5 Landscape and Visual Appraisal

5. Landscape and Visual Appraisal

5.1. Introduction

5.1.1. This Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) has been conducted by Chartered Landscape Architects at SLR Consulting Limited (SLR) on behalf of Boralex Limited to evaluate the potential effects on the landscape and visual resource associated with the construction, operation and decommissioning of a 36 megawatt (MW) Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) the project known as Lochluichart East BESS (hereafter referred to as the 'Proposed Development'). The Application Site is located approximately 5km northwest of Garve, north of the A832 at Lochluichart and west of the Corriemoillie Substation. The LVA has been project managed by Sarah Fletcher MA(Hons), MLA(Dist), CMLI and an Associate at SLR.

5.1.2. The purpose of the LVA is to provide a landscape appraisal, which outlines the existing landscape and visual baseline and appraises the landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development, to inform the material planning considerations in the determination of a planning application under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended).

5.1.3. An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening request under Regulation 8 of The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 was submitted to Highland Council in March 2025. The formal Screening Opinion received from Highland Council confirmed that an EIA was not required. A supporting Planning Statement has been prepared by David Bell Planning and submitted alongside this LVA. This covers the key planning policies and considerations relevant to the Proposed Development and its consideration.

5.1.4. The LVA considers effects on the landscape resource and the visual amenity within the Study Area (Figure 5.1). Cumulative effects arising from the addition of the Proposed Development to other large scale energy infrastructure are also considered. The specific objectives of the chapter are to:

- describe the landscape and visual baseline;
- describe the appraisal methodology and criteria used in the appraisal of effects;
- describe the potential effects, including direct, indirect, and cumulative effects;
- describe the mitigation measures proposed to address likely landscape and visual effects; and
- assess the residual effects remaining following the implementation of mitigation.

5.1.5. This Chapter is supported by the Technical Appendix 5.1 (TA) listed below which is referenced throughout the Chapter.

Technical Appendix 5.1: Appraisal Criteria

5.1.6. The LVA is also supported by the following set of figures and visualisations, which contain GIS maps, photographs, and photowires to illustrate various aspects of the LVA. These figures have supported the professional judgement that is applied within the appraisal:

Appendix 5.2

- Figure 5.1 - Study Area
- Figure 5.2 - Topography
- Figure 5.3 - BESS Bare Earth Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) plan
- Figure 5.4 - Landscape Character Types with Bare Earth ZTV overlaid
- Figure 5.5 - Landscape Designations
- Figure 5.6 - Visual Receptors with Bare Earth ZTV overlain
- Figure 5.7 - Forest Design (with aerial photography out to 1km)
- Figure 5.8 - BESS Screened Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) plan
- Figure 5.9 - Cumulative developments

Appendix 5.3

- Figure 5.10 - Viewpoint 1 - A832 Lochluichart Lodge entrance
- Figure 5.11 - Viewpoint 2 - A832 near Corriemoillie Farm
- Figure 5.12 - Viewpoint 3 - Lochluichart Estate existing track - east
- Figure 5.13 - Viewpoint 4 - Lochluichart Estate existing track - west
- Figure 5.14 - Viewpoint 5 - Scottish Hill Track 280 – Strathconon to Loch Luichart Circular
- Figure 5.14 - Viewpoint 6 - A832 Lochluichart layby

5.1.7. The Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) illustrations have been produced on the basis of two different scenarios to inform the appraisal. In common with standard practice, a bare earth ZTV has been prepared to illustrate the worst case situation. This modelling takes no account of the existing woodland and forestry screening that exists in the Lochluichart Estate North Forest Plan and wider woodland and forestry in the Study Area, which in reality in addition to landform, will provide a further degree of screening to the Proposed Development

5.1.8. To capture this screening, a ZTV has also been prepared which models existing woodland and forestry (as indicated on Figure 5.1) at a conservative height of 10m and assumes this is present in the terrain model (Figure 5.8 BESS Screened ZTV). The forestry on the Site and in the immediate surrounds has been modelled having regard to the information currently available for the Lochluichart Estate North Forest Plan (as indicated on Figure 5.7). The Forest Plan identified the area as approved for Low Impact Silvicultural Systems (LISS), which is defined as '*a type of woodland management that helps to increase species and structural diversity*'. The contract deadline for LISS ended in March 2024 (24/03/2024) so there is currently no Forest Plan in place.

5.1.9. The nature of LISS encourages a less intensive management approach to achieve greater species and structural diversity, so for the purposes of the LVA the assumption is that this approach will continue. From site work, the area of the LISS appears to be predominantly birch woodland (with some Caledonian Pine on western fringes), with a more varied structure and open canopy. By comparison the commercial coniferous plantation which fringes the LISS area to the south, east and north the birch woodland has a looser more irregular character and texture, which is likely to filter views to the Proposed Development (especially when defoliated in Winter months) rather that completely block views. The differences between woodland and forest character are visible on aerial the photography, which has been included on Figure 5.7 (limited to a 1km extent such that the detail of the change in tree character can be discerned).

5.1.10. It is not possible to model this type of variation in woodland character and on this basis the screened ZTV may overrepresent the extent to which the birch woodland would effectively 'block' views. Taking a precautionary approach the majority of figures used the bare earth ZTV to inform potential visibility of the BESS compound appraisal, but is caveated with observations from site work, on the levels of likely screening afforded in reality. Evident from site work, the LISS woodland is fragmented in extent (with areas of bare ground appreciable) but in places has a maturing canopy. As such the LISS woodland in addition to the surrounding blocks of mature commercial forestry affords a level of filtering and/or screening such that the extent and pattern of predicted visibility on Figure 5.8 can be used to inform the appraisal. It is evident from the screened ZTV (verified in fieldwork) that visibility of the Proposed Development will be well contained by surrounding woodland and forestry.

5.2. Proposed Development

5.2.1. A full description of the Site is set out in the Environmental Report (ER) in Chapter 2 with a full description of the Proposed Development in Chapter 3, with a summary provided here to provide context to the LVA.

5.2.2. The Proposed Development Site ('the Site') is located on the Lochluichart Estate. Existing warehouse buildings and sheds near the Site entrance are located approximately 1km east of the small settlement of Lochluichart. The Site is undeveloped and comprises both planted forestry and semi-natural woodland (mixed regenerating birch was prevalent in observations from field work).

5.2.3. The overall Site area is approximately 19.5 hectares (ha) with access along an existing forestry track taken from the A832 and includes a short length (approximately 400m) of new

track, extending the existing track access to the BESS compound. The site is rural in nature with a small number of neighbouring residential properties. The nearest of these dwellings exist along the A832 approximately 0.7km to the southeast and 0.9km to the west of the Proposed Development.

5.2.4. Existing Site access off the A832 and the existing track forms part of the Application Site boundary for the Proposed Development and close to this existing entrance and Site access are a number of warehouse buildings used by the nearby shooting estate, with adjacent land used for game shooting, target practice and (within fenced areas) the rearing of pheasants. The Site entrance requires upgrading to facilitate vehicular construction access off the A832, within the vicinity of the existing estate warehouses. North of the warehouses, there is no upgrading required to the existing forestry track. Up to 55 battery storage containers (approximately 6m long x 2.5m wide by 3m high) would be located within a palisade fenced compound measuring approximately 115m by 70m which would be formed of crushed rock laid across a levelled area on permeable membranes. This area includes a potential future augmentation area measuring 50m by 30m. The maximum height of any structure within the facility would be approximately 4m. The only lighting would be motion sensor activated lighting on the units within the facility.

5.2.5. The photowires that are provided in Appendix 5.3 illustrate the proposed BESS compound as a single three-dimensional box accurately representing the maximum parameters of the development. The wayleave construction corridor which will contain the length of new track is indicated on Figure 13 (Viewpoint 4 the closest to the BESS compound) to illustrate this aspect of the Proposed Development. The photowires do not attempt to illustrate the actual appearance of these elements but enable an opinion to be formed on the likely visibility and magnitude of change that will occur at each viewpoint.

5.3. Scope of the Appraisal

5.3.1. The appraisal covers the potential landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development during its construction and operational phases. A Study Area of 3 km buffered from the Proposed Development has been defined as the basis of this LVA (the ‘Study Area’). The extent of the Study Area has been informed by the extent of predicted visibility of the Proposed Development and the potential for likely material effects arising, and professional experience of undertaking appraisal for this type and scale of development, in similar landscape character and terrain. Consideration of any evolving cumulative context is included throughout the appraisal, where relevant.

Methodology

5.3.2. The LVA methodology draws upon the established guidance in the Landscape Institute’s Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA), 3rd edition 2013, the LI Technical Guidance Note LITGN-2024-01 (August 2024) and previous experience of undertaking similar appraisals. Appendix 5.1 sets out criteria for the appraisals of sensitivity and magnitude of change of the landscape and visual receptors identified in the LVA, and for the appraisal of levels of effect.

5.3.3. The following extract, taken from the GLVIA 3 gives guidance on the terminology to be used in non-EIA Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisals, such as this LVA:

'*In carrying out appraisals, the same principles and process as LVIA may be applied but, in so doing, it is not required to establish whether the effects arising are or are not significant given that the exercise is not being undertaken for EIA purposes. The reason is that should a landscape professional apply LVIA principles and processes in carrying out an appraisal and then go on to determine that certain effects would be likely be significant, given the term 'significant' is enshrined in EIA Regulations, such a judgement could trigger the requirement for a formal EIA. The emphasis on likely 'significant effects' in formal LVIA stresses the need for an approach that is proportional to the scale of the project that is being assessed and the nature of its likely effects. The same principle - focussing on a proportional approach – also applies to appraisals of landscape and visual impacts outside the formal requirements of EIA.*'

5.3.4. In this LVA, effects are appraised to be either 'negligible', 'minor', 'minor-moderate', 'moderate' 'moderate-major', or 'major.' The level of effect is appraised through a combination of two considerations - the sensitivity of the landscape element, landscape character receptor or visual receptor, and the magnitude of change that would result from the Proposed Development. This evaluation is carried out for each of the receptors described within the baseline section of the report, with the exception of those receptors that are scoped out of detailed appraisal.

Categories of Effect

5.3.5. In the appraisal, the potential effects of the removal and addition of elements within the landscape that are associated with the Proposed Development are considered in relation to effects on landscape elements, landscape character and visual amenity.

5.3.6. Effects on landscape elements are restricted to the area within the Site boundary and are direct effects upon the fabric of the Site. Landscape elements are components of the landscape such as hedgerows, or woodland that may be physically affected by the Proposed Development.

5.3.7. Effects on landscape character arise either though the removal or introduction of new elements that physically alter the pattern of elements that makes up landscape character, or through visibility of the Proposed Development, which may alter the way in which the pattern of elements is perceived. This category of effects is made up of landscape character receptors which fall into two groups: landscape character types and areas covered by a landscape planning designation.

5.3.8. Effects on visual amenity is an appraisal of how the Proposed Development will affect the views of residents, recreational users, and road users around the Site. The appraisal of effects on visual receptors is informed by the ZTV analysis and six viewpoints that have been selected to represent the visibility for the Proposed Development from the visual receptors around the Study Area. Further information on these viewpoints is provided in the baseline section of this appraisal.

Appraisal of the Levels of the Effect

Sensitivity

5.3.9. Sensitivity is an expression of the ability of a landscape or visual receptor to accommodate the Proposed Development. The sensitivity is determined through a combination of the value of the receptor, and the susceptibility of the receptor to the Proposed Development.

5.3.10. Levels of sensitivity - high, medium to high, medium, medium to low, low, and negligible are applied in order that the judgement used in the process of appraisal is made clear. The criteria used to determine sensitivity differ for the effects on landscape elements, landscape receptors and visual receptors. These criteria are explained in full in Appendix 5.1.

Magnitude of Change

5.3.11. Magnitude of change is an expression of the extent of the effect on the landscape and visual receptors that will result from the introduction of the Proposed Development. The magnitude of change is appraised in terms of the size and scale of the effect. The geographical extent of the area influenced is described in relation to the magnitude of change.

5.3.12. Levels of magnitude of change - high, medium to high, medium, medium to low and low - are applied in order that the judgement used in the process of appraisal is made clear. The criteria used to determine magnitude of change differ for the effects on landscape receptors and visual receptors, as well as any cumulative effects on both. These criteria are explained in full in Appendix 5.1.

Level of Effect

5.3.13. To ascertain the level of effect, the sensitivity rating is combined with the magnitude of change rating, through the application of professional judgement to conclude whether the level of the effect is major, moderate, or minor or sits between these thresholds as outlined above. A major effect occurs where the Proposed Development would provide a defining, or material, influence on a landscape element, landscape character receptor or visual receptor. A minor effect occurs where the effect of the Proposed Development is not material, and the baseline characteristics of the landscape element, landscape character receptor, or visual receptor continue to provide the definitive influence. A moderate effect occurs where the Proposed Development has a notable influence on a landscape element, landscape character receptor or visual receptor, but where the baseline characteristics continue to provide the definitive influence.

5.3.14. It is relevant to emphasise that a non-EIA appraisal should not form any conclusions around the significance of any environmental effects, as to do so may trigger a requirement for an EIA level assessment.

Guidance

5.3.15. The LVA follows the Appraisal Criteria set out in Appendix 5.1 devised specifically for the appraisal of energy developments, which is in line with the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment: Third Edition' (Landscape Institute and IEMA, 2013) ('GLVIA3'), the key source of guidance for LVIA and LVA.

5.3.16. Other sources of guidance used and referenced in the LVA include the following:

- Landscape Institute (2019). Visual Representation of Development Proposals: Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/19.
- Landscape Institute (2021). Technical Guidance Note 2/21 Assessing landscape value outside of national designations.
- Landscape Institute, Technical Guidance Note LITGN – 2024-01 (GLVIA3 Clarifications), Published August 2024.
- NatureScot (2021). Assessing the Cumulative Impact of Onshore Wind Energy Developments.
- NatureScot (2020). Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Areas Technical Guidance.

5.4. Landscape and Visual Baseline

5.4.1. The baseline study records the existing conditions of the Site and Study Area and includes an evaluation of which receptors should be carried forward to a detailed appraisal on the basis of the potential for material effects arising from the Proposed Development. The process enables an understanding of the baseline characteristics of the Site, outlining what it is that makes the Site and surroundings distinctive as well as describing the important components or characteristics which comprise the existing landscape and how strongly they are represented across the Site and wider Study Area. It is instrumental in the identification of the landscape elements, landscape designations, landscape character types and visual receptors which are included in the subsequent appraisal.

5.4.2. The baseline study is presented in five sections:

- The Proposed Development Site and Wider Context
- Landscape Character
- Landscape Planning Designations and Wild Land
- Principal Visual Receptors and Viewpoints, and
- Future Baseline.

5.4.3. In each section of the baseline description, receptors are screened in relation to the likelihood of material landscape and visual effects arising from the Proposed Development and, applying professional judgement, are either scoped-in or scoped-out of the appraisal of effects. This is to provide a proportionate appraisal that focuses on relevant considerations for planning purposes.

Field Survey

5.4.4. To inform the LVA, field survey was undertaken in April and July 2025. Viewpoint photography was captured during field survey visits in periods of good visibility. Field surveys were carried out within the Study Area (as far as practical within the timescales allowed), concentrating within the areas shown on the ZTV where theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development is predicted.

5.4.5. Field survey included visits to viewpoints as well as travel around the Study Area to consider potential effects and cumulative effects on landscape character and on the experience of views seen from travel routes through the landscape. Field survey has allowed the landscape character and the visual amenity of the Study Area to be experienced in a range of different conditions. The field survey allows the assessors to judge the likely scale, distance, extent, and prominence of the Proposed Development directly.

5.4.6. The landscape of the Site was assessed for any particular features that contribute to the landscape character of the Site or are important to the wider landscape setting. The landscape character types for the Study Area were reviewed and the analysis from field surveys informed the verification of how strongly the key characteristics are expressed and in turn how they may be affected by the Proposed Development. Visual amenity was surveyed including both static and sequential views, from receptors representative of the range of views and viewer types likely to experience the Proposed Development. Views from a variety of distances, aspects, elevation, and extents were included. Receptor types were initially considered during desk study and include settlement; recreational routes; transport routes; hilltops; visitor locations; areas of cultural significance; a range of landscape character types; and landscape designations.

The Site and Wider Context

5.4.7. The Proposed Development Site is situated in Ross and Cromarty approximately 20km west of Dingwall on the inland extremity of the Cromarty Firth, between the smaller settlements of Lochluichart (1.5km to the west) and Garve (5km to the southeast). The Site is located on the south facing lower slopes of Beinn a Bhric (one of a number of foothills containing Strath Bran and Strath Garve to the north), within a relatively small rectangular block of regenerating woodland and forestry which extends between Allt Coire Mhuilidh and Allt Ceann Loch Luichart, to the east and west respectively. Within the same forest block and east of the Site is the operational Corriemoillie Substation, which is accessed off the A832 further east.

5.4.8. The underlying landform of the Site is situated on the lower south facing slopes to Beinn a Bric, the gradient of which falls from the summit at 442m AOD southwards to the northern shoreline of Lochluichart at 100m AoD.

5.4.9. In a transect across the contours, the slope gradient is markedly steeper on the upper slopes extending down from the summit to the approximately 220m contour line. South of which the gradient reduces, the landform levels out, the concavity of profile creating a tangible step or localised plateau, before gently dropping down to the A832 corridor and then to the Loch shoreline. The flatter ground afforded by this plateau, has already been taken advantage of in the location of the Corriemoillie Substation to the east, which combined with the extent of coniferous forestry within which it sits, is well screened from the immediate area and A832 corridor. Reflecting the siting of Corriemoillie Substation, the length of new access track required, and Site of the BESS compound is also located within this localised plateau, which reduces the level of earthworks required to attain levels to align the track and facilitate construction of the compound. The Site itself is undeveloped, the ground containing regenerating birch and semi-natural woodland and associated understorey, reflecting the low intensity forest management of this area.

5.4.10. Beyond the Site within the immediate Study Area, the landform is defined by the narrow linear form of Loch Luichart surrounded by the steeply rising foothills which underpin Strathgarve, Corriemoillie and Kinlochluichart Forests to the north, and the pronounced form of Sgurr Marcasaidh to the south. On the lower slopes and along the Rivers Bran and Garve the flatter ground has led to a concentration of development both historically (with road and rail communication routes and scatter of settlement and enclosed rough grazing) and more recently commercial afforestation across lower slopes and with the advent of hydroelectricity in the 1950s. Loch Luichart reservoir was constructed in 1954 as part of the much more extensive River Conon Hydroelectric Scheme which effected major changes to the landscape at that time and included the construction of Loch Glascarnoch, Loch Fannich (to the north and south respectively beyond the Study Area) and Mossford Power Station, south of Lochluichart.

5.4.11. As typical in many of the mountainous areas in Highland, river valleys, glens and straths facilitate access into and across the upland area, the lower landforms having a long association as accessible routes connecting the east and west coasts. The A832 (part of the NC 500) connects into the A835 at Garve, crossing the Study Area orientated east to west along Strath Garve, the northern shoreline of Loch Luichart and into Strath Bran westwards. The main Dingwall to Kyle Railway line follows a similar path to the A832, diverting from the road corridor at Corriemoillie where is follows the immediate shoreline of Lochluichart, before rejoining the A832 in Strath Bran (albeit on the south side of the River Bran). Following a similar alignment along the strath is the 132kV transmission pylon line connecting through Mossford Power Station and a number of tracks related to operation and management of the sporting estates (including Lochluichart).

5.4.12. North of the Site and beyond the edge of the Study Area, are located the wind turbines to the existing Lochluichart and Corriemoillie Wind Farms, sitting beyond the immediate enclosing hills to Lochluichart, the turbines are typically screened in views from the lower extents of the A832 corridor and settlement. In the last decade requirements for energy security and storage, and transmission in particular from wind, have led to the construction of Corriemoillie Substation, and proposals for BESS schemes at Corriemoillie and Grudie in addition to the Proposed Development.

5.4.13. The land is predominantly used for semi-natural woodland regeneration and commercial forestry creating a mosaic with larger tracks of unforested terrain confined to the mid and upper slopes of the surrounding hills, with retained open areas occurring to the north of Corriemoillie and Lochluichart.

5.4.14. The BESS compound will be located on the undeveloped and undisturbed landform necessitating the removal of woodland and ground cover with earthworks to achieve required levels. Access to the BESS will require a new length of track extending between the compound and the existing track to the northwest. The physical effects on the Site will, therefore, relate to disturbance of ground cover and earthworks and the loss of semi-natural woodland and changes to the underlying landform. This stage of works will involve the:

- removal of an area of semi-natural and forest woodland and construction of the BESS compound (with woodland retained as far as practical within the wider Site boundary);
- removal of a linear strip of semi-natural and earthworks to facilitate the construction of a short section of new access track;
- removal of a section of existing trees (east of the existing Site access and immediate to the A832) and wider ruderal vegetation to facilitate construction traffic and sightlines.

5.4.15. The effect of the loss of clear-felling the woodland and earthworks will lead to a material change and effect to the fabric of the Site itself. Direct landscape effects on the fabric of the Site are appraised in Section 5.7.

Landscape Character

5.4.16. The landscape appraisal considers the effect of the Proposed Development on the Landscape Character Types (LCTs) within the site and the surrounding area. NatureScot's 2019 Character Assessment forms the most up to date characterisation study for the site and Study Area and its landscape character boundaries and descriptions of key landscape characteristics form the basis of character appraisal in this LVA. The LCTs found in the Study Area are shown on Figure 5.4.

5.4.17. The landscape character within the Study Area (of relevance to the appraisal of the Proposed Development), is primarily characterised by three LCTs, defining the landscape character along the lower strath, and the upland areas to the north and south. Strath Bran and Strath Garve are characterised as Strath - Ross and Cromarty (LCT 340), a narrow linear area orientated east to west across the Study Area and includes part of the Site relating to access off the A832. Extending northwards from the Strath LCT (and including the northern extent of the Site with BESS compound and access track) the landscape is characterised as Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes - Ross and Cromarty (LCT 330). South of the Strath LCT the landscape is characterised as Rounded Rocky Hills - Ross and Cromarty (LCT 331). The other LCT in the Study Area (Rounded Mountain Massif LCT 329) will not be affected owing to their separation distance from the Proposed Development, the relatively small scale of the Proposed Development and the screening effect of intervening landform and as a consequence is scoped out of further consideration in the LVA.

5.4.18. The Strath LCT defines a series of long narrow linear discrete LCTs which channel through an area contained by upland or mountainous areas in the central and west of Highland. Many of the key characteristics of the Strath LCT are strongly expressed in the Study Area, in particular the narrow sinuous channel comprising the River Bran and northern extremity of Loch Luichart, connecting between the uplands of Strath Garve and Strath Bran. There is an appreciably smaller scale to the Strath LCT within the Study Area (by comparison with the wider broader Strath Bran westwards). Where the Strath narrows at Grudie and Gorstand, considerable roadside woodland reinforces the experience of containment between these two straths and along the northern shoreline to Loch Luichart. Only when there are breaks in the woodland cover and views open up to Loch Luichart, does the experience of landscape scale increase, and the combination of open water, woodland and mountainous backdrop is highly scenic. The abrupt change in topography is marked with the concentration of transportation, settlement, historic estates and lodges and more recent development such as grid transmission and estate buildings located on the transition between Strath and the enclosing hills LCTs.

5.4.19. Landcover within the Strath LCT is principally woodland and forestry, interspersed with an pockets of enclosed pasture, and particular to the Lochluichart and Corriemoillie area, pronounced specimen conifer, the narrow dark crowns of which punctuate the lower lighter green canopy of woodland and commercial forestry, creating points of focus and interest. The mix of woodland characters, including mature deciduous trees, regenerating scrub birch/semi-natural woodland and commercial forestry creates diversity and contributes to the scenic interest whilst also screening or framing views to the wider LCT. The perception of a greater extent of development and land use change (both historic and more recent) indicated on baseline OS mapping (Figure 5.1) belies how limited visibility is to existing development, when travelling along the Strath, due to the extent of woodland cover prevailing. For example, Mossford Power Station, Lochluicart Lodge, the railway line, Corriemoillie Substation and Corriemoillie Lodge are not readily apparent from the A832 corridor, by virtue of their locations set back (higher or lower) from the main corridor and within a framework of woodland/forest. Vertical features or large scale change which break this treed cover are more perceptible, including the line of the A832 service corridor with signage and laybys, local breaks in woodland canopy to facilitate access off this route, newer agricultural sheds and warehouses and wayleave for grid transmission infrastructure, contribute incrementally to, and erosion of, the rural character and scenic interest of the LCT.

5.4.20. There would be direct changes to the Strath LCT from the removal of existing vegetation and earthworks to facilitate Site access and required sightlines off the A832, the appraisal of which is considered further in section 5.7.

5.4.21. North of the Strath LCT, the Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes LCT defines large tracts of uplands across central and eastern Ross-shire, interweaving and transitioning between the lower lying more settled straths and valleys, up to the remote interior mountain massif. In this context the hills of this LCT provide backdrops and visual horizons in views from within the Strath LCT. Development and land use change extend up from the transition with the Strath LCT onto the lower and mid slopes, including pasture and commercial forestry, access tracks for estate management, with energy production and grid transmission infrastructure.

5.4.22. Within the Study Area key characteristics of the Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes LCT are well expressed in particular the rounded hills and uplands with smooth gentle slopes down to straths, a landcover of moorland vegetation with occasional rivers, with riparian woodland, woodland patches and regenerating trees of the Site. Tracks along the Allt Cean Loch Luichart and Allt Coire Mhuilidh extent up from the Strath LCT and into the hills, where larger geometric blocks of commercial forestry prevail.

5.4.23. Energy production and transmission infrastructure is located within the lower afforested and wooded slopes of the LCT including the Corriemoillie Substation, the Hydroelectric Power station at Coire Bhratag and the southern turbines of Lochluichart and Corriemoillie Wind Farms. There would be direct changes to the Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes LCT from the proposed development, in particular the BESS compound and the new length of access track, the effects of which are appraised in Section 5.7.

5.4.24. The Rounded Rocky Hills LCT extends from the Strath LCT southwards and comprises the northern east to west orientated extent of Loch Luichart as it curves and runs southwards (out of the Study Area) and into Strath Conon, backed by the north facing slopes of Sgurr Marcasaidh, which features as a backdrop in sporadic views south from Lochluichart. Many of the key characteristics are strongly expressed within this area of the LCT, in particular the moderate scale of the well-defined hill of Sgurr Marcasaidh the steep sides of which drop abruptly to the southern shore of Loch Luichart. To the southwest the dip in the upland profile is denoted by the native woodland regeneration associated with the rivers Allt Loch an Alltain-bheithe and Allt nam Feadan, and which extends across the lower flanks of the of the slopes up from Loch Luichart. There is a pronounced lack of built features or signs of intensive land use management, with only part of path to Arrieleitrach visible as it zig-zags down the enclosing slopes to the Allt Loch an Alltain-beithe. Views from this LCT across to the northern shoreline of Lochluichart are likely to contain the scatter of development and land use practices associated with the Strath LCT, with woodland and forestry on the mid slopes and the turbines of Lochluichart and Corriemoillie Wind Farms on the skyline to the northwest.

5.4.25. No part of the proposed development would be located within this LCT, and whilst there may be some views across the Loch to the Proposed Development, these would be mitigated by the distance involved, and filtering of views through native woodland on Site and on the southern shorelines through which a track runs. The screening effect of woodland (as demonstrated by comparing Figures 5.3 and 5.8), combined with the relatively small scale of the Proposed Development and the baseline influence of existing development (in particular the scatter of settlement and infrastructure on the northern shoreline and wind turbines on the horizon), is unlikely to introduce material effects on the landscape character of this part of the Rounded Rocky Hills LCT and on this basis has been scoped out of the detailed appraisal.

5.4.26. The relevant landscape character types for consideration in the appraisal are the:

- Strath LCT; and
- Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes LCT.

Landscape Planning Designations and Wild Land

5.4.27. The Site and its surroundings lie well separated from any national or local landscape designations. The closest designations to the Site are the following regionally valued Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) the qualities for which are principally defined by the upland mountainous massif of these areas:

- Ben Wyvis Special SLA which lies approximately 7km to the east of the site;
- the Fannichs, Beinn Dearg and Glencalvie SLA, approximately 8km to the west, and
- the Strathconon, Monar and Mullardoch SLA located approximately 10km to the southwest.

5.4.28. All three SLAs are therefore situated well beyond the LVA Study Area. It is considered that no effects on the special landscape qualities of these designations will arise owing to a combination of the substantial separation distances, the relatively small scale and height of the Proposed Development and the enclosure of the Site by localised landform features, woodland and coniferous plantation. Landscape Planning Designations have therefore been scoped-out from the detailed appraisal.

5.4.29. Broadly following a similar spatial arrangement to the SLAs, the nearest three Wild Land Areas are located to the east, west and southwest of the Study Area[1]. Of these WLAs only the boundary to the WLA 28, is drawn closer (than the commensurate SLA) to the proposed Study Area. The wildness qualities of this WLA 28, the eastern extremity of which lies approximately 4km to the northeast of the Site, are significantly influenced by the adjacent operational turbines of Lochluichart and Corriemoillie Wind Farms. WLAs are a mapped interest, however owing to a combination of the separation distances, the relatively small scale and height of the Proposed Development and the enclosure of the Site by localised landform features and coniferous plantation it is considered that no effects on the wildness qualities or attributes of any of the nearest WLAs will arise. On this basis, effects on the WLAs 24, 28 and 29 have been scoped-out from the detailed appraisal.

5.4.30. Furthermore, National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) advises in Policy 4(g), in relation to Wild Land, that "*Buffer zones around wild land will not be applied, and effects of development outwith wild land areas will not be a significant consideration.*"

[1] Rhidorroch – Beinn Dearg – Ben Wyvis WLA 29 to the east, Fisherfield – Letterewe – Fannichs WLA 28 to the west and Central Highlands WLA 24 to the south.

Principal Visual Receptors and Viewpoints

Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) Analysis

5.4.31. Two different types of ZTV have been prepared to inform the Appraisal. A bare ground ZTV in Figure 5.3 demonstrates the worst-case basis of visibility of the Proposed Development by taking no account of any built or natural/vegetative screening features within the Study Area other than the landform profile. To the north of the site, predicted higher visibility is limited within 1km to the immediate mid and upper slopes and summits of the surrounding local hills of Creag Mhor to the west and Beinn a' Bhric to the north. Visibility is predicted out to 2km across the west facing slopes of Cnoc na h-Iolaire, (to the east), the landform of all three hills screening visibility further north across the wider Study Area.

5.4.32. Southwards along the immediate strath and northern extent of Loch Luichart there is typically limited or no predicted visibility within 1km immediate to the Site. East and westwards of the Site area beyond 1km along the lower lying valley visibility remains limited, with small, concentrated pockets of visibility at Grudie, the curve northward in the A832 east of Lochluichart Station, and varying visibility east of Lochluichart Lodge to Corriemoillie Lodge. More widespread higher levels of theoretical visibility are illustrated across the majority of Loch Luichart (within the Study Area) extending up from the south shoreline, across the north facing flanks and summit of Creag nan Corrachan almost continuously out to the edge of the Study Area. Visibility is fragmented to the southeast and southwest due to localised screening by landform.

5.4.33. As the Site occupies a location within regenerating semi-natural woodland, which is fringed by commercial forest, it is considered that the bare ground ZTV overstates the likely visibility of the Proposed Development. To address this a screened ZTV has been prepared (Figure 5.8) which includes an Ordnance Survey dataset of existing trees and forestry within the Study Area (as indicated on Figure 5.1), on the terrain model. A nominal height of 10m has been attributed to this dataset to provide an indication of the potential screening that may be derived from existing trees and forestry. The ZTV modelling assumes the forest to be dense commercial plantation, which affords significant screening and containing views. However from aerial photography (included in Figure 5.7) and observed in field work, the woodland character is more mixed comprising both planted forest and semi-natural woodland. The fragmented cover of the woodland is more likely to filter rather than block immediate views to the Site from within the 1km radius. Around the southern and western edges of the Site woodland there is denser plantation forest which more effectively screens views, akin to that modelled on Figure 5.8. The reduction of visibility indicated south across Loch Luichart to the southern shoreline and lower slopes is considered to be a fairly realistic representation of likely theoretical visibility with higher visibility limited to the mid and upper slopes between 2-3km (and takes no account of screening afforded by woodland regeneration on theses slopes).

5.4.34. As there is some uncertainty of the extent potential screening portrayed on Figure 5.8, the bare earth ZTV is shown with the representative viewpoints indicated (Figure 5.3), and alongside the landscape character and visual receptor figures (Figures 5.4 and 5.6). The landform of the Site and surrounding area, combined with the forestry and woodland cover,

has a notable influence on the extent of visibility across the wider Study Area and the pattern of theoretical visibility is consequently more fragmented and limited in geographical extent, by comparing the bare earth ZTV with the screened ZTV. At close range (within 1-2 km), visibility is substantially contained by the topography of the site with respect to the main visual receptors which are predominantly located along the A832 and strath, with the exception of close range views from the existing forest track to the proposed BESS compound site.

5.4.35. Supporting photowires have been prepared to illustrate how the views from representative viewpoints may change and they also help to illustrate where the Proposed Development will be screened by intervening landform and/ or vegetation. The presence of and notable absence of visibility of the operational Corriemoillie Substation provides a helpful reference or benchmark to demonstrate the high degree of containment likely afforded to the Proposed Development.

Settlements and Residential Properties

5.4.36. Settlements are limited in the wider Study Area to the north and south due to the remote upland character of the hinterland. However, there are a scatter of villages and rural clusters along the lower lying strath and northern loch side, accessed off the A832 where views from them may be affected by the Proposed Development. Settlements in the Study Area are shown on Figure 5.3 and include Grudie, Lochluichart and Corriemoillie ranging in distance from the edge of the Study Area at 3km, to within 1km close to the Site access. These separation distances, combined with the screening effect of the localised landform undulations and coniferous plantation, as well as the relatively small scale and height of the Proposed Development, affords substantial screening as demonstrated by the very limited ZTV predicted along the A832 corridor and across these communities shown in Figures 5.3 and 5.8. Given the limited potential for residents or visitors in these settlements to be affected by the Proposed Development, the assessment of effect on settlements and residential receptors is scoped out of the visual appraisal. However, viewpoints have been included at Lochluichart and along the A832 where predicted visibility is modelled, or where there may be changes in the views from the loss of woodland along the roadside to facilitate site access.

Transportation Routes

5.4.37. Stemming from the constraining upland landform which characterises the majority of the Study Area, there are a very limited number of public transport routes namely the A832 (also designated as part of the North Coast 500 route and therefore likely to be used for informal recreation, including cycling) which follows the line of the River Bran and the Inverness to Kyle Railway Line. As for predicted visibility from settlements within the valley, visibility of the Proposed Development is limited and contained by the landform and forest plantation immediately north. Potential visibility is predicted from the roadside travelling eastwards, and a viewpoint has been included to appraise potential effects from this location (including the layby which is a popular stopping point on route from which to appreciate view across the loch).

5.4.38. Similar limited extents of visibility are predicted for users of the Kyle Railway, due to its alignment in the lee of the site hills to the north, from its lower siting along the immediate

northern shoreline to Loch Luichart (where typically the main focus of views is south across the Loch to the surrounding mountains).

5.4.39. Due to the limited predicted bare earth and screened visibility from both the A832 and the Dingwall to Kyle Railway Line (supported by observations on site), there are unlikely to be widespread sequential effects on these receptors and as such both routes are scoped out of further consideration in the LVA.

Recreational Routes and Core Paths

5.4.40. Figure 5.6 shows the extent of recreational routes in the Study Area. There are no Core Paths within the Study Area, the nearest being those extending along Strath Garve, to the east. The principal route of relevance to the appraisal is the Scotways defined Scottish Hill Track number 280 Strathconon to Loch Luichart Circular[2] (SHT 280) an approximate 5km section of which runs south of Loch Luichart along the flanks of Creag na Corrachan parallel to the shoreline.

5.4.41. The bare earth ZTV predicts visibility along the SHT 280 at a distance of approximately 2km from the Proposed Development for the majority of the route within the Study Area. A wireline from Viewpoint 5 (Figure 5.14) is included to illustrate potential bare ground visibility from this route at the closest point to the Site. East of Viewpoint 5 the SHT drops down slope and runs inland losing visibility, eventually arriving at the ruin of Arrieleitrach, further south along the shore (and beyond the Study Area). The screened ZTV, illustrates that mitigation from the relatively small scale of the development, the woodland and forest screening and filtering views, at a distance of at least 2km reduces the likely material visual effect of the proposal from this receptor. In addition, the screened ZTV does not model screening from the immediate woodland regenerating on the south flanks of the hill through which the track passes.

5.4.42. Views from along the SHT 280 (within the Study Area) are already influenced by, in particular the turbines of Lochluichart and Corriemoillie Wind Farm, and to a lesser extent settlement and infrastructure along the northern shoreline of Lochluichart. Whilst the whole of the 26km circular route of the SHT 280 runs through remote terrain, along the stretch of route within the Study Area the experience for users is one already influenced by existing development and energy infrastructure. In this context whilst there may be some additional visibility to energy infrastructure attributed to the Proposed Development, it is considered that this would not be of a level to materially effect the sequential views along this route as a whole and as such effects of the Proposed Development on the SHT 280 have been scoped out of the appraisal.

[2] ScotWays – Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society - Scottish Hill Tracks - 6th Edition 2024.

5.4.43. Six viewpoints for the landscape and visual appraisal have been selected following site and desk based analysis, and with prior knowledge of the area from undertaking the LVIA for the Lochluichart Wind Farm application. Four viewpoints have been taken forward into the detailed appraisal, selected to cover points of specific importance such as recognised viewpoints, settlements, important routes, and attractions, and to inform the definition of the likely extent of visual effects arising from the Proposed Development, including woodland felling to facilitate sight lines at the entrance. These viewpoints represent various visual receptors from different compass directions and distances. It is worth highlighting that the mitigation afforded by the initial choice of Site on a 'plateau step' in the slope and set within woodland and forestry has reduced the availability of clear views to the Proposed Development (representing worst case scenario) and as a consequence has limited the number of viewpoints selected for detailed appraisal. This proportionate approach to the scope of this LVA reflects that advocated in GLVIA3, a larger number of viewpoint locations initially identified through desk work, were scoped out from further consideration on the basis of site work and the effects of screening.

5.4.44. The table below lists the six initial viewpoints selected for the LVA and provides information on their location, the receptors which may experience views at these locations, viewpoint distance, elevation, and view direction to the Proposed Development. Viewpoint locations are shown in conjunction with the bare earth and screened ZTVs in Figures 5.3 and 5.8. Photowire visualisations have been prepared for the majority of these viewpoints (Appendix 5.3) to meet the requirements of the Landscape Institute's guidance on the production of visualisation with exception of Viewpoint 5 for which only a wireline is included.

LVA Viewpoints

VP No	VP Name	Grid Ref	Distance to BESS	Receptor Type / LCT / Designation	Potential visual effects
1	A832 Lochluichart Lodge Entrance East	233910, 863420	0.54km	Road users Strath LCT NC 500	The BESS and compound and new section of access track will be screened from view. Changes in the view will primarily relate to the loss of roadside trees at the site entrance and earthworks in the immediate vicinity. Assessed in Section 5.7.
2	A832 Near Corriemoillie Farm	235461 863658	1.05km	Road users, local residents Strath LCT NC 500	Whilst there is some bare earth predicted visibility to the BESS compound, screening by intervening woodland will mitigate these effects. Corriemoillie Substation closer to the viewer is not visible, only parts of pylons and conductors, protruding above the tree denote the presence of energy infrastructure. The works at the Site entrance and removal of trees will not be visible, and as such there will be limited material changes to this view. On this basis appraisal from this VP is scoped out of the LVA.
3	Lochluichart Estate – existing track east	234119 864032	0.27km	Walkers, estate workers Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes LCT	The BESS compound and new access track and removal of birch woodland will be visible from this view, the appraisal of effect is contained in Section 5.7.
4	Lochluichart Estate – existing track west	233929 863961	0.4km	Walkers, estate workers Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes LCT	The BESS compound and new access track and removal of birch woodland will be clearly visible from this view, the appraisal of effect is contained in Section 5.7.
5	Scottish Hill Track 280 – Strathconon to Loch Luichart Circular	234755 861713	2.1km	Walkers Rounded Rocky Hills LCT Scottish Hill Track 280	Parts of the BESS compound and removal of birch woodland may be visible from this view, the appraisal of effect is contained in Section 5.7.

VP No	VP Name	Grid Ref	Distance to BESS	Receptor Type / LCT / Designation	Potential visual effects
6	A832 Lochluichart – layby	232954 863122	1.5km	Residents / Road users Strath LCT NC 500	It is unlikely that the BESS compound, new section of access tracks, works at the Site entrance will be visible. Changes to the coverage and density of tree crowns on skyline from removal of semi-natural woodland may be visible but is unlikely to materially effect the visual receptor. On this basis an appraisal from this viewpoint is scoped out of the LVA.

Cumulative Interactions

5.4.45. This Appraisal considers the likely cumulative effects of the Proposed Development in against two baseline scenarios reflecting relevant existing and consented energy related development in the Study Area.

5.4.46. Existing cumulative baseline scenario

- Given the limited geographical influence of the Proposed Development on the surrounding area, the principal landscape and visual cumulative interaction will take place with the neighbouring Corriemoillie Substation and existing energy infrastructure associated with Mossford Substation and the associated 275kv pylon lines along the strath. The addition of the Proposed Development will likely introduce some cumulative change to the local landscape character, the baseline for which includes Corriemoillie Substation, Mossford Power Station and associated infrastructure, and the turbines of part of Lochluichart and Corriemoillie Wind Farms.
- Whilst Loch Luichart is a constructed reservoir and part of the wider hydroelectric scheme in this area, as for many of these water bodies, where there are limited views to dam heads, draw down scarring and associated infrastructure, they can appear as a more ‘natural’ landscape feature with scenic interest. On this basis and in this context Loch Luichart is not considered as part of the developed baseline in the cumulative appraisal.

5.4.47. The majority of visual receptors which are situated at low levels in the lee of the hills enclosing Lochluichart have no visibility or very limited visibility to the existing Corriemoillie Substation (with the exception of the gated access off the A832) and to the wind turbines, against which limited, or no cumulative effects would occur. Mossford Power Station and the pylon lines appear glimpsed in views as you move along the strath.

5.4.48. Future cumulative consented scenario

5.4.49. Within this scenario, the additional effects of the Proposed Development against a cumulative baseline comprising existing and consented energy related development within the Study Area are appraised. This includes the proposed Corriemoillie BESS (to the east of Corriemoillie Substation, application submitted but not yet determined) and the consented Lochluichart Energy Storage Project (west of the Site along the River Grudie valley).

5.4.50. On the basis of the existing and predicted extents of energy related developments within the Study Area, cumulative landscape and visual effects for both the existing and consented baselines are considered within the appraisal of both the Strath LCT and the Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes LCT, and the 4 viewpoints.

Future Baseline

5.4.51. In order to ensure that the Proposed Development is appraised against a realistic baseline scenario, i.e. what the baseline conditions are likely to be once the Proposed Development is operational, a description of the likely future baseline conditions is provided within this section.

5.4.52. The main driver of future change in respect of the landscape and visual resource is climate change. Aspects that may cause change are likely to take two forms; measures to mitigate against the adverse effects of climate change and measures put in place to try and limit the future effects of it. The most evident land use change likely to occur in the Highlands will be the further development of renewable energy in the form of offshore and onshore wind farms, tidal, wave and solar power projects and associated supporting infrastructure including upgrades to electricity transmission and energy storage, including substations and BESSs.

5.4.53. In the absence of the Proposed Development proceeding on the site, the land will most likely continue to be managed as Low Intensity Silviculture assuming the Scottish Forestry contract is renewed for this Plan area. There are currently no other wind farm developments within close proximity to the Proposed Development, there are however further applications within the wider Ross and Cromarty area. The need for further renewable energy development to achieve net zero carbon emission targets may also result in a need for further grid infrastructure development to connect to the national grid and consumers, as is demonstrated in the Study Area (to be appraised for landscape and visual receptors).

5.5. Potential Landscape and Visual Effects

5.5.1. The effects of the construction, operation and decommissioning of the Proposed Development on the landscape and visual resource would arise principally from the construction and operation of the BESS compound and associated infrastructure. The temporary construction compound and delivery vehicles would also have effects on the landscape and visual resource during the anticipated 6-12 month construction period of the Proposed Development. The operational lifespan of the Proposed Development is proposed for 40 years (allowing for replacement of the BESS batteries every 15 years or so). In the event that it is decommissioned at some point in the future, it is understood that this process

would take approximately 12 months and involve activities similar in nature to that of construction, resulting in similar effects.

5.5.2. Due to the relatively small scale of the Proposed Development, there is the potential that the effect during the construction (and decommissioning) phases could give rise to a greater magnitude of change than the operational phase. The effects of the construction and operational phases are, therefore, considered separately.

5.6. Mitigation

5.6.1. The design process for the layout of the Proposed Development is a vital part of the environmental process and is where the biggest contribution can be made to mitigate potential landscape and visual effects, creating a development which is appropriate for the existing landscape character and visual features of an area. The design of the Proposed Development has evolved as part of an iterative process which has aimed to provide a satisfactory design solution taking account of environmental, technical and economic constraints. Landscape and visual mitigation measures have been a central consideration in this iterative design process and includes:

- The specification of the development is relatively contained smaller in footprint than the neighbouring Corriemoillie Substation, with the height of the acoustic barrier (if required) being up to a maximum of 4m.
- Reflecting the siting of the adjacent Corriemoillie Substation, the BESS compound and section of new access track is located at a on a ‘plateau’ of relatively flat ground, a tangible ‘step’ within the wider fall of slope from the summit of Beinn a Bhric, to the northern shoreline of Loch Luichart, which reduces the requirement for extensive earthworks to achieve necessary ground levels and which visually pulls back the development from views from the majority of receptors along the Strath.
- The siting of the Proposed Development within the Lochluichart Forest North - Forest Plan area has been intentional to secure embedded mitigation, by further filtering views to the development, a precedent set in the locale by Corriemoillie Substation and the pending Corriemoillie BESS project.
- An existing site entrance and forest access track off the A832 is being used, the upgrading of which will be within and an area of disturbed ground between the A832 and existing estate warehouses and compound.

5.6.2. All of the effects appraised in the LVA should be considered residual.

5.7. Detailed Appraisal of Residual Effects

Scoped-in Receptors

5.7.1. The baseline review of the Site and its surrounding landscape character, landscape designations and visual receptors concludes that the following receptors should be appraised in respect of likely effects from the Proposed Development. All other landscape and visual receptors are not considered likely to experience material effects as a consequence of the Proposed Development:

- Strath LCT 340 – site landscape and wider LCT
- Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes LCT 330
- Viewpoint 1 A832 Lochluichart Lodge Entrance East
- Viewpoint 3 Lochluichart Estate – existing track east
- Viewpoint 4 Lochluichart Estate – existing track west
- Viewpoint 5 Scottish Hill Track 280 – Strathconon to Lochluchiart Circular

Strath (LCT 340) – the Site and wider context

Baseline Characteristics

5.7.2. The Strath LCT occurs across in a number of locations across Ross and Cromarty, often acting as a transitional link between a water body and the interior of the region. By virtue of their location passing through upland areas, they are typically linear in definition and narrow, and for settlement, access and land use change, by comparison with the surrounding more remote uplands and interiors. The width of the Strath LCT fluctuates between narrow incised straths such as at Corriemoillie, to the broader flatter form of Strath Bran, but typically views are contained to a greater or lesser degree by immediate slopes sides and channelled along the strath. Within the Study Area the Strath LCT is a focus for settlement and the key communication routes of the A832 and the Kyle Railway. Land use is typically small scale pasture farming set within a diverse mix of woodland and forest character, the latter including estate policies and specimen trees, commercial forest plantation and regenerating native woodland, in particular birch and some Scot's Pine. Human influences shape the Strath in the locale, from the shoreline and open waters of Loch Luichart reservoir, the line of grid transmission, power station and substation buildings, but are typically well contained and set within the wooded framework.

5.7.3. Only the lower extents of the Proposed Development are located within the Strath LCT and comprises tree removal at the entrance to facilitate sightlines off the A832 for construction (and maintenance) traffic, with upgrading of the entrance area and a section of the existing track that runs up to and past the existing estate warehouses (that sit in a fenced compound). Beyond this the existing estate track runs north and crosses into the adjacent LCT. The area between the existing estate compound and the A832 is characterised by ground disturbance,

with existing spoil heaps, engineered slopes and levels to accommodate the existing estate infrastructure (tracks, turning circles, laybys, circulation and storage within the compound) and three large warehouses. Vegetation cover is predominantly ruderal grasses, plants and shrubs colonising the disturbed ground, backed by a mix of scrub birch woodland, commercial forest and roadside trees.

5.7.4. There is a strong sense of enclosure from the rising slopes to the north and level of roadside woodland to the south of the A832 (reinforced in the locale with an establishing hawthorn hedgerow), changes in levels, built form of the warehouses and existing woodland. The level of ground disturbance and scale of the warehouses imparts a managed and modified landscape character but one which is well contained in views from the immediate and wider area, in particular along the A832 where views only open up and into the compound when relatively close to the site entrance. This area of the LCT lacks the more natural landform and scenic qualities and sense of place, experienced along the LCT to the east and west where views across the loch backed by mountains are afforded.

Sensitivity

5.7.5. The value of this LCT within the Study Area is **Medium-High**. There are no national or regional landscape designations covering this LCT which would otherwise denote a particular recognised landscape value. There are several aspects of the key characteristics which heighten the value to local communities in particular the more historic characteristics of field patterns, buildings and diversity of woodland to the existing Lochluichart and Corriemoillie Estates and the relatively abrupt transition between strath floor and hill sides, such that there is a strong association with the surrounding mountains and the open waters of the Loch. However, there is very little evidence of these characteristics or valued features expressed on the Site or the immediate surrounds to the existing entrance.

5.7.6. Furthermore, within the Strath LCT in the vicinity of Lochluichart there are many human influences which reduce the scenic value of the strath including the service character of the A832, pylon lines and geometric commercial forestry which rise out of the strath in places reducing the clarity of transition to adjacent hillsides. The value of the LCT of the Site and immediate surrounds at the entrance and to the estate compounds is medium- low, beyond which the value of the Strath LCT increases to medium and in less developed extents where there is appreciation of the loch and more nature woodland character the value is medium-high.

5.7.7. Whilst the susceptibility of the Strath LCT to the effects the Proposed Development are **Medium**, given the existing levels of disturbance local to the site entrance and in the context of the existing estate compound, the susceptibility is appraised as **Low**. Beyond this where there is a greater appreciation and expression of more historic and scenic character along the Strath the susceptibility is assessed as Medium.

5.7.8. The combination of the value of the Site and its susceptibility to the Proposed Development results in an overall sensitivity rating of **Low**. Within the wider Strath LCT the sensitivity remains Low stemming from the limited predicted visibility to the Proposed Development along its wider extent within the Study Area.

Magnitude of Change and Level of Effect

5.7.9. **Magnitude of Change:** Immediate to the site entrance the Proposed Development requires the removal of existing largely ruderal vegetation and scrub along the A832 verge and a number of trees to the east of the site entrance to enable a minimum of 4.5 m x 160 m sightline. The existing entrance will be widened and immediate landform upgraded to facilitate construction traffic involving ground distance, loss of ruderal vegetation and scrub regeneration. In the context of the existing disturbed character of the LCT in this locale, the direct changes to the site and in particular loss of some trees along the roadside will result in some direct changes to an already altered landscape character.

5.7.10. The ZTV pattern modelling the visibility of the BESS in Figure 5.3 shows that there is limited visibility along the Strath in the Study Area, with concentrations higher visibility focussed at Grudie at 3km westwards, immediate to the row of cottages set back from the row at Lochluichart at approximately 1km west, and variable visibility along a section of the Strath LCT broadly between Lochluichart Lodge and just east and beyond Corriemoillie Lodge. Figure 5.8 illustrated that much of this bare ground visibility to the BESS compound will be screened from view, introducing minimal changes to the perception of landscape character in views along the strath. Removal of woodland to facilitate the constriction of the BESS compound may be visible in a loss of trees crowns, reducing the density of birch woodland in some views, but these effects are considered to be very localised.

5.7.11. Taking these factors into account the magnitude of change on the defining characteristics of the Site landscape character LCT is considered to be **Medium - Low** during construction (and decommissioning) on the Site landscape character, and **Low** during operation of the Proposed Development. On the wider Strath LCT the magnitude of change is considered to be **Low** during construction and decommissioning, and negligible during operation.

5.7.12. **Level and nature of effect:** The level of effect on the Site **Moderate/Minor** during construction reducing to **Minor** during operation of the Proposed Development, localised out to approximately 0.3km of the boundary along the A832 and around the adjacent lower slopes.

Definitions of these effects are provided in Appendix 5.1: Table TA4.

5.7.13. Across other parts of the LCT within the Study Area the appraised effect would be lower, or non-existent, where ZTV coverage indicates no visibility would arise. This is generally because of increased separation distance from the Proposed Development and/ or an absence of visibility.

Cumulative Effects on LCT 340

5.7.14. Where visibility of the Proposed Development in arises, it will be most likely be experienced as wider site entrance off the A832, increasing the existing gap in vegetative cover along the roadside and experience of disturbed ground and development infrastructure beyond. These changes would introduce some incremental reduction in loss of roadside planting and

localised widening of access in the vicinity of the A832 and an increased level of disturbance with upgraded tracks, in addition to other access points along the immediate area of the Strath LCT. On the basis of a low level of effect of the Proposed Development ton the wider Strath LCT the addition of BESS compound is unlikely to introduce cumulative changes to the wider appreciation of this LCT. The appraisal of **Low** cumulative change during construction and operation takes the above factors into consideration in the context of the disturbed landscape character existing.

5.7.15. The level of effects appraised of the Proposed Development (both individually and cumulatively) on the Strath LCT are considered to be localised and non-material. There is, however, an opportunity (and some limited space within the Site Boundary) to include native hedgerow and tree planting to the back of the visibility splays either side of the existing Site entrance. This planting (maintained to ensure sight lines remain clear) in the shorter term would physically and visually reduce the gap in the roadside tree cover. Longer-term with effective establishment the planting would begin to filter views to the disturbed area of ground at the Site entrance reducing landscape and visual effects, with the additional benefit of mitigating views to the existing large warehouses and shed.

Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes (LCT 330) – the Site and wider context

Baseline Characteristics

5.7.16. The Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes LCT extends northwards transitioning from the Strath LCT into the more remote Rounded Mountain Massif LCT to the north. By facet of this relationship between neighbouring LCTs the key characteristics of the LCT are influenced to a lesser or greater extent by those within neighbouring areas. Along the southern boundary of the LCT within the Study Area the mid and upper flanks of the rounded slopes are influenced by the presence of commercial plantation, pockets of regenerating native woodland and estate access tracks (and the recently constructed Corriemoillie Substation just on the transition with the Strath LCT, all of which impart a more managed landscape character.

5.7.17. Away from the transition with the Strath in the interior of the LCT the character changes to a more upland mountainous character, where heather moorland predominates with a lack of habitation. Commercial forestry is still present but less extensive, and typically upper slopes and summit tops remain clear and impart a more remote and natural character. Some access tracks extend further into the upland, supporting estate management but these are typically contained within river valleys, tributaries which flow south into Loch Luichart. To the northeast on the transition of the LCT with the Rounded Mountain Massif LCT, turbines of the operational Lochluichart and Corriemoillie Wind Farms are located, the majority of the turbines set within the higher mountain massif LCT, only the southern fringe extending into this LCT.

5.7.18. Only part of the Proposed Development is located within this LCT and included the mid and upper sections of the existing track, a new 400m section of track and the BESS Compound. The more managed landscape and forest character of the Site and immediate surrounds up to the termination point will largely remain unchanged as the existing access track will be used, with minimal upgrading proposed. Eastwards beyond the track termination point and deer fence, the landscape character changes the key characteristics defined by the gentler slopes of this section of the hillside falling to the south, with naturally regenerating relatively

mature semi-natural woodland (in particular birch species), extending in an irregular mosaic across the slope and up to the edge of the commercial forest plantation to Corriemoillie Estate.

Sensitivity

5.7.19. The value of this LCT within the Study Area varies, from **Medium** locally increasing to **Medium-High** in the area of regenerating semi-natural woodland. There are no national or regional landscape designations covering this LCT which would otherwise denote a particular recognised landscape value and the LCT within the Study Area extends across a much wider area running centrally and eastwards within Ross and Cromarty. Several of the key characteristics are well expressed which heighten the value in particular upland slopes and open hill summits which form the main backdrop in views from the lower lying areas, and the variety and diversity of woodland character (and the semi-natural woodland on the Site to the east) which within the Study Area and immediate to the site contribute to a diversity of texture and colour and some scenic interest. However, the value of the LCT is strongly influenced by estate and commercial forestry management, with access tracks and locally to the northwest, wind turbines.

5.7.20. The susceptibility of the LCT to the effects the Proposed Development are **Low** along the existing access track of the site up to the termination point at the deer fence, given the presence of the existing track and appreciable estate practices in the vicinity. Eastwards beyond the deer fence into the regenerating birch woodland the susceptibility to change increases to **Medium-High**, as the Proposed Development will necessitate the removal of birch woodland and levelling out of the undulating terrain to facilitate the Proposed Development.

5.7.21. The combination of the value of the Site and its susceptibility to the Proposed Development results in an overall sensitivity rating of **Medium-High** around the eastern extent of the Site within which the new track and BESS will be located. Westwards and within the wider Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes LCT the sensitivity is appraised **Medium-Low** due to the prevalence of existing estate practices and land-use and lower susceptibility arising from the limited changes proposed.

Magnitude of Change and Level of Effect

5.7.22. **Magnitude of Change:** From the transition with the Strath LCT to the south and up to the termination point of the existing access track, the magnitude of change is predicted to be Low/Negligible during construction, on that basis that there are no proposed changes to the existing forest track along this section but that there would be some temporary changes with an increase in traffic during the construction period. The magnitude of change dropping to negligible during operation, as the existing track will remain, and maintenance access will be infrequent.

5.7.23. East of the termination point, the appraised magnitude of change on the immediate site is considered to be **High**, as a consequence of the introduction of built development into a relatively natural uninhabited upland landscape character. The Proposed Development necessitates the removal of areas of regenerating semi-natural woodland and associated

understorey and soil, earthworks to affect required ground levels across the BESS compound and line of the access track (the extent of which is illustrated in Figure 5.12) and the introduction of a series of 3m high large battery components related to the operation of the BESS, (where acoustic fencing is not required). If acoustic fencing is required the majority of the BESS components will be contained within a 4m fenced compound. Locally, the landscape character of the Site will change from an undeveloped more open semi-natural woodland character to an energy storage facility with uncharacteristic built components.

5.7.24. Across the wider extent of the LCT, the ZTV pattern (Figure 5. 3) illustrates that bare earth higher theoretical visibility is typically limited to within 1km in concentrated areas on the mid and upper slopes and hill tops of Creag Mhor and Beinn a Bhric to the west and north respectively. To the east there is theoretical visibility out to 2km, the higher predicted levels located between 1km and 2km on the west facing slopes of Cnoc na h-Iolaire. Figure 5.8 illustrates the effects of screening with levels and extents of visibility reducing across the LCT and limited to the upper slopes of the hills to the north and east. Acknowledging the more open wooded character context to the Site (as illustrated by the baseline aerial photography on Figure 5.7), the level of screening predicted in Figure 5.8 may potentially overestimate the extent to which visibility is reduced, with the possibility of areas of open ground or semi-natural woodland allowing or filtering views of the BESS compound and new section of track, rather than completely screening them. Although also demonstrated on the aerial photography on Figure 5.7 denser commercial forestry sits immediately beyond the birch woodland, which may enhance the level of screening in wider views) more akin to the predicted levels of screening on the screened ZTV Figure 5.8). Notably in views from the west (represented by Viewpoint 3) the removal of woodland to facilitate track construction may open up framed views to the BESS compound. In wider views such as from Viewpoints 2 and 6 removal of woodland to facilitate the construction of the BESS Compound may be denoted by a gap or loss of trees crowns, but these effects if tangible are considered to be minor and localised.

5.7.25. Taking these factors into account the magnitude of change on the defining characteristics of the Site landscape character LCT is considered to be **Medium - High** during construction (and decommissioning) on the Site landscape character, remaining at **Medium - High** during operation of the Proposed Development. These effects are considered to be localised extending out to approximately the Site boundary of the Proposed Development. On the wider Rounded Slopes and Moorland Hills LCT within the Study Area, the magnitude of change is considered to be **Medium-Low** during construction and decommissioning, and **Low** during operation, on the basis of the relatively small scale of the proposal and the location within existing woodland (in particular where adjacent to denser forest plantation).

5.7.26. **Level and nature of effect:** The level of effect on the Site will be **Major-Moderate** reflecting the loss of regenerating woodland and change from undeveloped rural upland landscape character to a developed area. If the immediate land surrounding the Site within the Forest Plan area continues to be managed as LISS, in time the continued growth of regenerating woodland and recolonisation of areas of construction disturbance will lessen the level of effect.

5.7.27. Definitions of these effects are provided in Appendix 5.1: Table TA4.

5.7.28. Across other parts of the LCT within the Study Area the appraised effect would be lower, or non-existent, where ZTV coverage indicates limited, or no visibility would arise. This is generally because of the lower appraisal of sensitivity for the wider extent of the LCT within the Study Area, increased separation distance from the Proposed Development, intervening screening by forestry and woodland and/ or an absence of visibility.

Cumulative Effects on LCT 330

Current existing baseline

5.7.29. In addition to the existing extents of energy related development and transmission within the immediate and wider LCT the addition of the Proposed Development to the existing baseline with the existing Corriemoillie Substation and will introduce some cumulative change, by virtue of the loss of woodland character (where development is key-holed int the woodland cover) and upgrading or new lengths of access track. The extent of cumulative change would be limited to the immediate extent of the Lochluichart Forest North plan area and the adjacent Corriemoillie Forest. Given the limited visual contribution Corriemoillie Substation introduces to the wider existing baseline, the addition of the Proposed Development is unlikely to affect a material level of cumulative change and effect on the LCT. Whilst in a different landscape setting (and of a different scale and type of development), the existing turbines of Lochluichart and Corriemoillie Wind Farms do effect some perceptual change to the immediate LCT to the northwest of the Study Area. However, such is the limited level of change from both the addition of the Proposed Development and the relatively contained area of turbines and limited views to the turbines, cumulative effects are considered to be non-material.

Future consented and application scenarios

5.7.30. As illustrated in Figure 5.9 in addition to Corriemoillie Substation, the consented Lochluichart Energy Storage Facilities to the west, and the is the proposed Corremoillie BESS (application submitted and under review) to the east of the substation. Contrary to existing energy development which is typically contained within the Strath LCT (including Mossford Power Station and grid transmission), these more recent energy stability projects including the substation and BESS projects with larger footprints are located away from the immediate strath and settlement, closer to the points of energy generation (the existing wind farms to the north), where the landform and commercial forest plantation help to mitigate effects. In a future baseline scenario containing the consented development, the addition of the Proposed Development to this future baseline, would introduce some level of cumulative change on the landscape character, in particular from the incremental loss of woodland and forestry by keyholing of development, the additional access tracks or upgrading of access tracks, and increasing the level of development extending up from the straths, onto the lower and mid slopes, such that there is an attrition of human influences on the fringes of this LCT in the Study Area.

5.7.31. In a future baseline scenario containing the consented and application developments, the addition of the Proposed Development to this future baseline, would introduce some level of cumulative change on the landscape character local to the lower south facing slopes of Beinn a Bhric, in particular from the incremental loss of woodland and forestry by keyholing of development, the additional access tracks or upgrading of access tracks, and increasing the

level of development within this area, such that there is an attrition of human influences on the fringes of this LCT in the Study Area.

Viewpoint 1 A832 Lochluichart Lodge Entrance East

Baseline Visual Amenity

5.7.32. The viewpoint is located on the A832 (part of the NC 500 tourist route) in the vicinity of the entrance to Lochluichart Lodge, travelling west. The viewpoint is representative of users of the A832 which includes both visitors to the area, local residents, freight traffic and non-motorised user in particular cyclists. The A832 is one of two principal transportation routes through the Study Area (the other being the Kyle Railway). The viewpoint does not represent user views from the Kyle Railway, which diverges from running parallel to the A832, to run along the northern shoreline of Loch Luichart with views north screened by landform resulting in no visibility to the Proposed Development.

5.7.33. At this location, the view is strongly contained by immediate roadside vegetation and low cuttings resulting from the road's construction, which are now vegetated with a mix of native birch woodland and non-native invasive rhododendron species. The views both east and west are framed along the road corridor, with views focussed along the immediate carriageway curtained from looking too far ahead by curves in alignment. Part of the profile of Creag Mhor provides a distant upland visual backdrop. A relatively dense canopy of mixed woodland frames the view north and south along the road and in the middle distance where the road curves. At this particular juncture there is a pronounced diversity of woodland characters, including birch woodland and scrub along either side, pockets of Scots Pine and a mixed native and non-native understorey, including rhododendron, and some commercial forestry on the mid slopes of the upland backdrop. Specimen conifers associated with the Lochluichart Estate policies, punctuate the wooded canopy and creating pronounced features. A recently planted hawthorn hedgerow runs along the soft verge south of the road in the vicinity of the viewpoint.

5.7.34. With the exception of the road and traffic it carries, the view is typically rural and 'upland' in character, with a relatively narrow running width for an 'A' class road, soft verges, and the distant upland horizon containing views. As a result, there are some scenic qualities to the viewpoint at this locale, the extent of screening allowing a sense of anticipation to develop where views are alternative screened and then open out. With the exception of the woodland character and short section of hill backdrop there is limited expression of the other key characteristics of the Strath LCT, including views to built elements and/or grid transmission.

5.7.35. The existing Site entrance is imperceptible denoted by a break in the grassed verge, and higher levels of light where the break in tree canopy allows light to stream across the road. Views into the Site entrance area are blocked by the immediate roadside trees (only becoming apparent in the immediate vicinity the entrance).

Sensitivity

5.7.36. The value of this viewpoint is **Medium-Low**. This appraisal balances the lack of national or regional landscape designations covering this location, and containment by woodland limiting

the wider appreciation of the scenic qualities of the LCT (or any real sense of identity of the features in the view to identify this as Lochluichart). However, cognisance is taken of the popularity of the wider NC 500 route, with some of the diverse woodland character providing scenic interest with a tangible lack of existing development visible.

5.7.37. The susceptibility of people using the A832 is **Medium** which again is a reflection of the variety of route users, their occupations and expectations for travel. Commuters and workers are appraised at a lower sensitivity, whilst local residents and visitors are typically appraised as of higher sensitivity, due to the high repetition of use and/or expectations as to levels of scenic character (and in the case of the NC500 the anticipation of experiencing a variety of 'Scottish Highland' characters).

5.7.38. The combination of the medium-high value of the viewpoint and its medium susceptibility results in an overall sensitivity rating of **Medium.**

Magnitude of Change and Level of Effect

5.7.39. **Magnitude of Change**: The bare earth ZTV indicates that no part of norther extent of the proposed development (in particular the BESS compound or section of new access tracks) would be visible from this location. The photowire for Viewpoint 1 in Appendix 5.3 illustrates that the main change to the view will stem from the construction effects, in particular the loss of roadside woodland, which in turn opens up views across the immediate interior of the estate entrance. During construction the level of change in the view is likely to include disturbed open ground, regraded and levelled to facilitate construction traffic and plant, with construction signage and associated spoil heaps and construction compound. The construction compound will use the future augmentation area proposed within the BESS compound. In addition, the loss of woodland will open up views to the existing warehouses and site access, introducing the influence of relatively large scale built structures, into an otherwise rural view. During construction the magnitude of change is appraised as **Medium-High** taking account of the close proximity of the change, the loss of woodland, movement of traffic opening up views to the interior of the existing working area around the estate warehouse, views to which will compound the level of change appreciable.

5.7.40. At operation the levels of construction traffic will drop, and reinstatement/restoration works will be implemented (see Chapters 4 Forestry and 6 Ecology for further information). The loss of woodland without additional mitigation planting, will mean that views across the disturbed ground and up to the existing estate warehouses and compound will remain the visibility to which will introduce the experience of relatively large development into the rural character of the view. Within a fairly undifferentiated wooded corridor they will introduce pronounced new features acting as focal points for a short section of the route which this viewpoint represents. On this basis the magnitude of change is during operation is appraised as **Medium**.

5.7.41. Should further planting be included (along the back of the visibility splays, to mitigate the operational effects stemming from the loss of woodland (and opening up of views), over time the magnitude of change will lessen with suggested native hedgerow and tree species. This planting would not only begin to filter views to the interior estate sheds and disturbed ground

but would reinforce the wooded landscape character locale to this area and visually reinstate the wooded corridor experienced from this location.

5.7.42. Similar views would be both from travelling west and east along this section of the road, although there is less woodland along the roadside immediate west of the site entrance, so the magnitude of change at construction would be less pronounced.

5.7.43. **Level of Effect**: The level of effect on the visual amenity and view at Viewpoint 1, A832 would be **Moderate-Major** during Construction, dropping to **Moderate** during operation. With mitigation planting at the entrance these moderate effects would begin to lessen with the establishment of planting.

Cumulative Visual Effects

5.7.44. The lack of any views to existing development in the baseline or any future scenarios for change, mean that the levels of effect appraised are attributed to the construction and operation of the Proposed Development in isolation, as opposed to in addition to and cumulatively with other development irrespective of their determination.

Viewpoint 3 Lochluichart Estate – existing track east

Baseline Visual Amenity

5.7.45. This viewpoint is located on Lochluichart Estate at the terminus of the existing estate track in the location detailed on ZTV Figure 5.2. The viewpoint sits at 189.5m AOD within the turning circle to the track terminus, adjacent to the deer fence enclosing the Lochluichart Estate North Forest Plan area immediately east. The view is representative primarily of estate workers using the track for access and potentially visitors to the estate in particular in relation to its function as a sporting estate. Public access is facilitated with walkers potentially using these estate tracks to access the interior hills north. It is not known how popular these tracks up through Lochluichart Estate are, but with the relatively close proximity to Lochluichart and Corriemoillie settlements (as part of a wider network of forest and estate tracks in the surrounding hills extending up from the strath), this track has the potential to appeal to locals as a convenient and accessible route for walking and recreation.

5.7.46. The immediate track and turning circle are surrounded by mature woodland and forestry, the majority of which is densely planted commercial plantation woodland, to the south enclosed beyond deer fencing. Eastwards the woodland character changes to more open regenerating woodland with some native Scots pine. Westwards a short section of the existing track is visible before its alignment is lost to the gently undulating in landform and proximity of plantation vegetation. The existing track typically runs at grade, with very minor cuttings at the terminus to facilitate the turning circle. Running north off the turning circle is a narrower, less engineered access track (narrower working corridor, with a vegetated unconsolidated running surface). The experience is of one of intense managed commercial forestry, views are short range contained to the immediate forest edges, with no views to any existing built features or infrastructure, and there is limited expression of the key characteristics of the Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes LCT prevalent in the wider area (and on the approach up to the viewpoint).

Sensitivity

5.7.47. The value of this viewpoint is **Low**, appraised on the basis that there is a lack of national or regional landscape designations covering this location, the context and undifferentiated character of the view located within an area managed as commercial forestry, with very limited expression of key characteristics and no tangible scenic qualities visible. Furthermore, the termination of the access track mid slope, is less likely to encourage recreational hill walking in this area.

5.7.48. The susceptibility of people using this access track is appraised as **Low**, reflecting the principal users of this track are likely to be estate workers whose occupation first and foremost is to manage the estate. Whilst there may be some walkers using the track, given the lack of any view or scenic interest they would be unlikely to stop or linger to enjoy the landscape at this location.

5.7.49. The combination of the low value of the viewpoint and its low susceptibility results in an overall sensitivity rating of **Low.**

Magnitude of Change and Level of Effect

5.7.50. As illustrated on Viewpoint Figure 5.12, changes from construction will result in a High magnitude of change, stemming from the felling of trees and ground disturbance as construction begins opening up views across the hillside eastwards (and potentially wider and out and across Loch Luichart) and potentially with visibility to some parts of the Corriemoillie Substation beyond. The densely wooded character within this direction of view would change to one with movement of construction vehicles and plant and earthworks to construct the new section of access track to the BESS compound site.

5.7.51. On operation, whilst efforts will be made in the planning of construction activities to retain as much tree cover as practical, part of the new section of track will be clearly visible as it extends the existing running surface eastwards with associated loss of woodland and in the initial few years disturbance at verges and loss of vegetation cover. Parts of the new track will likely be screened by landform as it extends eastwards and beyond the immediate undulations in slope, before reappearing as it runs up to the BESS compound. At just under 300m to the edge of the BESS compound from this higher vantage point, both the enclosing acoustic fence (if required) and parts of the interior BESS units would be clearly visible introducing the experience of relatively large scale development in close proximity. Efforts will be made to regrade overly engineering cuttings and resultant bunds from earthworks to respond more sensitivity to the undulating landform in the vicinity of the BESS and over time the disturbance from earthworks and ground modelling will soften with regeneration of the surrounding woodland as it recolonises disturbed areas. However, the loss of existing woodland, proximity of the Proposed Development and its uncharacteristic scale and form in this view will introduce a **High** magnitude of change, in the longer term dropping to **High-Medium** dependant on the regeneration of surrounding woodland.

5.7.52. The effects are appraised as **Moderate** during construction remaining as **Moderate** during operation, the levels of effect attributed more to the low sensitivity of the viewpoint with

potentially limited recreational and scenic interests, as opposed to the levels of change introduced.

5.7.53. From the higher location and with the loss of woodland canopy in the mid ground, there is the potential for views to open up to all or part of the components of the Corriemoillie Substation, and/or break in the woodland canopy and some infrastructure in the same direction of view.

Cumulative Visual Effects

Existing cumulative baseline scenario

5.7.54. There is the potential for cumulative effects to arise from the addition of the Proposed Development, stemming from the loss of woodland canopy to facilitate construction. Where views to Corriemoillie Substation open up, the addition of the Proposed Development closer to the viewer would introduce some non-material cumulative change. This appraisal takes account of the low sensitivity of the visual receptor and the location of the Proposed development in a similar angle of view, and the intervening mature commercial forest canopy between the sites potentially affording screening to the Substation.

Application cumulative baseline scenario

5.7.55. There is the potential for cumulative effects to arise from the addition of the Proposed Development to a baseline comprising the existing Corriemoillie Substation and the proposed Corriemoillie BESS (pending decision). Where views eastwards open up with the loss of woodland to facilitate the Proposed Development (both the new section of track and BESS compound) filtered views through the surrounding birch woodland to the Corriemoillie BESS may be possible, introducing some cumulative change. However the level of cumulative effect of this scenario is considered to be non-material, the appraisal taking account of the low sensitivity of the visual receptor and the location of the Proposed Development in a similar angle of view, closer to the viewer (and thereby introducing a greater magnitude of change from the development itself rather than the cumulative relationship in addition to the operational substation and consented BESS). Whilst all three developments would be in a similar direction of view intervening mature commercial forest between the sites may affect some mitigation of the extent to which the Corriemoillie Substation and Corriemoillie BESS would contribute to a changed visual baseline.

Viewpoint 4 Lochluichart Estate – existing track west

Baseline Visual Amenity

5.7.56. This viewpoint is located on Lochluichart Estate along the existing estate track west of Viewpoint 1, at the edge of the commercial forest plantation and in this context, the view is comprised of pronounced differences in character and extent depending on whether the view is broadly to the east or to the west. The viewpoint sits at 175m AOD on the existing access track. The view is representative primarily of estate workers using the track for access and potentially visitors to the estate in particular in relation to its function as a sporting estate. Public access is facilitated, with walkers potentially using these estate tracks to access the interior hills north. It is not known how popular these tracks up through Lochluichart Estate are, but the relatively close proximity to Lochluichart and Corriemoillie settlements with a wider

network of tracks in the immediate surrounding hills extending up from the strath, this track has the potential to appeal to locals as a convenient and accessible route for walking and recreation.

5.7.57. From this location, views westwards are similar in character and extent to those experienced further along the track from Viewpoint 1, with the relatively dense forest edge providing visual containment and limiting views further east, the uniformity of the forest edge softened by some a fringe of native species including birch and Scot's Pine. The tracks alignment continuing eastward breaks the tree canopy enabling a framed view into the forest interior. There is limited expression of key landscape characteristics or scenic interest in the view east and as such the main focus of the view is typically westwards (and away from the location of the Proposed Development).

5.7.58. By comparison the view west looks across and down over the immediate grassed slopes of the estate, allowing wider views south and west across Loch Luichart to the hills and mountains beyond – Sgurrachd-ire to the south and Creah Mhor/Meallan Bhuidhe to the west are prominent landforms given their closer proximity, between which at a greater distance is the mountainous massif of Strathconon Forest, the distinctive profile of Sgurr a Mhuilinn to Agurr a Choire-rainich a key focal point. Single and clusters of mature deciduous and Scots Pine sit within the fore and mid ground, screening views further west along the immediate slopes and framing views across to Loch Luichart. The key characteristics of the enclosing slopes and hills, diversity of woodland, including the prominent vertical dark silhouettes of specimen conifers, and water in Loch Luichart are well expressed and combine with the backdrop of mountains to provide scenic interest and a strongly rural upland character. The existing site access track is visible running at grade down the slope following the undulating contours of the hill. The roofs of the existing estate warehouses and shed are visible in the mid ground, their full extent partially screened by intervening trees. The weathered oxblood red roof of one shed draws the eye but the colour is not uncommon in a rural highland context. Connectors to the pylon line (backdropped by woodland) and the partial line of the railway skirting the Lochside are visible but have a limited developed influence on the view. Some of the turbines of Lochluichart Wind Farm are visible from further down the track but are not visible from the Viewpoint location.

Sensitivity

5.7.59. The view and the viewpoint are not covered by any national or regional designations which would otherwise denote a special value. While there is little evidence to suggest this is a frequently visited viewpoint, the vista afforded at this elevation, and appreciation of landscape character and scenic interest, is nonetheless, in easy reach of the settlements of Lochluichart and Corriemoillie and provides a view of local value and is appraised as **Medium.**

5.7.60. The susceptibility of people using this access track is appraised as **Low-Medium**, reflecting the principal users of this tracks are likely to be estate workers whose occupation first and foremost is to manage the estate. The marginally higher appraisal of susceptibility (than the location of Viewpoint 2) acknowledges the scenic interest afforded at this viewpoint which may encourage walkers to the locale and visitors to the estate to stop and linger.

5.7.61. The combination of the medium value of the view and low susceptibility of the viewers results in an overall sensitivity rating of **Medium- Low** at this viewpoint.

Magnitude of Change and Level of Effect

5.7.62. **Magnitude of Change**: The photowire for Viewpoint 4 (Figure 5.11) in Appendix 5.3 indicates the location of the extent of the BESS compound modelled at the height of 4m and at a distance of 400m. The Proposed Development would be seen in the context of the existing access track and commercial plantation, and as such does not directly intrude upon the appreciation of existing focal points and scenic interest in the view south and west. The main extent of construction change would come from the movement of plant and construction traffic along the existing access track. However, from this location the existing woodland picture in the baseline photograph will be retained and therefore provides an effective screen limiting or filtering views of construction activities, in particular those associated with the new section of access track and BESS compound. On this basis the level of change during construction is appraised as **Medium** which primarily stems from the movement of vehicles and plant along the existing estate track intruding upon the more scenic views west and south.

5.7.63. The magnitude of change of the operation of the BESS facility taking a precautionary approach would stem from filtered views in close proximity to the new length of access tracks, and the BESS, but are considered to introduce a **Medium-Low** level of change. Views south and east will remain unaffected by the operation of the Proposed Development.

5.7.64. **Level of Effect**: The level of effect on the visual amenity and view at Viewpoint 4 would be **Moderate** during Construction and **Minor** during operation of the Proposed Development.

Cumulative Visual Effects

Existing cumulative baseline scenario

5.7.65. There is limited potential for cumulative effects to arise with the addition of the Proposed Development, to the existing baseline, as views to Corriemoillie Substation are likely to be screened or highly filtered, and in this context any change or effects from the Proposed Development will be in isolation rather than cumulative with Corriemoillie Substation.

Application cumulative baseline scenario

5.7.66. There is limited potential for cumulative effects to arise from the addition of the Proposed Development to an application baseline as views to both the existing Corriemoillie Substation and the proposed Corriemoillie BESS are likely to be screened or highly filtered. In this context any change or effects from the Proposed Development will be in isolation rather than cumulative with the proposed Corriemoillie BESS.

Viewpoint 5 Scottish Hill Track 280 – Strathconon to Lochluchiart Circular

Baseline Visual Amenity

5.7.67. Due to time constraints, it has not been possible to visit this viewpoint location to take site photography and inform the detailed appraisal. The description of the viewpoint baseline and

potential magnitude of change and likely potential effects are informed by a desk based review, the ZTV modelling and the Wireline Figure 5.14 only. The appraisal of effects on the view from Viewpoint 5 should be understood and read in this context.

5.7.68. The viewpoint is located on the part of the SHT 280 which runs closest to the Proposed Development (at approximately 2km) on the north facing flanks of Creag nan Corrachan. In more detail the viewpoint sits at an elevation of approximately 200m AoD just west of the steep bare rugged shoreline at Creag Dhudh east of which Loch Luichart narrows and is orientated south east running down to Strath Conon. The viewpoint is representative of users (in particular walkers) using SHT 280 and the route is described as '*an adventurous, circular route in the rugged and isolated country south of Loch Luichart, combining parts of two old rights of way*.'[3]

5.7.69. For the purposes of this section of the LVA the appraisal assumes the worst case scenario of open direct views across Loch Luichart to the hills containing the Site. Aerial photography indicates some regenerating woodland along the lower flanks of the hill through which the SHT 280 runs (which may filter views north), which is borne out by fieldwork observations from the opposing shoreline. The section of route which runs within the Study Area is described as following' *a more distinct path contouring 80m above the loch for about 5km before reaching fenced areas of regenerating Scots Pine and birches with stiles close to the shoreline.*'

5.7.70. The view is likely to take in the immediate lower landscape and southern shoreline beyond which extends out Loch Luichart in the mid-ground, the north shoreline to which is viewed at a distance of approximately 1km. From the northern shoreline and immediate strath rises the hill of Beinn Bhric which the wireline Figure 5.12 indicates is a pronounced landform central in the view north. It is not possible to make observations on the extent to which Corriemoillie Substation is visible.

5.7.71. Demonstrated in Wireline Figure 5.14 the existing turbines of Lochluichart and (to a lesser extent) Corriemoillie Wind Farms would be prominent on the upland skyline.

Sensitivity

5.7.72. The view and the viewpoint are not covered by any national or regional designations which would otherwise denote a special value. From the desk based appraisal while there is little evidence to suggest this is a frequently visited viewpoint, the recorded route which offers a different perspective of views across Loch Luichart, with likely experiences of remoteness and scenic interest, nonetheless, provides a view appraised as **Medium-High.**

[3] Scotways Scottish Hill Tracks 280 Strathconon to Loch Luichart Circular – 6th Edition published 2024.

5.7.73. By comparison with the wider length of the circular route which aligns through the more secluded and wilder interior to the south, this section of the route running parallel to the southern shore of Lochluichart is likely to afford views to existing development and infrastructure on the opposing shoreline. Some level of settlement and existing buildings, commercial forestry on the lower slopes of hills and the turbines of Lochluichart Wind Farm on the skyline are likely to feature in views and have the potential to detract from what would otherwise be a rural landscape with only small-scale human artefacts, such as vernacular cottages, native woodland and small field pattern. Susceptibility is considered to be medium.

5.7.74. The sensitivity of this view is **Medium-High** on account of the qualities of remoteness and wildness character that is likely evident along the route. Whilst there are obvious detractors to the experience and scenic interest from the viewpoint and track, the terrain is relatively rugged and more difficult to access requiring a walk in from Strah Conon to the south. Views offer a different perspective across and along Loch Luichart and these views have the potential to be longer in duration along the 5km stretch. These views are not of an undeveloped landscape; in particular Lochluichart wind turbines are already visible in views from the southern shoreline. These tall vertical structures establish energy infrastructure as a feature of the baseline, and this moderates the sensitivity of the view.

5.7.75. The combination of the medium-high value of the view and medium-high susceptibility to the Proposed Development results in an overall sensitivity rating of Medium-High.

Magnitude of Change and Level of Effect

5.7.76. **Magnitude of Change**: The wireline for Viewpoint 5 (Figure 5.12) in Appendix 5.3 indicates the location of the extent of the BESS compound at a distance of 2km and modelled at the height of 4 m. The section of new access track and the loss of woodland at the site entrance are unlikely to be visible from this location due to immediate woodland screening around the site. Some part of the Proposed Development may be visible as a narrow horizontal band on the lower flanks of Beinn a Bhric, but the fuller extent (including earthworks and access track) are likely to be filtered in views by the immediate woodland surrounding the Site.

5.7.77. Taking a precautionary approach, the Proposed Development would be visible as a narrow band on the lower slopes of Beinn Bhric at 2km distance seen from this location, within a woodland setting. It is also possible that some construction activities such as felling of woodland and earthworks and movement of plant and equipment may be seen during the construction phase. the magnitude of change is considered to be **Medium-Low** during construction (and decommissioning) and **Low** during operation of the Proposed Development.

5.7.78. **Level of Effect**: Based on a desk-based appraisal the level of effect on the visual amenity and view at Viewpoint 5, would likely be **Moderate** during Construction and **Moderate-Minor** during operation of the Proposed Development.

Cumulative Visual Effects

5.7.79. It is not possible to provide an appraisal of the potential for cumulative change or effects with the addition of the Proposed Development to both the existing and consented baseline

scenarios but given the Moderate-Minor level of effect of the Proposed Development on its own, it is reasonable to assume that it would not make a material contribution to either cumulative context.

5.8. Conclusions

5.8.1. Chartered Landscape Architects at SLR Consulting Ltd. have conducted a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA). The methodology follows that set out in GLVIA, 3rd edition and photowirelines and wirelines accord with the Landscape Institute guidance note - Visual Representation of Development Proposals, Technical Guidance Note 06/19.

5.8.2. No part of the Proposed Development is located within a landscape designated for its scenic value and quality. The Site has been carefully identified in order to minimise potential adverse landscape and visual (and other environmental) effects by positioning it within existing woodland and on a tangible step plateau on the hillside (the siting of which reflects the nearby Corriemoillie Substation). This has had the beneficial effect of choosing a site which benefits from a high level of screening when viewed from outside the confines of the Forest and in providing a logical rationale for the siting and design of the Proposed Development.

5.8.3. The appraisal has found that the only locations where high levels of landscape and visual effect may arise is within or proximal to the Application Site itself. These locations are represented by Viewpoint 3 where the BESS compound and a new relatively short section of access track can be experienced at closer range from the termination point of the existing estate track, or from Viewpoint 1 where transitional and oblique views of the widened Site entrance will be viewed in close proximity from the A832 (the latter effects of which could be reduced by planting to the back of the visibility splays). Beyond the boundaries of the Site the Proposed Development is neither prominent or intrusive and both the bare earth and screened ZTV demonstrates how beneficial the choice of site is.

5.8.4. On the basis of this appraisal, it can be concluded that the Proposed Development will have highly localised landscape and visual effects on the Site and surrounding area and reflecting the design approach and siting of the neighbouring Corriemoillie Substation.

Technical Appendix 5.1: Appraisal Criteria

Table TA1: Landscape Elements - (Criteria for Sensitivity and Magnitude of Change)	
Sensitivity Criteria	**Magnitude of Change Criteria**
The **sensitivity of a landscape element** is determined by a combination of the value of the landscape element and its susceptibility to accommodate the proposed development. **Value** of the landscape element: • Its importance in the pattern of elements that constitutes the landscape character of the area and whether or not landscape elements are part of a designated landscape. • The quality of the landscape element, that reflects its condition and state of repair. **Susceptibility** to change: • the ability of the individual element or feature to accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences for maintenance of the baseline. Professional judgement is used based on: • The degree to which the element can be restored, replaced or substituted.	The **magnitude of change on landscape elements** is an expression of the scale of the change that will result from the proposed development and is dependent on a number of variables regarding the size or scale of the change and its geographical extents, based on the following criteria: • The extent of the existing landscape elements that will be lost, the proportion of the total extent that this represents as a contribution of that element to the character of the landscape. • The degree to which the aesthetic or perceptual aspects of the landscape are altered either by the removal or existing components of the landscape or by addition of new ones. • Whether the effects change the key characteristics of the landscape which are critical to its distinctive character.

Table TA.2: Landscape Character - (Criteria for Sensitivity and Magnitude of Change)	
Sensitivity Criteria	**Magnitude of Change Criteria**
The **sensitivity of a landscape character receptor** is determined by a combination of the value of the landscape character receptor and its susceptibility to accommodate the proposed development. **Value of the landscape character receptor**: • Its importance in terms of any designations that may apply. • Its quality in terms of scenic quality, sense of place, rarity and representativeness. • The experience of the landscape in relation to perceptual responses, cultural associations, its iconic status, its recreational value, and the contribution of other values such as nature conservation or archaeology. **Susceptibility to change**: • The specific nature of the proposed development, its size, scale, location, context and characteristics. • The degree to which the receptor may accommodate the influence of the proposed development. • The extent to which the proposed development will influence the character of the landscape receptors across the Study Area.	The **magnitude of change on landscape character receptors** is dependent on a number of variables regarding the size or scale of the change and its geographical extents, based on the following criteria: • The extent of existing landscape elements that will be lost, the proportion of the total this represents and the contribution of that element to the character of the landscape; • The degree to which the pattern of elements that makes up the landscape character will be altered by the proposed development, by removal or addition of elements in the landscape; • The extent to which the effects change the key characteristics of the landscape, identified in the baseline study, which may be critical to the distinctive character of the landscape; • The distance between the landscape character receptor and the proposed development. Generally, the greater the distance, the lower the scale of change; and • The proportion of the proposed development that will be seen. The geographic area over which the landscape effects will be experienced (within the Study Area) is also considered, which is distinct from the size or scale of effect.

Table TA 3: Visual Receptors and Views - (Criteria for Sensitivity and Magnitude of Change)	
Sensitivity Criteria	**Magnitude of Change Criteria**
The **sensitivity** of a view is determined by a combination of the value of the view and the susceptibility of the visual receptors to the change that the proposed development will have on the view: **Value of the view**: a reflection of the recognition and importance attached either formally through identification on mapping or being subject to planning designations, or informally through the value which society attaches to the view(s). The value of a view is classified as high, medium-high, medium, medium-low or low and the basis for the appraised level is made clear using evidence and professional judgement. **Susceptibility to change**: the nature of the viewer experiencing the view and how susceptible they are to the potential effects of the proposed development. Professional judgement is used based on: • Nature of the viewer: the occupation or activity which they are engaged in at the viewpoint or series of viewpoints. • The principal visual characteristics: those features which define the view. • Experience of the viewer: The experience of the visual receptor relates to the extent to which their focus is directed on the view, the duration and clarity of the view and whether it is a static or transitory view.	The **magnitude of change** on views is dependent on a number of variables: • The distance between the visual receptor and the development; generally, the greater the distance, the lower the magnitude of change; • The scale and character of the context within which the development will be seen, as this will determine the degree to which the development can be accommodated in the existing outlook. The scale of the landform and the patterns of the landscape, the existing land use and vegetation cover, and the type of development and settlement seen in the baseline view will all be relevant; • The extent of the development that will be seen; • The position of the development in relation to the principal orientation of the receptor. If the development is seen in a specific, directional vista from a receptor the magnitude of change will generally be greater; and • The width of the view available and the proportion of the view that is affected by the development. Generally, the more of a view that is affected, the higher the magnitude of change will be.

Table TA.4: Level of Effect		
Level of Effect	**Definition of Landscape Effect**	**Definition of Visual Effect**
Major	Where the proposed changes are sufficiently large to substantially alter the character, scale or pattern of the landscape. Substantial alteration to landscape features or valued aspects of a landscape.	Where the proposed changes are sufficient to substantially alter a nationally important view, or view of high scenic quality.
Major - Moderate	Where the proposed changes noticeably contrast with the underlying character of an area or substantially alter a locally important landscape feature / valued aspect of the landscape.	Where the proposed changes to views contrast with the existing view and/ or substantially alter a locally important view, or view of scenic quality.
Moderate	Where the proposed changes contrast with the underlying character of an area or noticeably alter a landscape feature or aspect of landscape.	Where the proposed changes to views contrast with the existing view or noticeably alter a view.
Moderate - Minor	Where proposed changes are readily apparent and at slight variance with the underlying character of an area and/ or landscape features.	Where proposed changes to views are noticeable and at slight variance with the existing view.
Minor	Where proposed changes are intermittent and at slight variance with the underlying character of an area or landscape features.	Where proposed changes to views are intermittent and at slight variance with the existing view.
Negligible	Where proposed changes have an indiscernible effect on the character of an area or landscape features.	Where proposed changes have an indiscernible effect on views/ visual amenity.