likely to be an existing low level of disturbance from dog walking in this area. It is unlikely that residents of the proposed development site would undertake a different temporal pattern of use compared to existing residents.</p> <div data-bbox="819 908 1097 941" data-label="Caption"> <p>Screenshot from Strava</p> </div> 

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<p>If Q6 = yes for any woods, mitigation is needed. Note and continue to Q7</p> <p>If Q6 = No for any woods, continue to Q7</p>	
<p>Q7: For each of the woods identified at Q3, could the predicted level of use by residents / users of the development site <u>significantly</u> increase overall levels of recreational use?</p> <p><i>Q7: This is included because a significant increase in recreational use could result in significant disturbance to capercaillie, even in situations where the capercaillie wood is already popular for recreation, and no changes to current recreational patterns / activities or off path activities are predicted. The answer was assessed on the basis of professional judgement of current levels of use and whether the increase is likely to be more than approximately 10%.</i></p>	<p><u>Yes, Woods north of site</u></p> <p>Due to its proximity the recreational use of this woodland by residents of the proposed development is likely to significantly increase the overall levels of recreational use. The key issue is likely to be additional recreational use by dog walkers early in the morning, at lunchtimes and in the evening. Dogs are a greater cause of disturbance to wildlife than people alone. Even if dogs are on a lead their presence can have an impact on capercaillie. There are approximately 77 existing properties neighbouring the woodland, which is very accessible for them (see area highlighted in map below), this proposed development will be adding 35 more houses, which would be a 45% increase.</p>  <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p><u>Yes, Abernethy Forest SPA</u></p> <p>The CNPA Local Development Plan (2021) estimated that there were 361 occupied dwellings in Nethy Bridge in 2020, with an estimated population of 747 (LDP 2020 Habitats regulation Appraisal report). Like a number of other communities within the CNP area the population of Nethy Bridge was projected to decline between 2020 and 2029, with a projected decline of 36 people by 2029 (See Table 30 of LDP 2021, page 119).</p> <p>Dwelling numbers alone do not serve as a useful indicator of populations/human activity in villages in the</p>

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	<p>highlands, but if the 35 properties at Lettoch Road remain as occupied dwellings they may house approximately 67 people (average occupancy in the CNP is 1.9 – National Records of Scotland). This would be an increase of ~8.9% (based on the estimated 2020 Nethy Bridge population).</p> <p>It's been estimated that 36% of households owned a dog in 2024, and so approximately 13 of the 35 future households of the development site might include a dog or multiple dogs. Not everyone from the development will choose to walk or mountain bike every day, or choose to do so in Abernethy Forest, but dogs require regular daily exercise, and therefore an increased level of use of trails closest to the development site by dog walkers would be expected.</p> <p>An increase in the use of MTB cross country / gravel riding use might also be expected, especially with the new gate making it more accessible for them.</p> <p>Ranger patrol data for the sensitive capercaillie area of Abernethy Forest closest to the development recorded just 10 dog walkers (and 3 in less sensitive areas, making a total of 13) over a 5-week period from April to mid-May 2025. This is an average of 2.6 dog walks/week in the mornings during the capercaillie lekking season.</p> <p>This low level of dog walking activity seen during the lekking period may be due to other dog walking routes around the village being preferred for early morning/late evening walks, or inhibition due to the presence of ranger patrols and successful messaging from the <i>Lek It Be</i> campaign (Ref: Lek It Be) raising awareness about the impacts of recreational disturbance on capercaillie.</p> <p>With the current low level of dog walking activity, the addition of small number of early morning/late evening dog walk per week during the sensitive lekking period could potentially increase disturbance. However, as there are over 140 existing properties in the east of Nethy Bridge which are a similar distance or closer to Abernethy, it is unlikely that residents of the proposed development site would undertake a different pattern of use compared to existing residents.</p> <p>No negative impacts were predicted for capercaillie in the HRA for the current LDP (2021) for proposed developments in Nethy Bridge, which included the Lettoch Road development, and these conclusions are considered to remain valid. However, since the current LDP was published the capercaillie population has decreased by over 50% to 532 birds and a Capercaillie Emergency Plan is now in place requested by the Scottish Government. The number of lekking male capercaillie at the lek site in Abernethy closest to the development has been increasing while many other leks have been declining.</p>
If Q4-7 = No for all woods, conclusion is no significant disturbance to capercaillie and assessment ends here	

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If Q4, 5, 6 and/or 7 = Yes for any woods, mitigation is needed

Conclusion: Is mitigation needed as a consequence of this development site in relation to each wood listed at Q3?

Yes, additional mitigation is needed as consequence of this development site.

Proposed Mitigation:

Dog exercise area within the development site

Layout/design for dog exercise area and associated access/path routes to be submitted by developer and approved by CNPA. See map below, this area is approximately 60m wide and 120m long.

Use of this space by residents with dogs will reduce pressure on the woodland to the north during early morning and evening times for short dog walks. This measure is to reduce disturbance pressure on the wood to the north to maintain it as a dispersal corridor for capercaillie.

To ensure no impact to the integrity of the River Spey SAC, safeguarding the objectives for Otter, the design is to include fencing to maintain the riparian buffer recommended by SEPA for the River Nethy, removal of the corner gate and/or addition of screening to discourage residents from walking along the river to the west of the site from the dog exercise area.



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	<p><u>Householder advice pack/ biodiversity note:</u> To be submitted by the developer and approved by CNPA. To include information on alternative walking routes e.g. https://cairngorms.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/NETHY-BRIDGE-CPL_screen-1.pdf raise awareness/encourage dog owners of the importance of keeping dogs on leads during the capercaillie breeding season March – August. explicit mention of the sensitivities near The Dell during breeding season so people can make informed decisions. This approach has been central to the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project. explicit mention of the potential function of the wood to the north by dispersing capercaillie before and after the lekking season in April and encouragement to keep dogs on leads.</p> <p>Without such mitigation measures, it is possible that the Habitats Regulations Appraisal would not be able to conclude that the proposal would not have an adverse effect on site integrity of the Abernethy Forest SPA.</p> <p>Existing Mitigation for Abernethy Forest Some mitigation already exists through signage, ranger patrols and the <i>Lek It Be</i> campaign led by the Park Authority, however the <i>Lek It Be</i> campaign is targeted specifically at birdwatchers, guided groups and photographers rather than dog walkers or mountain bikers and is only in place for the most sensitive lekking period (April – May).</p>
<p>Reasons mitigation needed:</p>	<p><u>Wood north of the site – value/function to capercaillie</u></p> <p>Information gathered through the course of completing this HRA indicates that the wood to the north of the site is unlikely to be used by capercaillie currently, however capercaillie activity is dynamic, the extent of the active lek near the Dell in Abernethy is increasing (last assessed condition was 'favourable maintained'). The condition of the breeding capercaillie population at Craigmore Wood has been assessed as 'unfavourable declining'. Presence and movement of capercaillie has changed, increasing the significance of this area and it is important to safeguard any potential dispersal corridor for capercaillie during Autumn and Spring (timeframes either side of lekking/nesting/brood rearing). In accordance with the Capercaillie framework 2015 and given the proximity to the expanding lek at Abernethy, the site has</p>

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	<p>the potential to support dispersing males and females.</p> <p><u>Abernethy Forest area – value/function to capercaillie</u></p> <p>Information is provided in Q7. Given the sensitivity of the eastern part of Abernethy Forest, any additional disturbance from human activity, particularly if accompanied with dogs, could impact lekking, egg incubating, and brood rearing, producing a significant effect on capercaillie productivity here and for the overall population of caper in Badenoch and Strathspey. The current UK population is estimated to be 532 with B&S holding 85%- national capercaillie survey results 2021/2022). See NatureScot information on disturbance here and in the Capercaillie Emergency Plan here(page 6).</p> <p>Mitigation as proposed above would help to reduce effects to a minimal level such that recovery of capercaillie would not be hindered by the proposed development.</p>
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