

Planning Application for the Installation and Operation of a Battery Energy Storage System  
at Contullich, Alness, Highlands, Scotland  
Landscape & Visual Appraisal

PREPARED BY PEGASUS GROUP ON BEHALF OF RES LTD | DECEMBER 2023 | P23-1582





## CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION
2. METHODOLOGY
3. SITE CONTEXT AND DESCRIPTION
4. DESIGNATION AND POLICY CONTEXT
5. DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS
6. LANDSCAPE BASELINE AND EFFECTS
7. VISUAL BASELINE AND EFFECTS
8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION
9. CUMULATIVE APPRAISAL
10. REFERENCES

### APPENDIX 1: ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

### APPENDIX 2: PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

---

**Pegasus Environment, part of Pegasus Group**  
1 Lochrin Square, 92-98 Fountainbridge, Edinburgh, EH3 9QA  
t: 0131 589 2274

Job code	P23-1582
Author	GC
Checked by	DT
Date	DECEMBER 2023



# 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) has been prepared on behalf of RES by Pegasus Group. It relates to a parcel of land in proximity to the B9176, approximately 1km north of Alness, as shown on **Figure 1**. This LVA considers the site and its surrounding context in both landscape and visual terms, to assess the potential effects of the proposed Battery Energy Storage System (BESS / the Proposed Development) upon:

- Landscape features;
- Landscape character; and
- Visual amenity.

1.2 This LVA has been guided by the assessment criteria set out in **Appendix 1**. It should be noted that all of the landscape and visual effects stated within assessments such as this are considered adverse unless stated otherwise. It should also be noted that all effects are considered direct, long-term and permanent unless otherwise stated.

1.3 The appraisal has been prepared through a desk study analysis of the site and its policy context as well as site visits to gain an appreciation of the landscape and visual context of the site.

1.4 A detailed landscape proposals plan conveys the landscape strategy and is shown by **Figure 6**. This LVA is based on this detailed landscape proposals plan, which is also produced as a separate plan in support of the planning application.



Figure 1: Site Location and Surroundings



## 2. METHODOLOGY

### Published Guidance

2.1 The LVA has been undertaken in accordance with the principles of best practice, as outlined in published guidance documents listed in the reference section of this report, notably the third edition of the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Assessment (GLVIA3), (Landscape Institute and the Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013).

2.2 The methodology and assessment criteria for the assessment have been developed in accordance with the principles established in this best practice document. It should be acknowledged that GLVIA3 establishes guidelines, not a specific methodology. The preface to GLVIA3 states:

*“This edition concentrates on principles and processes. It does not provide a detailed or formulaic ‘recipe’ that can be followed in every situation – it remains the responsibility of the professional to ensure that the approach and methodology adopted are appropriate to the task in hand.”*

2.3 The approach set out below and in detail in **Appendix 1** has therefore been developed specifically for this assessment to ensure that the methodology is fit for purpose.

### Distinction between Landscape and Visual Effects

2.4 In accordance with the published guidance, landscape and visual effects were assessed separately, although the procedure for assessing each of these is closely linked. A clear distinction has been drawn between landscape and visual effects as described below:

- Landscape effects relate to the effects of the Proposed Development on the physical and perceptual characteristics of the landscape and its resulting character and quality; and
- Visual effects relate to the effects on specific views experienced by visual receptors and on visual amenity more generally.

### Types of Landscape and Visual Impacts Considered and Duration

2.5 The LVA assesses both the permanent effects of the development and the temporary effects associated with its construction.

2.6 Consideration has been given to seasonal variations in the visibility of the development and these are described where necessary.

2.7 Both beneficial and adverse effects are identified in the assessment and reported as appropriate. Where effects are described as ‘neutral’ this is where beneficial effects are deemed to balance the adverse effects. The adverse and beneficial effects are communicated in each case so that

the judgement is clear.

2.8 As part of the Proposed Development, new planting would be introduced. Newly planted vegetation takes a number of years to mature and average growth rates have been taken into consideration in this assessment. The effectiveness of vegetation would improve over time (both in terms of integrating the development into the surrounding landscape and in providing visual screening) and this needs to be considered appropriately.

2.9 Therefore, permanent landscape and visual impacts of the project are assessed both in the winter of year 1 (the year in which the development is completed) and also in the summer of year 15 (15 years after completion of the development). In this second scenario it is assumed that vegetation planted as part of the development will have established and exhibit a degree of maturity.

### Assumptions and Limitations of the Assessment

#### Assessed Proposal

2.10 The project proposals have been developed iteratively in conjunction with the production of the LVA with the intention of incorporating mitigation into the project from the outset. The effects identified and described as part of this LVA are based on the landscape proposals as shown in **Figure 6**.

#### Study Area

2.11 This LVA has focussed on an initial 3km study area. Based on an understanding of visibility gained during site visits and the results of the screened zone of theoretical visibility plan (**Figure 9**), it was considered that given the context of the landscape and the scale of the Proposed Development, this was a proportionate study area. However, most landscape and visual receptors are within less than 1km of the site.

#### Baseline Information

2.12 The baseline landscape resource and visual receptors were identified in part through a desk based study of Ordnance Survey mapping, published landscape character studies, relevant planning policies, interrogation of aerial photography, as well as photographs taken and observations made during a site visit conducted during July 2023. The site visit was conducted during sunny conditions with good visibility.

2.13 Access during the site visit was restricted to publicly accessible locations or land within the ownership of the site landowners. No access was possible to private properties and therefore, assumptions have been made regarding the view from private properties. These assumptions have been based on an understanding of the properties and features present within the wider landscape gained during the site visit from

publicly accessible locations. Assumptions are guided by professional experience and judgement.

### Distances

2.14 Where distances are given in the LVA, these are approximate distances between the nearest part of the site and the nearest receptor in question, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

## 3. SITE CONTEXT

3.1 The site is located 1km north of Alness in Ross and Cromarty, north of Inverness within the administrative boundary of the Highland Council (THC). The site comprises the north eastern part of a larger rectilinear arable field.

3.2 Landform within the site rises gradually to the east and west with an elevation range of approximately 75m AOD in the east to 85m AOD in the west. Northern, western and southern boundaries are largely open comprising low stone walls and scrub. The eastern boundary is defined by a low stone wall and some mature individual trees. The boundaries of the wider field are defined by the existing access to Alness Substation (0.2km north east) to the north, Coulhill Wood to the east, a minor road to the south and the B9176 to the west.

3.3 The immediate surrounding landscape comprising elevated landform and woodland largely contains the site. This includes the woodland along the River Averon in proximity to the north, elevated Coulhill Wood immediately east, localised changes in landform to the south and the steeper rising landform and woodland north of the B9176. The site is not located in any nationally or locally designated landscapes.

3.4 There are no promoted recreational routes within the site. The closest THC Paths are located within Coulhill Wood approximately 660m south, with non-designated tracks providing routes close to the site and connectivity across Coulhill Wood.

3.5 A photographic record of views toward the site and its local context is provided in **Appendix 2** with the photographic locations illustrated on **Figure 10**.



## 4. DESIGNATION AND POLICY CONTEXT

4.1 This section provides an overview of the policies and designations of particular relevance to landscape and visual issues. **Figures 2 to 5** illustrate relevant designations within the locality of the site.

### Landscape Designations

4.2 The site is not covered by any national or local landscape designations, the closest THC Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) are Ben Wyvis and Sutors of Cromarty, Rosemarkie and Fort George, located over 12km east and west of the site. Given the intervening distance notable effects on THC SLAs (shown on **Figure 2**) are considered unlikely and are not considered further in this LVA.

4.3 The closest recreational routes are shown on **Figure 3** include THC Core Paths RC03.02 and RC03.05 approximately 660m south of the site. NCNR 1 following the B817 through Alness and then minor roads east of Coul Hill Wood approximately 0.7km east at the closest point.

4.4 There are no Tree Preservation Orders covering the site. There are no listed buildings, scheduled monuments or conservation areas on or in proximity to the site, with those closest illustrated by **Figure 3**. Cultural assets are a Cultural Heritage concern and are not considered further in this LVA. Recreational routes are shown on **Figure 4**.

### Relevant Landscape Planning Policy

#### National Planning Guidance

4.5 The National Planning Framework for Scotland 4 (NPF4) (2023) was adopted 13th February 2023 and replaces NPF3 (2014) and Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) (2014). NPF4 sets out spatial principles, regional priorities, national developments and national planning policy for Scotland.

4.6 NPF4 sets out six overarching spatial principles:

- *“Just transition. We will empower people to shape their places and ensure the transition to net zero is fair and inclusive.*
- *Conserving and recycling assets. We will make productive use of existing buildings, places, infrastructure and services, locking in carbon, minimising waste, and building a circular economy.*
- *Local living. We will support local liveability and improve community health and wellbeing by ensuring people can easily access services, greenspace, learning, work and leisure locally.*
- *Compact urban growth. We will limit urban expansion so we can optimise the use of land to provide services and resources,*



Figure 2: Extract from the Highland Council Open Map Special Landscape Areas Data (approximate site location shown as red dot). SLAs shown as blue wash

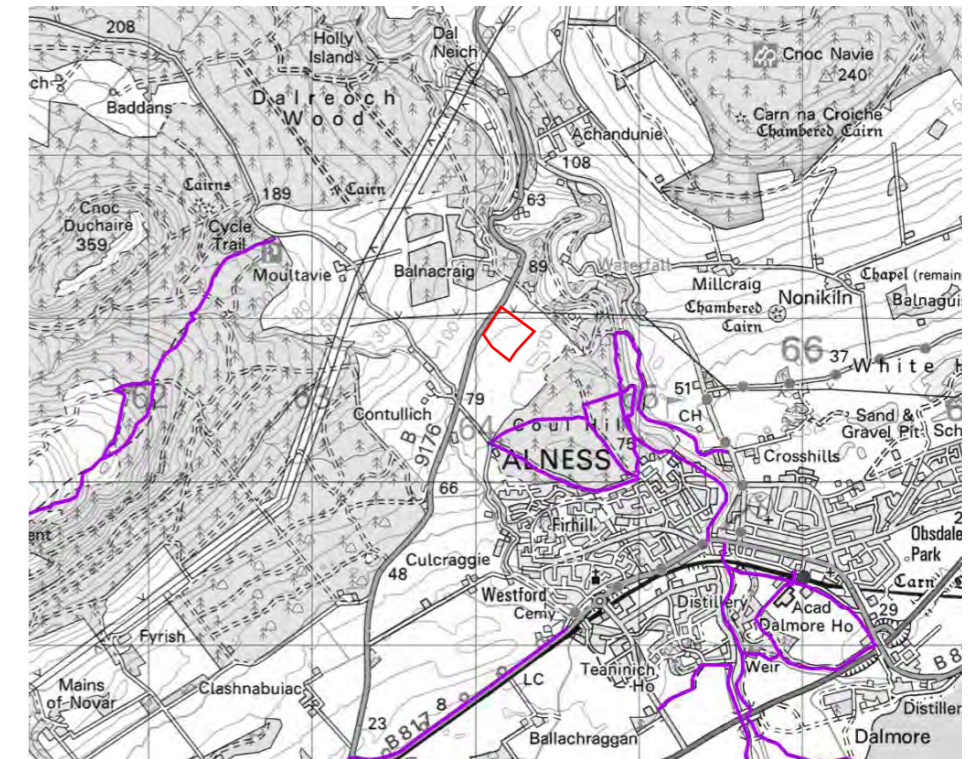


Figure 4: Extract from the Highland Council Core Path Open Map



Figure 3: Extract from the Historic Scotland interactive mapping (Grade A listed building small Red Dot, Grade B listed building Blue Dot, Grade C listed building pink dot).

*including carbon storage, flood risk management, blue and green infrastructure and biodiversity.*

- *Rebalanced development. We will target development to create opportunities for communities and investment in areas of past decline, and manage development sustainably in areas of high demand.*
- *Rural revitalisation. We will encourage sustainable development in rural areas, recognising the need to grow and support urban and rural communities together.”*

4.7 By applying these principles NPF4 will support the planning and delivery of:

- *“sustainable places, where we reduce emissions, restore and better connect biodiversity;.*
- *liveable places, where we can all live better, healthier lives; and*
- *productive places, where we have a greener, fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy.”*



4.8 A full and detailed consideration of the NPF4 policy applicable to the Proposed Development are provided in the Planning Statement accompanying the planning application. A full and detailed consideration of the regulatory and planning policy frameworks applicable to the Proposed Development are provided in the Planning Statement accompanying the planning application.

### Local Planning Policy

4.9 The Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) was adopted in April 2012 and sets out the over arching vision statement and spatial planning policy for the whole of the Highland Council area. HwLDP policies of relevance to the site and the Proposed Development are considered below and an extract from the LDP interactive web map is illustrated in **Figure 5**.

### HwLDP Policy 28 – Sustainable Design

4.10 This policy states that: “The Council will support developments which promote and enhance the social”, and that proposed developments will be assessed against a number of criteria. Selected criteria relevant to landscape and visual matters include “landscape” and “scenery”. Policy 28 also states that: “All development proposals must demonstrate compatibility with the Sustainable Design Guide: Supplementary Guidance, which requires that all developments should:

- conserve and enhance the character of the Highland area; • use resources efficiently;
- minimise the environmental impact of development; and
- enhance the viability of Highland communities. economic and environmental wellbeing of the people of Highland.”

### HwLDP Policy 29 – Design Quality & Place Making

4.11 This policy is concerned with design quality and place making. The Policy states that new development should be designed to make a positive contribution to the architectural and visual quality of the place in which it is located, where appropriate, and should consider the incorporation of public art as a means of creating a distinct sense of place and identity in line with the Council’s Public Art Strategy for the Highlands. Applicants should demonstrate sensitivity and respect towards the local distinctiveness of the landscape, architecture, design and layouts in their proposals.

### HwLDP Policy 57 – Trees and Woodland

4.12 Policy 51 is concerned with the protection of trees and woodland, and states that the Council will secure additional tree and hedge planting within a tree planting or landscape plan to enhance the setting of new development.

### HwLDP Policy 57 – Natural, Built and Cultural heritage

4.13 This policy is concerned with Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage, emphasising the need to fully consider the outstanding natural, built and cultural heritage of the Highlands when development proposals are considered. Categories outlined in this policy relevant to landscape and visual matters include SLA and settlement setting.

### HwLDP Policy 61 – Landscape”

4.14 This policy states that:

“New developments should be designed to reflect the landscape characteristics and special qualities identified in the Landscape Character Assessment of the area in which they are proposed. This will include consideration of the appropriate scale, form, pattern and construction materials, as well as the potential cumulative effect of developments where this may be an issue.”

4.15 The Policy encourages developers to take measures to enhance the landscape characteristics of the area.

### Consideration of HwLDP Policies

4.16 The above local planning policies have been used to inform the design of the Proposed Development to ensure it is befitting of the site context, immediate surroundings and delivers enhancements where possible. The Proposed Development would be located in a landscape already influenced by electricity infrastructure including Alness Substation in proximity to the north east. Sections 5, 6 and 7 describe how the existing landscape and landscape features such as existing trees, and visual amenity have been addressed in the design proposals, and how additional landscape features are proposed.

4.17 Accounting for Policy 57 the site is not located within or in proximity to an SLA or settlement edge.

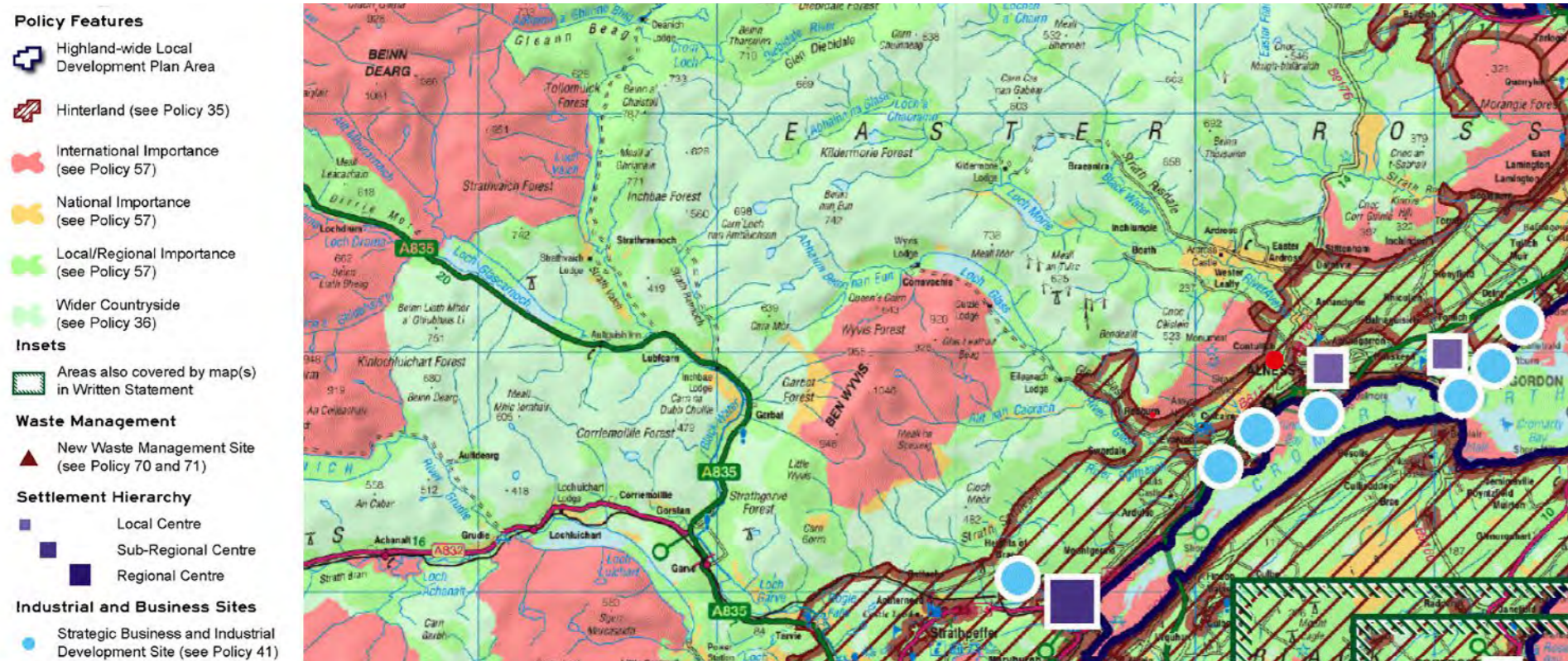


Figure 5: Extract from the adopted HwLDP (2012) proposals mapping (approximate site location shown as red dot).



## 5. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

5.1 The site covers an area of approximately 6.3 hectares. The Proposed Development comprises an energy storage facility with associated equipment and infrastructure and would consist of the following:

- 64 no. battery storage enclosures (BSE) positioned in 32 pairs and associated Power Conversion Systems (PCS), a Distribution Network Operation (DNO) substation building, a BESS substation building, auxiliary transformers and Low Voltage (LV) distribution equipment, pre-insertion resistor, harmonic filter and a storage container, set within a surfaced compound;
- Formation of a new access from the B9176 and a new access track leading to the battery storage compound;
- Lighting columns and CCTV system, located at strategic points around the compounds;
- Security fencing and an acoustic timber fence up to 4m high;
- Earthworks bund;
- Drainage channels and an attenuation basin within a storage area of 890m<sup>3</sup>;
- A site access track leading from the B9176; and
- Native tree and shrub planting.

### Mitigation Proposals

5.2 In order to mitigate potential landscape and visual effect, the landscape planting as illustrated at **Figure 6**, takes account of the identified areas of sensitivity by providing additional planting where required. During construction the existing vegetation within the site would be removed. Mature trees and vegetation immediately west and south of the site would be retained and protected in accordance with BS 5837:2012 Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction.

5.3 The landscape mitigation proposals include the following:

- The battery storage enclosures are relatively low in terms of height, and as installed units would be coloured in relation to the local landscape;
- The proposed acoustic fence would be painted or stained a colour informed by the local landscape;
- The proposed access would use the existing access from the B9176;
- Creation of new native tree and shrub planting to the north, south and west of the proposed compound to provide visual enclosure to the development; and
- Ongoing landscape management of planting during the lifetime of the Proposed Development.



Figure 6: Landscape Masterplan Proposals



## 6. LANDSCAPE BASELINE AND EFFECTS

6.1 The assessment of Landscape Effects deals with the changes to the landscape as a resource. Different combinations of the physical, natural and cultural components (including aesthetic, perceptual and experiential aspects) of the landscape and their spatial distribution create the distinctive character of landscapes in different places.

6.2 Effects are considered in relation to both landscape features and landscape character during construction, at Year 1 and at Year 15 and beyond. A summary of landscape effects are included in Table 1.

### Landscape Features

#### Landform and Topography

6.3 Accounting for the planning application boundary landform within the sites rises from approximately 75m AOD in the east to 85m AOD in the west.

6.4 There are no notable watercourses within the site, the River Averon is located approximately 0.3km north outside the site. Landform within the immediate to wider surroundings is defined by the River Averon Valley and Coul Hill, rising north, west and east of the site.

6.5 Landform is typical for the locality and is in keeping with the landscape character type description of the River Averon valley.

6.6 The landform of the site is judged to be of medium susceptibility to the type and scale of development proposed. Considering the present site condition and immediate surroundings, landscape value is judged to be low. Taking account of the judgements of susceptibility and value, the overall sensitivity of the site is judged to be medium.

6.7 There would be some changes to the landform of the site to accommodate foundations of the proposed BESS compound, fencing, access track and other structures. During construction, the magnitude of change is considered to be low, which would result in a **Minor** adverse landscape effect, which would be temporary in nature.

6.8 Upon completion, all earthworks works would be completed, with new features outside of the main compound planted, resulting in a low magnitude of change resulting in a **Minor** adverse landscape effect in the longer term.

#### Watercourse and Drainage

6.9 There are no notable watercourses within the site, the River Averon is located approximately 0.3km north outside the site.

6.10 Given the lack of water of water and drainage features within and close to the site, the sensitivity of these features is judged to be low to the type

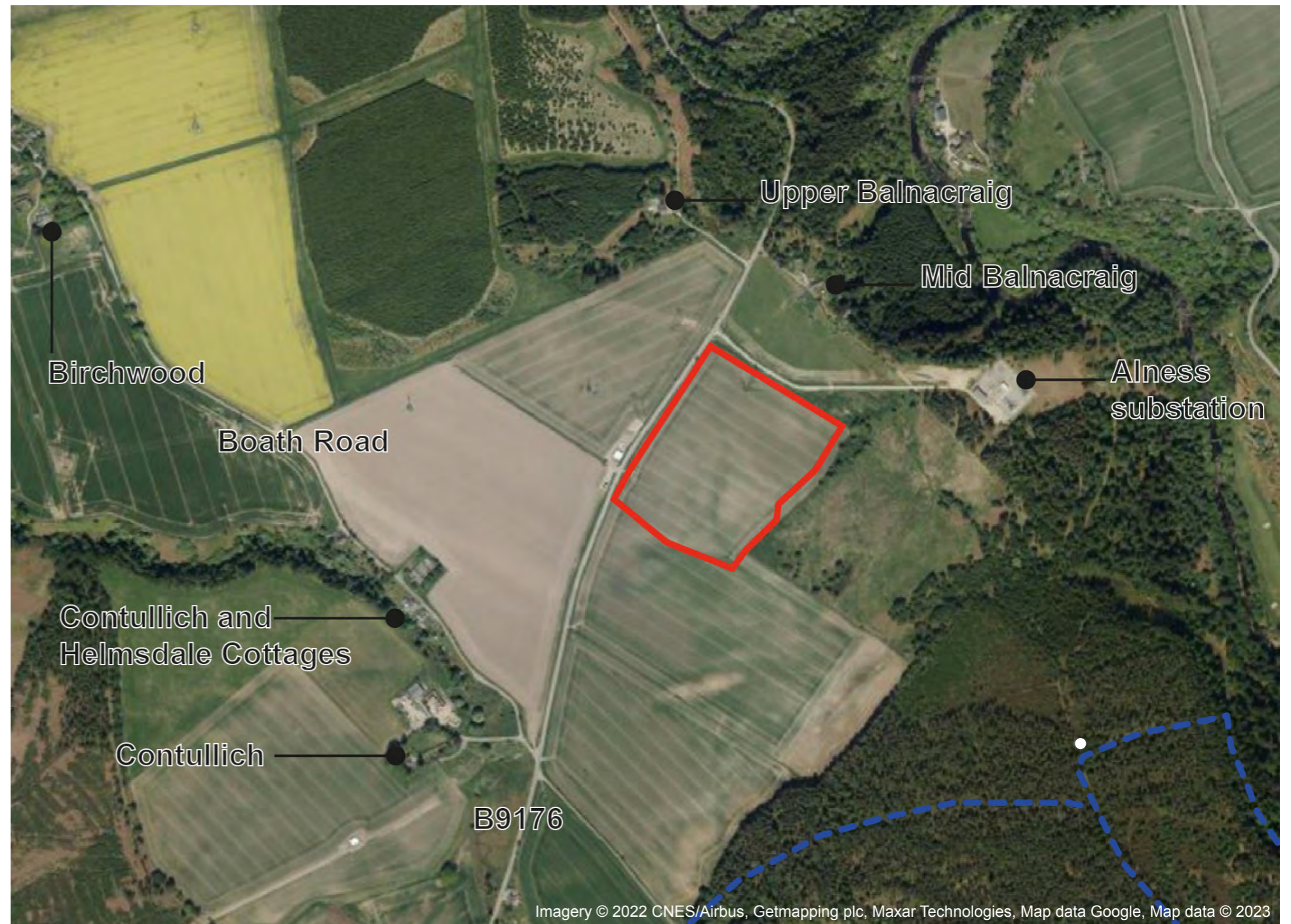


Figure 7: Aerial Photograph of site and immediate surroundings, THC Core Paths blue dashed line



of development proposed.

- 6.11 There would be no direct or indirect effects upon the water features in proximity to the site. There would be a very low beneficial magnitude of change resulting from the proposed drainage within the site, resulting in a **Minor** beneficial long-term effect.

### Land Use, Buildings and Infrastructure

- 6.12 The site comprises a medium-scale rectilinear arable field. There are no existing buildings within the site. The site is partly contained by its low elevation and Coulhill Wood to the east. The site is influenced by Alness Substation in proximity to the north east, associated pylon lines and the pylon line approximately 0.9km to the north. These infrastructure elements are visible across much of the site partly screened and filtered by intervening landform.
- 6.13 Accounting for the existing land uses and the influence of the main transport route and nearby settlement, susceptibility and landscape value are judged to be low medium. Overall sensitivity is judged to be low medium.
- 6.14 The introduction of the Proposed Development would result in a change of land use across the site. This would result in the localised loss of arable farmland, the introduction of a BESS and associated infrastructure. The magnitude of change is judged to be medium during construction and at Year 1 of operation as part of the field would remain to the immediate west of the Proposed Development, resulting in a **Moderate** adverse landscape effect.
- 6.15 As landscape mitigation planting matures, the Proposed Development would be further integrated within the local landscape by Year 15. However, accounting for the change in land use the degree of effect would remain **Moderate** and adverse.

### Vegetation

- 6.16 The site is partly contained by a low stone wall and shrubs to the north and mixed woodland to the south. The site itself and the wide field of which it occupies the north eastern part of comprises arable crops.
- 6.17 Vegetation across the site is considered to be of low medium susceptibility and value. On balance, the overall sensitivity of vegetation within the site is considered to be low.
- 6.18 During construction, the introduction of the Proposed Development would result in the localised loss of an area of arable farmland. The existing trees on the eastern boundaries would be retained and protected as far as practicable during construction. The magnitude of change to vegetation

is judged to be low. Accounting for the low sensitivity the degree of effect is judged to be **Minor** adverse and temporary.

- 6.19 Proposed native tree and shrub planting would be provided along the northern, southern and eastern boundary of the Proposed Development as illustrated in **Figure 6**. A very low magnitude of change is predicted at Year 1 as planting would not have matured, resulting in a **Minor** beneficial landscape effect in the short term. In the longer term, the proposed vegetation would help integrate the Proposed Development with its surroundings and bring about a number of localised benefits, resulting in a long-term **Minor** beneficial landscape effect.

## Landscape Character

- 6.20 This section provides an overview of the landscape character of the site and its locality. It provides judgment on the sensitivity of the landscape character to the Proposed Development and the resulting effects which would arise from the development proposals.

### National Level Landscape Character

- 6.21 Scotland has a digital map-based national Landscape Character Assessment published in 2019 by NatureScot, showing Landscape Character Types (LCTs) i.e. areas of consistent and recognisable landscape character. This mapping now supersedes those landscape character studies from the 1990s.
- 6.22 The site access is located within the southern part of LCT 341 - Forest Edge Farming, the main site is located within the northern part of LCT 345 - Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty. LCTs are illustrated on **Figure 8** and considered below.
- 6.23 Given the limited SZTV coverage as shown on **Figure 9** it is considered unlikely that there would be any notable indirect effects on other LCTs. Therefore this LVA considers the effects of the Proposed Development on LCT 341 and 345.
- 6.24 Selected key characteristics of LCT 341 - Forest Edge Farming relevant to the site and immediate landscape include:
- *Gentle to moderately steep convex slopes, occasional minor straths and glens with sinuous burns and rivers, and occasional high level, flatter undulating moorlands.*
  - *Rocky, steeper slopes occur in the southern part of the type.*
  - *Mix of agriculture and farming, varying from an equal balance to marginally more agriculture.*
  - *A patchwork of semi-improved and improved pasture, arable fields, conifer forestry blocks, woodlands, shelterbelts, trees and hedges.*
  - *The topography and geometric pattern of enclosure are emphasised by walls, hedges and hedgerow trees.*
  - *Variable field sizes, many are large and open and dominate the landscape; others are smaller and create diverse patterns and textures.*
  - *The contrasting upland character of higher ground emphasised by stone walls, rough grassland and less tree cover.*



- The scale of woodlands is in keeping with the geometry of fields and narrow roads.
- Conifer forests vary in size, the larger ones superimposed on the field pattern.
- The edge of forestry blocks creates enclosed spaces around fields and buildings, and forms a dark background to enclosed features.
- Tree cover creates enclosed or intermittent distant views and helps to screen structures such as pylons and masts.”

6.25 Selected key characteristics of LCT 345 - Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty to the site and immediate landscape include:

- “Complex pattern of farmland, tree cover, forests and woodland on sloped, often terraced land rising from firths or river plains to mid-elevations and often backed by large scale forest plantations where there are adjacent hills.
- Overall impression of a well-treed landscape, but within which farming is the dominant land use.
- Generally higher proportion of trees, woodland and forest plantations in upper slopes, forming a well-connected network within which fields are located.
- Terraces of open land, interspersed with forest plantations and woodlands on mid slopes. Gradual change to more open landscapes at lower levels.
- Wide range and distribution of archaeological sites indicating a long history of human settlement.
- Occasional large settlements in a predominantly rural landscape.

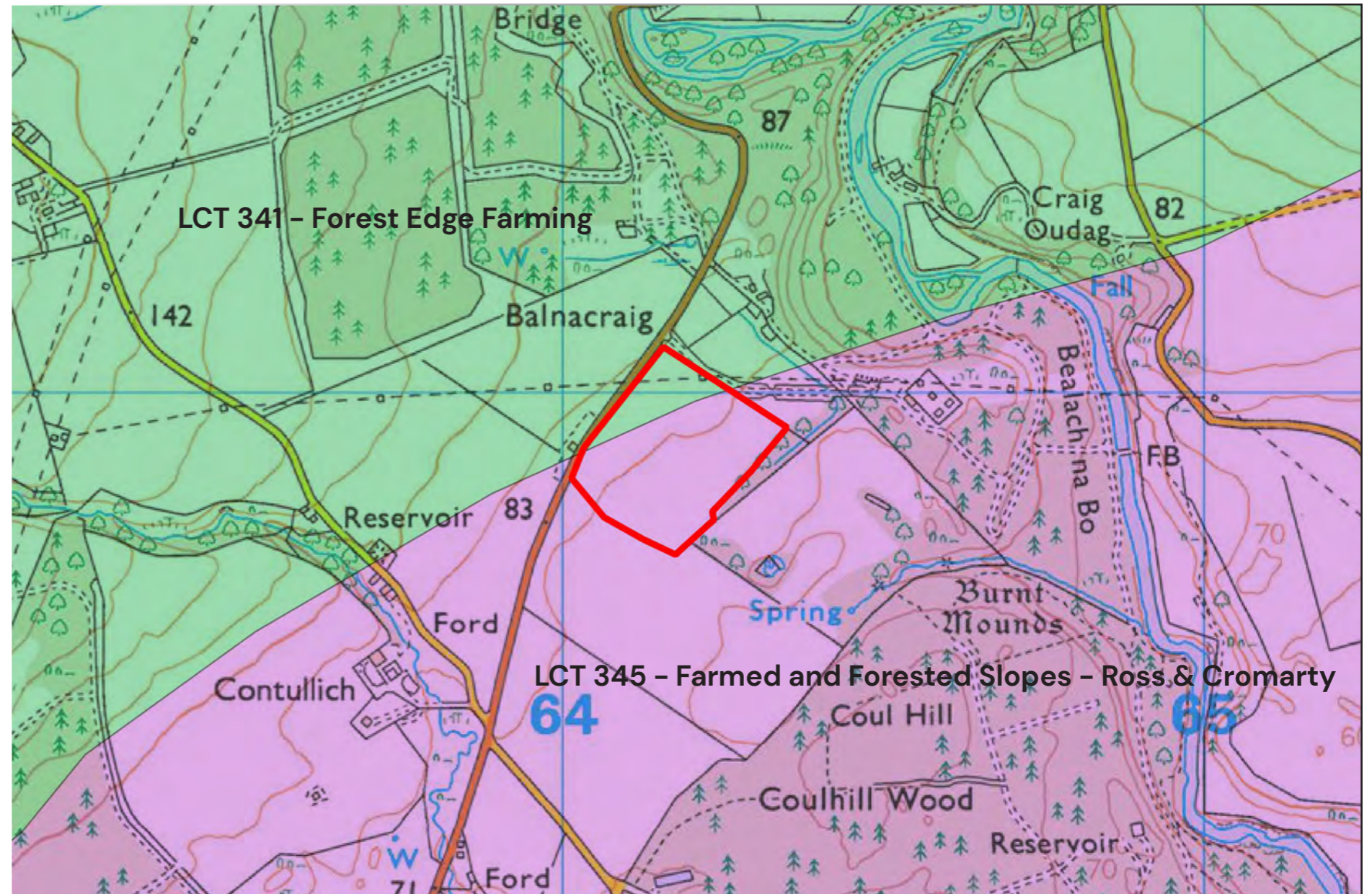


Figure 8: Extract from Nature Scot Landscape Character Types Interactive Map (site shown as red circle)

6.26 Within the study area LCT 341 - Forest Edge Farming extends to cover much of the River Averon valley. LCT 345 - Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty covers much of the northern side of the Cromarty firth.

6.27 Both LCTs are influenced by existing electricity infrastructure including Alness Substation within LCT 345 and the associated pylon line within LCT 341 and the local road network. Accounting for the influence of existing elements of electricity infrastructure the susceptibility of both LCTs is judged to be medium. There are no landscape designations within the LCTs. Recreational routes include a network of Core Paths outside the site. On balance landscape value is judged to be medium.

6.28 Accounting for landscape susceptibility and value the overall sensitivity for LCT 341 and LCT 345 is considered to be medium.

6.29 Effects on landscape character would be largely contained within the site and its local context. The Proposed Development would introduce a BESS and associated infrastructure and result in the loss of an area of arable farmland.

6.30 Accounting for the size and scale of the Proposed Development and screening provided by landform, existing woodland to the north and east and proposed mitigation planting to the north, east, south and west notable landscape effects would be largely limited to the site level and would extend to around 0.2km to the north, west and south and up to the edge of Coul Hill in proximity to the east at Year 1 of operation before mitigation measures have established.

6.31 The Proposed Development would marginally extend the presence and influence of electricity infrastructure south west of Alness Substation within the northern fringe of LCT 345, and would very locally influence the southern part of LCT 341.

6.32 The Proposed Development would directly affect LCT 345 where the main site is located and would indirectly affect LCT 341 where the site access shares the existing route to Alness Substation. This would give rise to a no greater than low magnitude of change upon the wider LCTs, resulting in a **Minor** adverse landscape effect, which would reduce in the longer-term due to the proposed mitigation planting as it becomes more established by Year 15 of operation.



## Effects on Local Landscape Character

### Sensitivity of the site

- 6.33 The current land use comprises arable farmland. The site is influenced by nearby Alness Substation, associated pylon lines and the local road network. Accounting for the existing land use and influences landscape susceptibility is considered to medium.
- 6.34 The site is not located within any nationally or locally designated landscapes. There are no recreational routes within the site itself. NCNR 1 following lies approximately 0.7km east at the closest point. The closest Core Paths are located within Coulhill Wood approximately 340m east and along the River Don approximately 660m south of the Site. Landscape value is considered to be low to medium.
- 6.35 Considering both landscape susceptibility and value the overall sensitivity of the site to the type and scale of development proposed is considered to be medium.

### Effects on the site

- 6.36 The Proposed Development would introduce a new feature into the landscape, which although of limited height and scale, would incorporate most of the site area and therefore adversely alter the physical and perceptual attributes of the site.
- 6.37 The magnitude of change to the site itself during construction and at Year 1 of operation is assessed as high. This would result in a **Major moderate** adverse landscape effect on the site.
- 6.38 The landscape mitigation proposals would provide some enhancements to the scheme, partly enclosing the Proposed Development and would have the potential to enhance local landscape character. In the longer-term, the magnitude of change to the site itself would reduce to medium, resulting in a **Moderate** adverse landscape effect at Year 15 of operation.

Receptor	Sensitivity	Development Phase	Magnitude of change	Level of Effect
<b>Landscape Features</b>				
Landform and topography	Medium	Construction	Low	Minor adverse
		Year 1	Low	Minor adverse
		Year 15	Low	Minor adverse
Water features and drainage	Low	Construction	Negligible	n/a
		Year 1	Very Low	Minor beneficial
		Year 15	Very Low	Minor beneficial
Land use, buildings and infrastructure	Low medium	Construction	Medium	Moderate adverse
		Year 1	Medium	Moderate adverse
		Year 15	Medium	Moderate adverse
Vegetation	Low	Construction	Low	Minor adverse
		Year 1	Medium	Minor beneficial
		Year 15	Medium	Minor beneficial
<b>Landscape Character</b>				
LCT 341 and LCT 345	Medium	Construction	Low	Minor adverse
		Year 1	Low	Minor adverse
		Year 15	Low	Minor adverse
The site itself	Medium	Construction	High	Major moderate adverse
		Year 1	High	Major moderate adverse
		Year 15	Medium	Moderate adverse

Table 1: Summary of Landscape Effects



## 7. VISUAL EFFECTS

### Introduction

7.1 The appraisal of visual effects considers the potential for changes in views and visual amenity. The aim is to establish the area in which the development may be visible, the different groups of people who may experience views of the development, the places where they will be affected, and the nature of the views and visual amenity (meaning the overall quality and pleasantness to a view).

7.2 Effects are considered during construction, at Year 1 and at Year 15 and beyond. New planting takes a number of years to mature and average growth rates have been taken into consideration. The effectiveness of the vegetation both in terms of integrating the development into the surrounding landscape and in providing visual screening would improve over time and needs to be considered appropriately. A summary of visual effects are included in Table 2.

7.3 Photography is set out within the photographic record set out in **Appendix 3**. Viewpoint locations are shown on **Figure 10**.

### Zone of Theoretical Visibility

7.4 The Screened Zone of Theoretical Visibility (SZTV, **Figure 9**) identifies the potential locations from which the development may be visible. The SZTV has been produced using Digital Terrain Modelling (DTM) data. Existing built development (8m tall) and larger blocks of woodland have also been modelled (15m tall) to take account of the screening effect that these would provide. However, the screening effect provided by smaller blocks of woodland, individual trees and hedgerows has not been taken into account, and consequently the actual extent of the area from which the Proposed Development is visible may be less than predicted.

7.5 The SZTV has been run based on the indicative heights of the various elements which form the Proposed Development.

### Sensitivity

7.6 Residential receptors, users of Core Paths and visitors are considered to be of high visual sensitivity. Users of the local minor road network where the view is not the focus of activity are of medium sensitivity. People using larger A-roads are considered to have low sensitivity.

7.7 The approach to sensitivity of visual receptors is set out in **Appendix 1**.

### Residential Receptors

7.8 The appraisal of residential receptors focuses on nearby residential

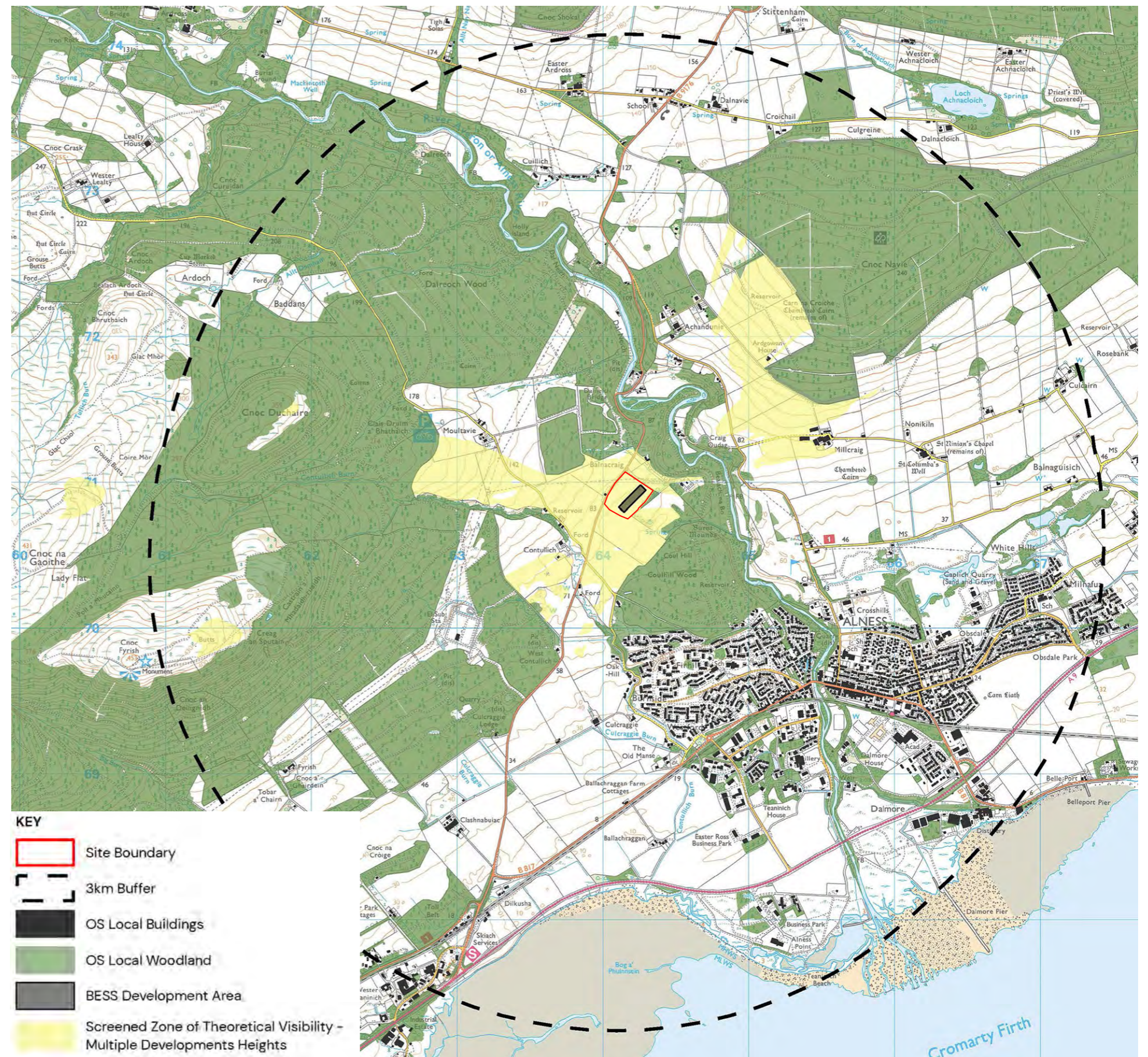


Figure 9: Screened Zone of Theoretical Visibility



properties and clusters of residential properties. This LVA does not include a separate residential amenity assessment. It is considered that effects resulting from the proposed development would fall below the Residential Visual Amenity Threshold referred to in Landscape Institute TGN 02/2019 as visual effects: “of such nature and / or magnitude that it potentially affects ‘living conditions’ or Residential Amenity”. For the purpose of this assessment, it is assumed as a worst-case, that all nearby properties are permanent residences.

### Mid Balnacraig

- 7.9 This property is located at a slightly lower elevation to the B9176, located east of the road and orientated south east towards the Cromarty Firth. The SZTV indicates theoretical visibility from the property. Given that the site is located at a lower elevation south (approximately 0.1 km) of the property actual views of the site are partly limited by landform and vegetation. In terms of existing electricity infrastructure visible from the property the pylon lines east and west Alness Substation are evident on the skyline. The substation itself is largely screened by mature intervening vegetation.
- 7.10 Representative views from the B9176 in close proximity to Mid Balnacraig are shown as Viewpoint 1 in **Appendix 2**. Existing proximity views of the higher elevations of the site looking south west would likely be possible from the southern and western facade partly screened by the raised sides of the access to Alness Substation and associated vegetation either side of this route.
- 7.11 It is considered likely that some construction activities within the site would be evident from the property and its curtilage including the movement of vehicles along the newly formed access track from the B9176. Construction activities would be partly screened by intervening features and would affect a relatively small portion of the foreground of the available view and backclothed by Coul Hill. The magnitude of change is judged to be medium and taking account of the high sensitivity would result in a short-term temporary **Moderate** adverse visual effect.
- 7.12 At Year 1, much of the Proposed Development would be screened by the acoustic fence along the site boundary. The access and occasional vehicle movements within the site would be partly screened by the existing access and associated vegetation. In views looking south from the property it is possible that the upper sections of the western and northern sides of the acoustic fence and the very tops of some of the battery energy storage units would be seen above the intervening landform before mitigation planting becomes established.
- 7.13 The magnitude of change is judged to be low medium and taking account of the high sensitivity would result in a **Moderate minor** adverse visual effect.
- 7.14 By Year 15 the proposed planting along the northern and western site

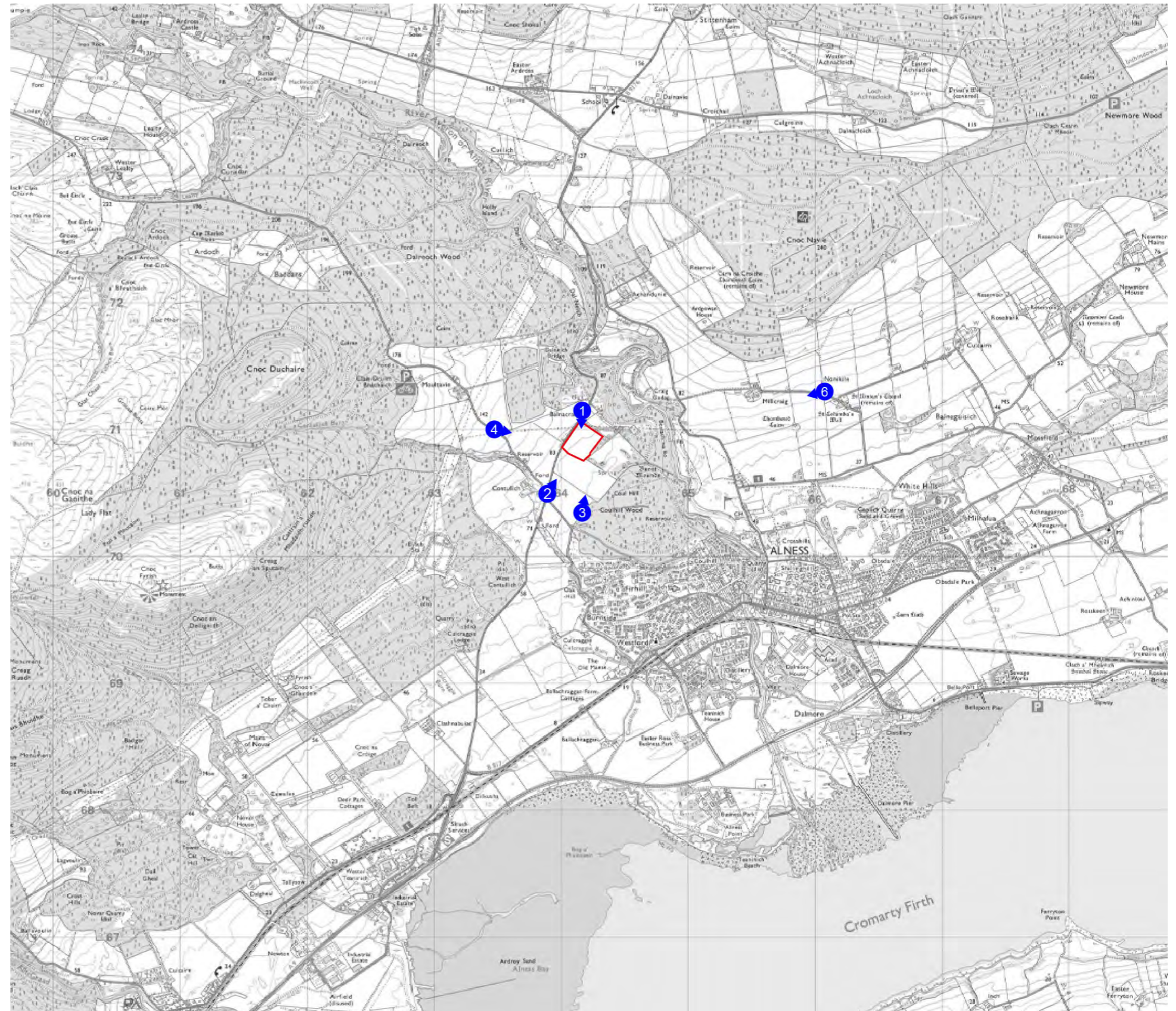


Figure 10: Viewpoint Location Plan



boundaries would be established. While there would be some evident gaps in the planting for access, overall the vegetation would help integrated the BESS within the local landscape. This would help screen and filter views looking south from the property. The magnitude of change by Year 15 is judged to be low and taking account of the high sensitivity would result in a **Minor** adverse visual effect.

### Contullich

- 7.15 This property is located at a slightly higher elevation to the B9176, located north of the road and west of Boath Road. The property is orientated south east towards the Cromarty Firth and is located approximately 0.5km south west of the site.
- 7.16 The SZTV indicates limited theoretical visibility from the property and its curtilage. Actual views of the site would be limited by the rising landform of the wider field of which the site would occupy a north eastern portion and the mature trees around the property and west of Boath Road. Visibility of existing electricity infrastructure is largely limited to the pylon lines east and west Alness Substation evident on the skyline. The substation itself is largely screened by mature intervening vegetation.
- 7.17 Viewpoint 2 is located west of the property adjacent to the B9176 and the intersection with Boath Road and The Corkscrew. From this location the site would be evident and represents a worst-case scenario which would not be experienced from the property given the intervening screening.
- 7.18 It is considered likely that some construction activities within the site would be evident from the property and its curtilage including the movement of vehicles along the newly formed access track from the B9176. Construction activities would be partly screened and filtered by intervening features and would affect a relatively a very small portion of the middle distance of view and would be backclothed by Coul Hill. The magnitude of change is judged to be low medium and taking account of the high sensitivity would result in a short-term temporary **Moderate minor** adverse visual effect.
- 7.19 At Year 1, the majority of the Proposed Development would be screened by the acoustic fence along the site boundary. The access and occasional vehicle movements within the site would be partly screened by the existing access and associated vegetation. In views looking north east from the property it is possible that the upper sections of the western sides of the acoustic fence and the very tops of some of the battery energy storage units would be seen above the intervening landform and filtered by the trees within the property grounds before mitigation measures have become established.
- 7.20 The magnitude of change is judged to be low medium and taking account of the high sensitivity would also result in a **Moderate minor** adverse

visual effect.

- 7.21 By Year 15, the proposed planting along the northern and western site boundaries would be established. While there would be some evident gaps in the planting for access, overall the vegetation would help integrated the BESS within the local landscape. This would help screen and filter views looking south from the nearby property. The magnitude of change by Year 15 is judged to be low and taking account of the high sensitivity would result in a **Minor** adverse visual effect.

### Upper Balnacraig

- 7.22 This property is located approximately 0.3km north of the site. While the SZTV indicates some limited theoretical visibility the property is surrounded by dense mature mixed woodland which would fully screen views of the site and the Proposed Development.
- 7.23 Accounting for the anticipated intervening screening by vegetation a very low magnitude of change is predicted at construction and Years 1 and 15, resulting in a **Minor** adverse visual effect to No Effect.

### Boath Road Properties

- 7.24 This residential receptor group consists of the properties (Helmsdale Cottage, Contullich Cottage, Birchwood and Moultaivie) on Boath Road north of Contullich, approximately 0.4km north west of the site at the closest point. The SZTV shows some theoretical visibility from these properties. However the majority of the properties are set at a slightly lower elevation west of Boath Road with actual views looking east and north east towards the site largely screened by landform and vegetation on the eastern side of the road. Although there are some opportunities along Boath Road to gain glimpsed partly screened views of the site as represented by Viewpoint 4 in **Appendix 2**.
- 7.25 Accounting for the anticipated intervening screening by landform and vegetation a very low magnitude of change is predicted at construction and Years 1 and 15, resulting in a **Minor** adverse visual effect to No Effect.

### Other residences and settlement within the study area

- 7.26 No notable visual effects are anticipated on other residential receptors within the study area.

### Recreational Receptors

#### NCNR 1

- 7.27 This promoted cycle route connects Dover in England to the Highlands of Scotland and passes east of Coulhill Wood approximately 0.7km east

at the closest point.

- 7.28 The SZTV indicates very limited theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development. Actual views looking north towards the site are screened by the intervening trees and landform north west of Alness. No visual effect is predicated to occur on recreational receptors travelling on this route.

### THC Core Paths

- 7.29 The closest THC Core Paths RC03.02 and RC03.05, approximately 660m south of the site at the closet point provide connections through Coulhill Wood to Alness.
- 7.30 Actual views of the site from the Core Path network are fully screened by mature mixed woodland. However, views of the site are experienced from the undesignated interlinking permissive routes which pass along the northern border of Coulhill Wood. Views looking north to north east from these tracks vary from generally open, to framed and glimpsed views. Representative views are shown as Viewpoint 3 in **Appendix 2**. Existing pylon lines are seen against the skyline in views looking north and north east from along this permissive route
- 7.31 No visual effects are considered likely to occur on recreational users of the THC Core Paths. However, the following considers views from the associated permissive routes on the northern border of Coulhill Wood.
- 7.32 Where visible construction activities within the site would be seen in the middle distance partly screened by the intervening trees and vegetation directly south of the site from a short section of the northern border of Coulhill Wood. The magnitude of change is judged to be low medium and taking account of the high sensitivity would result in a short-term temporary **Moderate minor** adverse visual effect.
- 7.33 At Year 1, In views looking north and north east from the permissive route the majority of the Proposed Development would be screened by the acoustic fence along the site boundary. The access and occasional vehicle movements within the site would be partly screened by the existing access and associated vegetation. The Proposed Development would introduce a new BESS into a small portion of the available view already affected by electricity infrastructure.
- 7.34 The magnitude of change is judged to be low medium and taking account of the high sensitivity would result in a **Moderate minor** adverse visual effect.
- 7.35 By Year 15 the proposed planting along the northern and western site boundaries would be established. While there would be some evident gaps in the planting for access, overall the vegetation would help



integrated the BESS within the local landscape. This would help screen and filter views looking south from the nearby property. The magnitude of change by Year 15 is judged to be very low and taking account of the high sensitivity would result in a **Minor** adverse visual effect.

**Other recreational routes within the study area**

7.36 No notable visual effects are anticipated on other recreational routes within the study area.

**Road Users**

**B9176**

7.37 Within the study area the B9167 passes west of Alness and west of the site from the intersection with the A9 in the south through to Dalnavie in the north. SZTV coverage is indicated from a short section of this road directly west of the Proposed Development.

7.38 Representative views are shown as Viewpoints 1, and 2, 6 in **Appendix 2**. Actual views of the site are limited to a short section of the B9176 between the existing access to Alness Substation in the north and the intersection with Boath Road and The Corkscrew in the south.

7.39 Construction traffic would use the B9176 to access the site, and would enter the site along the existing access. Brief views of construction activities would be seen in relatively unrestricted views from the short section of the road.

7.40 The magnitude of change during construction from this short section of the road is judged to be medium and taking account of the medium sensitivity would result in a short-term temporary **Moderate** adverse visual effect.

7.41 At Year 1, views of the Proposed Development would be briefly direct to oblique and would be limited to the northern, southern and western sides of the proposals which would be largely screened by the proposed acoustic fence and mitigation planting and backclothed by Coul Hill to the east. The Proposed Development would not extend above the skyline.

7.42 At Year 1, the magnitude of change is judged to be low and taking account of the medium sensitivity would result in a **Minor** adverse visual effect.

7.43 At Year 15, once proposed planting has established the Proposed Development would be further integrated within the local landscape, with views largely limited to sections of the site access and sections of the acoustic fence where there would be necessary gaps in the proposed planting. The magnitude of change at Year 15 is judged to be very low and taking account of the medium sensitivity would result in a **Minor** adverse level of effect to **No Effect**.

Receptor	Sensitivity	Development Phase	Magnitude of change	Level of Effect
<b>Visual Receptors</b>				
Mid Balnacraig	High	Construction	Medium	Moderate adverse
		Year 1	Low medium	Moderate minor adverse
		Year 15	Low	Minor adverse
Contullich	High	Construction	Low medium	Moderate minor adverse
		Year 1	Low medium	Moderate minor adverse
		Year 15	Low	Minor adverse
Upper Balnacraig	High	Construction	Very low	Minor adverse to No effect
		Year 1	Very low	Minor adverse to No effect
		Year 15	Very low	Minor adverse to No effect
Boath Road Properties	High	Construction	Very Low	Minor adverse to No effect
		Year 1	Very Low	Minor adverse to No Effect
		Year 15	Very Low	Minor adverse to No Effect
NCNR1	High	Construction	Very Low	No effect
		Year 1	Very Low	No effect
		Year 15	Very Low	No effect
THC Core Paths	High	Construction	Very Low	No Effect
		Year 1	Very Low	No Effect
		Year 15	Very Low	No Effect
Permissive Routes	High	Construction	Low medium	Moderate minor adverse
		Year 1	Low medium	Moderate minor adverse
		Year 15	Very Low	Minor adverse
B9176	Medium	Construction	Medium	Moderate adverse
		Year 1	Low	Minor adverse
		Year 15	Very Low	Minor adverse to No Effect

Table 2: Summary of Visual Effects



## 8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### Landscape Features

- 8.1 There would be some changes to the landform of the site to accommodate the Proposed Development, leading to a **Minor** temporary adverse levels of effect. However, once the proposals are completed and with new landscape features planted, adverse effects would reduce in the longer term.
- 8.2 The Proposed Development would represent an inevitable change to the current land use to an operational BESS and associated infrastructure. A **Moderate** adverse level of effect is predicted in the longer-term, although the surrounding influences and benefits of landscape proposals would provide some local enhancements.
- 8.3 In the long-term, the additional planting in the form of new tree and shrub planting on the northern, western and southern perimeter, would give rise to some landscape and biodiversity benefits.

### Landscape Character

- 8.4 The Proposed Development would introduce a new feature into the landscape, which although of limited height and scale and adjacent to similar elasticity infrastructures and the minor road network would adversely alter the physical and perceptual attributes of the site. The Proposed Development would give rise to **Major moderate** adverse effects upon the landscape character of the site itself, however, the landscape mitigation proposals would provide some enhancements around peripheral areas with effects becoming **Moderate** adverse over time.
- 8.5 The site access lies within LCT 341 - Forest Edge Farming, the main site lies within LCT 345 - Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty. The Proposed Development would result in the loss of a localised area of arable farmland and the introduction of an operational BESS and associated infrastructure. This would affect a very small southern part of LCT 341 - Forest Edge Farming - and a very small northern part of LCT 345 - Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty.
- 8.6 Given the relatively low heights of the Proposed Development and screening by the existing mature vegetation directly west, and proposed mitigation measures including tree and shrub planting along the boundaries of the site effects on LCTs 341 and 345 would be **Minor** adverse long-term. Over time as the proposed planting matures effects would reduce as the proposed development becomes further integrated within the local landscape.
- 8.7 No notable effects on other neighbouring LCTs are anticipated.

### Visual Receptors

- 8.8 The proposed layout has sought to integrate and minimise potential visual effects through siting the Proposed Development within a site already influenced by nearby electricity infrastructure and using the existing landform, and introducing appropriate mitigation measures.
- 8.9 Visual effects on local residents arising from the Proposed Development would be limited to views experienced by some residents on the western settlement edge of Mid Balnacriag within approximately 0.1km, north of the site. These receptors would experience a **Moderate** adverse and temporary visual effect during construction. Following construction a **Moderate minor** adverse visual effect is anticipated for operational Year 1 reducing further to **Minor** Adverse as mitigation planting matures by Year 15.
- 8.10 From the closest permissive route which connect to the nearby THC Core Paths a **Moderate minor** adverse and temporary visual effect during construction is anticipated. Following construction a **Moderate minor** adverse visual effect is anticipated for operational Year 1 reducing further to **Minor** adverse as mitigation planting matures by Year 15.
- 8.11 From the B9176 west of the site a **Moderate** adverse and temporary visual effect during construction is anticipated. Following construction a **Minor** adverse visual effect is anticipated for operational Year 1 reducing further as mitigation planting matures by Year 15.
- 8.12 No notable visual effects are anticipated to be experienced from other nearby residences, promoted recreational routes or main transport routes.

### Conclusion

- 8.13 The Proposed Development would locate a battery energy storage system within the agricultural landscape already influenced by Alness Substation and associated infrastructure. The Proposed Development would be sited away from the existing mature vegetation to the east and south. Mitigation measures would include new native tree and shrub planting along the perimeter of the site.
- 8.14 As the proposed planting matures the Proposed Development would be further integrated within the local landscape with some additional biodiversity opportunities. Overall the total extent of the landscape and visual effects would be localised and limited in nature.

## 9. CUMULATIVE APPRAISAL

- 9.1 The aim of the cumulative appraisal is to identify any interactions with other similar development types (including electricity infrastructure developments and associated infrastructure) which could result in further notable landscape and visual effects not identified within the LVIA. GLVIA (para 7.1) states that cumulative effects: *"...result from the incremental changes caused by other past, present or reasonably foreseeable actions together with the project."*
- 9.2 GLVIA3 (para 7.14) goes onto states that: *"Schemes at pre-planning or scoping stage are not generally considered in the assessment of cumulative effects because firm information on which to base the assessment is not available and because of the uncertainty of about what will occur that is not 'reasonably foreseeable'."*
- 9.3 This cumulative appraisal therefore considers similar consented developments, and current valid planning applications. Pre-application screening and scoping stage proposals are not considered within this cumulative assessment given the uncertainty that such schemes would come forward to the planning stage. It should be noted that operational developments similar to the proposed development are considered as part of the baseline assessment within the LVA. However, where necessary this cumulative appraisal provides additional narrative regarding such operational developments.
- 9.4 As recommended by NatureScot cumulative guidance (Assessing the cumulative landscape and visual impact of onshore wind energy developments 2021), this cumulative appraisal, focuses on the *"... additional cumulative change which would be brought about by the proposed development"* (page 6). While this guidance specifically accounts for wind farms, many overarching principles are of relevance to cumulative assessment of other development types such as solar farms.
- 9.5 The cumulative appraisal is based on the same landscape and visual baseline and receptors as the LVA (**Appendix 1**), and the methodology is also the same in terms of forming and expressing judgements. Where the magnitude of change that would occur as a result of the introduction of the Proposed Development is identified as either low or negligible, potential cumulative effects are often not assessed in cumulative assessment as it is considered that such an addition would not give rise to a notable cumulative effect.
- 9.6 Cumulate landscape effects arise from combined direct and or indirect effects on the same receptor, such as two developments within the same landscape character area or one development within, and another development visible form a different landscape character area.



9.7 Three types of cumulative visual effects are considered: combined, successive:

- **Combined** – where two or more cumulative developments are seen together at the same time from the same viewpoint, and in the same field of view. The effects of an extension of an existing development or the positioning of a new development such that it would be seen as extending the presence of built infrastructure.
- **Successive** – where two or more developments are present in views from the same location but cannot be seen in the same field of view and the observer must turn to see them.
- **Sequential** – where two or more cumulative developments are not seen from the same viewpoint, even if the observer turns around to extend his/her perception of the surrounding landscape. The receptor has to move to another location to see cumulative developments. The frequency of occurrence greatly depends on factors such as: distance to developments, distance to another viewpoint and speed of travel.

9.8 To provide for a robust assessment of potential cumulative landscape and visual effects, all landscape receptors, visual receptor including viewpoints considered in the LVA have been reviewed. The distance, context, and screening have been considered.

### Other Cumulative Developments

9.9 This cumulative appraisal uses a 3km study area informed by the LVA. There are is one application developments in proximity to the Proposed Development as shown on **Figure 11** which could give rise to cumulative interactions. The status, size and distance of the other cumulative developments from the proposed developments are outlined below.

- **22/05167/FUL** (directly south of the site) – Land 260M SW Of Alness Grid Sub Station Mid Balnacraig Alness. Battery energy storage facility comprising access track, compound of battery and electrical equipment, meter building, stores, fencing, security cameras and landscaping.

### Cumulative Landscape Effects

9.10 In terms of potential landscape effects resulting from the introduction of the Proposed Development the LVA identifies a high magnitude of change and a **Major moderate** adverse effect on the landscape of the site itself during construction and at Year 1 reducing to **Moderate** adverse at Year 15. Landscape effects on LCT 341 - Forest Edge Farming and LCT 345 - Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty are identified as a low magnitude of change and an overall **Minor** adverse effect on the LCTs.



Figure 11: Other developments



9.11 It is considered that the introduction of the Proposed Development into a scenario where application 22/05167/FUL forms part of the existing baseline would marginally extend the presence of electricity infrastructure south west of the existing Alness Substation. Accounting for the proposed mitigation measures around both the Proposed Development and screening by existing vegetation it is considered unlikely that the perceptual qualities of the these LCTs would be notably affected in the long term but there would be a physical loss of agricultural land.

9.12 The cumulative magnitude of change is judged to be low and would result in an a combined direct **Minor** adverse cumulative level of landscape effect on LCT 341 - Forest Edge Farming and LCT 345 - Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty

### Cumulative Visual Effects

9.13 Given the limited intervisibility of the Proposed Development with visual receptors considered in the LVA the cumulative visual appraisal considers potential cumulative effects on Mid Balnacraig, Contullich, the permissive routes connecting with the THC Core Paths and a short section of the B9176.

9.14 Other visual receptors considered in section 7 of this LVA are not brought forward for detailed appraisal of cumulative effects as effects resulting from the introduction of the Proposed Development on these visual receptors would be very limited.

9.15 At Year 1, from Mid Balnacraig, Contullich, the permissive routes within Coulhill Wood and the B9176 the Proposed Development would be seen in front of application 22/05167/FUL and would read as one development in combined views from these locations. Both developments would be partly screened by the existing landform and respective mitigation measures. On balance the combined cumulative magnitude of change at Year 1 is judged to be low which would result in a **Minor** adverse cumulative visual effect.

9.16 By Year 15 once mitigation measures are established the overall combined cumulative magnitude of change is judged to be low to very low which would result in a **Minor** adverse cumulative visual effect to **No Effect**.

### Conclusions

9.17 The addition of the Proposed Development in combination with other similar consented and application developments which would affect a landscape already influenced by electricity infrastructure and would result in a **Minor** adverse cumulative landscape effect on LCT 341 - Forest

Edge Farming and LCT 345 - Farmed and Forested Slopes - Ross & Cromarty.

9.18 Cumulative visual effects on Mid Balnacraig, Contullich, the permissive routes within Coulhill Wood and the B9176 would be **Minor** adverse at Year 1 reducing as mitigation measures establish by Year 15.

9.19 It should be noted that is possible that the construction phase of the Proposed Development and application 22/05167/FUL could occur at a similar time which would result in a higher temporary and short term magnitude of cumulative landscape and visual change from the receptors considered. However, given the uncertainty of this an overall level of cumulative landscape and visual effect resulting from construction activities has not been considered.

## 10. REFERENCES

9.20 The following documents have been consulted during the preparation of this LVA:

- National Planning Framework for Scotland 4 (2023);
- Highland-wide Local Development Plan (2012);
- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (3rd edition) - Landscape Institute/ Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013);
- Landscape Institute (June 2013) GLVIA3 Statement of Clarification 1/13, LI;
- Visual Representation of Development Proposals, Technical Guidance Note 06/19, September 2019;
- Residential Visual Amenity Assessment Technical Guidance Note 2/19: and
- NatureScot National Landscape Character Assessment (2019).



# APPENDIX 1: ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

## INTRODUCTION

This appendix presents the assessment criteria adopted for the appraisal of landscape and visual effects arising from the proposed development.

The primary source of best practice for LVA in the UK is The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (GLVIA3) (Landscape Institute and the Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013). The assessment criteria adopted to inform the appraisal of effects has been developed in accordance with the principles established in this best practice document. It should however be acknowledged that GLVIA3 establishes guidelines not a specific methodology. The preface to GLVIA3 states:

“This edition concentrates on principles and processes. It does not provide a detailed or formulaic ‘recipe’ that can be followed in every situation – it remains the responsibility of the professional to ensure that the approach and methodology adopted are appropriate to the task in hand.”

The criteria set out below have therefore been specifically tailored for this appraisal to ensure that the methodology is appropriate and fit for purpose.

The purpose of an LVA when undertaken outside the context of an EIA is to identify and describe the relative level of any landscape and visual effects arising as a result of the proposals. As confirmed in GLVIA3 Statement of Clarification 1/13 (Landscape institute, 10th June 2013) an LVA for development which has been screened as not requiring EIA should avoid concluding whether the effects are significant or not and this is the approach adopted in this LVA.

An LVA must consider both:

- effects on the landscape as a resource in its own right (the landscape effects); and
- effects on specific views and visual amenity more generally (the visual effects).

Therefore, separate criteria are set out below for the assessment of landscape and visual effects.



## NATURE (SENSITIVITY) OF LANDSCAPE FEATURES

The nature or sensitivity of an individual landscape feature or element reflects its susceptibility to change and any values associated with it. It is therefore a function of factors such as its quality, rarity, contribution to landscape character, degree to which the particular element can be replaced and cultural associations or designations that apply. A particular feature may be more 'sensitive' in one location than in another often as a result of local values associated with the feature or in relation to its function as a key or distinctive characteristic of that local landscape. Therefore it is not possible to simply place different types of landscape features into sensitivity bands. Where individual landscape features are affected, professional judgement is used as far as possible to give an objective evaluation of its sensitivity. Justification is given for this evaluation where necessary.

The nature or sensitivity of individual landscape features has been described as very high, high, medium, low or very low.

## NATURE (SENSITIVITY) OF LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The nature or sensitivity of landscape character reflects its susceptibility to change and any values associated with it. It is essentially an expression of a landscape's ability to accommodate a particular type of change. It varies depending on the physical and perceptual attributes of the landscape including but not necessarily limited to: scale; degree of openness; landform; existing land cover; landscape pattern and complexity; the extent of human influence in the landscape; the degree of remoteness/wildness; perception of change in the landscape; the importance of landmarks or skylines in the landscape; inter-visibility with and influence on surrounding areas; condition; rarity and scenic quality of the landscape, and any values placed on the landscape including any designations that may apply.

In this appraisal, the nature or sensitivity of landscape character is considered with reference to published landscape character areas/types and where relevant local landscape units as defined in this LVA for the purposes of this study. Information regarding the key characteristics of these local character areas/units has been extrapolated from relevant published studies where possible. Together with on-site appraisal, an assessment of landscape sensitivity to development has been undertaken employing professional judgement for relevant local landscape character areas/types/units.

The nature or sensitivity of landscape character has been described as very high, high, medium, low or very low.

## NATURE (SENSITIVITY) OF VISUAL RECEPTORS

The nature or sensitivity of a visual receptor group reflects their susceptibility to change and any values associated with the specific view in question. It varies depending on a number of factors such as the occupation of the viewer, their viewing expectations, duration of view and the angle or direction in which they would see the site. Whilst most views are valued by someone, certain viewpoints are particularly highly valued for either their cultural or historical associations and this can increase the sensitivity of the view. The following criteria are provided for guidance only and are not exclusive:

- Very Low Sensitivity – People engaged in industrial and commercial activities or military activities.
- Low Sensitivity - People at their place of work (e.g. offices); short - medium stay patients at hospital, shoppers; users of trunk/major roads and passengers on commercial railway lines (except where these form part of a recognised and promoted scenic route).
- Medium Sensitivity - Users of public rights of way and minor roads which do not appear to be used primarily for recreational activities or the specific enjoyment of the landscape; recreational activities not specifically focused on the landscape (e.g. football); motel users.
- High Sensitivity – Residents at home; users of long distance or recreational trails and other sign posted walks; users of public rights of way and minor roads which appear to be used for recreational activities or the specific enjoyment of the landscape; users of caravan parks, campsites and 'destination' hotels; tourist attractions with opportunities for views of the landscape (but not specifically focused on a particular vista); slow paced recreational activities which derive part of their pleasure from an appreciation of setting (e.g. bowling, golf); allotments.
- Very High Sensitivity - People at recognised vantage points (often with interpretation boards), people at tourist attractions with a focus on a specific view, visitors to historic features/estates where the setting is important to an appreciation and understanding of cultural value.

It is important to appreciate that it is the visual receptor (i.e. the person) that has a sensitivity and not a property, public right of way or road. Therefore, a large number of people may use a motorway for example but this does not increase the sensitivity of the receptors using it. Conversely, a residential property may only have one person living in it but this does not reduce the sensitivity of that one receptor. The number of receptors affected at any given location may be a planning consideration, but it does not alter the sensitivity of the receptor group.

Where judgements are made about the sensitivity of assessment

viewpoints, the sensitivity rating provided is an evaluation of the sensitivity of the receptor group represented by the viewpoint and not a reflection of the number of people who may experience the view.

## NATURE (MAGNITUDE) OF EFFECTS – GENERAL NOTE

The following discussion sets out the approach adopted in this LVA in relation to a specific issue arising in GLVIA3 which requires a brief explanation.

Prior to the publication of GLVIA3, LVA practice had evolved over time in tandem with most other environmental disciplines to consider significance principally as a function of two factors, namely: sensitivity of the receptor and magnitude of the effect (the term 'magnitude' being a word most commonly used in LVA and most other environmental disciplines to describe the size or scale of an effect).

Box 3.1 on page 37 of GLVIA3 references a 2011 publication by IEMA entitled 'The State of EIA Practice in the UK' which reiterates the importance of considering not just the scale or size of effect but other factors which combine to define the 'nature of the effect' including factors such as the probability of an effect occurring and the duration, reversibility and spatial extent of the effect.

The flow diagram on page 39 of GLVIA3 now suggests that the magnitude of effect is a function of three factors (the size/scale of the effect, the duration of the effect and the reversibility of the effect).

For clarification, the approach taken in this LVA has been to consider magnitude of effect solely as the scale or size of the effect in the traditional sense of the term 'magnitude'. Having identified the magnitude of effect as defined above the LVA also describes the duration and reversibility of the identified effect before drawing a conclusion on the overall level of effect taking all of these factors into account.

In the context of the above discussion the following criteria have been adopted to describe the magnitude of effects.



## NATURE (MAGNITUDE) OF EFFECTS ON LANDSCAPE FEATURES

Professional judgement has been used as appropriate to determine the magnitude of direct physical effects on individual existing landscape features using the following criteria as guidance only:

- Very Low Magnitude of Change - No loss or alteration to existing landscape features;
- Low Magnitude of Change - Minor loss or alteration to part of an existing landscape feature;
- Medium Magnitude of Change - Some loss or alteration to part of an existing landscape feature;
- High Magnitude of Change - Major loss or major alteration to an existing landscape feature;
- Very High Magnitude of Change - Total loss or alteration to an existing landscape feature.

## NATURE (MAGNITUDE) OF EFFECTS ON LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The magnitude of effect on landscape character is influenced by a number of factors including: the extent to which existing landscape features are lost or altered, the introduction of new features and the resulting alteration to the physical and perceptual characteristics of the landscape. Professional judgement has been used as appropriate to determine the magnitude using the following criteria as guidance only. In doing so, it is recognised that usually the landscape components in the immediate surroundings have a much stronger influence on the sense of landscape character than distant features whilst acknowledging the fact that more distant features can have an influence on landscape character as well.

- Very Low Magnitude of Change - No notable loss or alteration to existing landscape features; no notable introduction of new features into the landscape; and negligible change to the key physical and/or perceptual attributes of the landscape.
- Low Magnitude of Change - Minor loss or alteration to existing landscape features; introduction of minor new features into the landscape; or minor alteration to the key physical and/or perceptual attributes of the landscape.
- Medium Magnitude of Change - Some notable loss or alteration to existing landscape features; introduction of some notable new features into the landscape; or some notable change to the key physical and/or perceptual attributes of the landscape.
- High Magnitude of Change - A major loss or alteration to existing landscape features; introduction of major new features into the landscape; or a major change to the key physical and/or perceptual attributes of the landscape.

- Very High Magnitude of Change - Total loss or alteration to existing landscape features; introduction of dominant new features into the landscape; a very major change to the key physical and/or perceptual attributes of the landscape.

## NATURE (MAGNITUDE) OF EFFECTS ON VIEWS AND VISUAL AMENITY

Visual effects are caused by the introduction of new elements into the views of a landscape or the removal of elements from the existing view.

Professional judgement has been used to determine the magnitude of impacts using the following criteria as guidance only:

- Very Low Magnitude of Change - No change or negligible change in views;
- Low Magnitude of Change - Some change in the view that is not prominent but visible to some visual receptors;
- Medium Magnitude of Change - Some change in the view that is clearly notable in the view and forms an easily identifiable component in the view;
- High Magnitude of Change - A major change in the view that is highly prominent and has a strong influence on the overall view.
- Very High Magnitude of Change – A change in the view that has a dominating or overbearing influence on the overall view.

Using this set of criteria, determining levels of magnitude is primarily dependant on how prominent the development would be in the landscape, and what may be judged to flow from that prominence or otherwise.

For clarification, the use of the term 'prominent' relates to how noticeable the features of the development would be. This is affected by how close the viewpoint is to the development but not entirely dependent on this factor. Other modifying factors include: the focus of the view, visual screening and the nature and scale of other landscape features within the view. Rather than specifying crude bands of distance at which the proposed development would be dominant, prominent or incidental to the view etc, the prominence of the proposed development in each view is described in detail for each viewpoint taking all the relevant variables into consideration.

## TYPE OF EFFECT

The assessment identifies effects which may be 'beneficial', 'adverse' or 'neutral'. Where effects are described as 'neutral' this is where the beneficial effects are deemed to balance the adverse effects.

## DURATION OF EFFECT

For the purposes of this appraisal, the temporal nature of each effect is described as follows:

- Long Term – over 5 years
- Medium Term – between 1 and 5 years
- Short Term – under 1 year

## REVERSIBILITY OF EFFECT

The LVA also describes the reversibility of each identified effect using the following terms:

- Permanent – effect is non reversible
- Non-permanent – effect is reversible

## LEVEL OF EFFECT

The purpose of an LVA when produced outside the context of an EIA is to identify the relative level of effects on landscape and visual amenity arising from the proposed development. The judgements provided within the LVA may then inform the planning balance to be carried out by the determining authority.

In this LVA, the relative level of the identified landscape and visual effects has been determined by combining judgements regarding the sensitivity of the landscape or view, magnitude of change, duration of effect and the reversibility of the effect. The level of effect is described as Major, Major moderate, Moderate, Moderate minor or Minor. No Effect may also be recorded as appropriate where the effect is so negligible it is not even noteworthy. In determining the level of residual effects, all mitigation measures are taken into account.



## **APPENDIX 2: PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD**





Approximate extent of site













Alness Substation

Approximate extent of site





Cnoc Fyrsih

Millcraig

Approximate extent of site beyond treeline





Pegasus Group is the trading name  
of Pegasus Planning Group Limited,  
Registered in England and Wales  
under number 07277000

Registered Office:  
Pavilion Court,  
Green Lane,  
Garforth, Leeds  
LS25 2AF