6 Ecology

6. Ecology

6.1. Introduction

6.1.1. This Chapter reports the outcome of the assessment of likely significant ecology effects associated with the construction and operation of the Proposed Development. Potential impacts on birds are considered separately in **Chapter 7: Ornithology**.

6.1.2. The Site is centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) NH 34178 63847 and is located north of the A832, approximately 5 km west of Garve. The Site is located within an area of coniferous forestry plantation, semi-natural woodland and areas of open ground.

6.1.3. The Proposed Development consists of a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) of approximately 36MW and associated infrastructure, access and ancillary works, including a 33kV underground cable connection to Corriemoillie Substation which lies adjacent to the Site.

6.1.4. The Chapter is supported by the following reports:

- Appendix 6.1 Protected Species and UKHab Survey Report (Atmos Consulting, 2025a);
- Appendix 6.2 Protected Species Survey (Access Splay) Report (Atmos Consulting, 2025c);
- Appendix 6.3 NVC Survey Report (Atmos Consulting, 2025b);
- Appendix 6.4 Biodiversity Net Gain Report; and
- Appendix 6.5 Outline Habitat Management Plan.

6.1.5. The Chapter is also supported by the following figures:

- Figure 6.1 Final Site Layout;
- Figure 6.2 Protected Species Survey Results;
- Figure 6.3 UKHab Survey Results;
- Figure 6.4 BNG Baseline Areas and Proposed Infrastructure; and
- Figure 6.5 NVC Survey Results.

6.2. Legislative Context and Planning Policy

6.2.1. The baseline surveys and ecological assessment have been carried out with reference to the legislation and guidance outlined below.

Legislation

6.2.2. The non-avian ecology assessment has been undertaken with reference to the following legislation:

- The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) (the 'WCA');
- The Protection of Badgers Act 1992;
- The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended) (the 'Habitats Regulations');
- The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 (as amended); and
- The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 (as amended) (the 'WANE Act').

Planning Policy

National Policy

6.2.3. Full consideration has been given to relevant policy when carrying out this assessment. This includes the following:

- Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) (Scottish Government, 2014); and
- National Planning Framework 4 (Scottish Government, 2024).

Local Planning Policy

6.2.4. The Local Planning Policy considered applicable to the Proposed Development is the adopted Highland Council's Highland-wide Local Development Plan (2012), especially:

- Policy 28 Sustainable Design;
- Policy 57 Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage;
- Policy 58 Protected Species;
- Policy 59 Other Important Species;
- Policy 60 Other Important Habitats and Article 10 Features;

- Policy 67 Renewable Energy Developments;
- Policy 72 Pollution; and
- Policy 74 Green Networks.

6.2.5. Objectives from the Highland Council's Highland Nature Biodiversity Action Plan (2021-2026) were also consulted to understand local priorities, and where appropriate, inform mitigation.

Other Guidance

6.2.6. The Scottish Biodiversity List (SBL) (NatureScot (NS), updated 2022) is a list of animals, plants, and habitats that the Scottish ministers consider to be of principal importance for biodiversity conservation in Scotland.

6.2.7. Both scientific and social criteria have been used to define the SBL. Scientific criteria include all Species of Principal Importance (SPI) and Habitats of Principal Importance (HPI) included in the now superseded UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) (UK Biodiversity Partnership, 2007 *et seq*.), which occur in Scotland. Social criteria are based on the results of an omnibus survey of the Scottish public carried out in 2006 and includes some common species and habitats. This chapter only considers those listed using scientific criteria.

6.2.8. A summary of protection by legislation and policy can be found in Appendix A at the end of this Chapter.

Consultation

6.2.9. Pre-application advice was sought from the Highland Council, with advice received on 8th April 2025.

6.2.10. No ecological information had been submitted at this stage therefore no specific ecological advice was provided; however, with regards to woodland loss it was recommended that *"proposals should demonstrate that they protect and enhance natural woodland in the site and surrounding area"*.

6.2.11. The following was advised when considering biodiversity *"as this is a major development, NPF4 Policy 3b is applicable and requires biodiversity enhancement of the site post-construction in addition to mitigation and compensation measures. In order to satisfy Policy 3b The Highland Councils Biodiversity Enhancement Planning Guidance must be followed. Habitat enhancements must be clearly demonstrated and we recommend the use of the English Statutory Metric."*

6.3. Methodology and Approach

6.3.1. The Ecological Impact assessment is an evaluation process to quantify potential effects of a development on habitats, species, and ecosystems. Standard surveys (Desk Study, Habitats Survey, Protected Species Survey, and Consultations) are used to evaluate the baseline

conditions on the site. Mitigation measures according to the findings are advised. Residual impacts are characterised according to level and duration.

Desk Study

6.3.2. A desk study was undertaken to establish baseline information for the Site and to gather information about the presence of protected species. Various data sources were utilised including the website of the statutory agency, NatureScot via the 'Site Link Portal', publicly available datasets held on the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) website and aerial photography for the Site.

6.3.3. The desk study identified statutory designations such as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and National Nature Reserves (NNRs) within 2 km of the Site. Any internationally designated sites with bats as a qualifying feature within 10 km of the Site were also noted. In addition, Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and relevant non-statutory designations within a 2 km radius of the Site were searched for. A search for protected mammal records was carried out within 2 km of the Site utilising datasets freely available for commercial use held on the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Atlas website.

6.3.4. These search results are detailed in **Appendix 6.1**: **Protected Species and UKHab Survey Report** (Atmos Consulting, 2025a).

Habitat Surveys

UKHab Survey

6.3.5. An extended UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) survey was undertaken that involved mapping of habitats by a suitably qualified and experienced ecologist from Atmos, plus an assessment of the Sites potential to support protected species. This survey was completed on 6th and 7th March 2025, and the survey area covered the Site boundary with consideration given to ecological features of interest within 50 m of the Site. The habitat types were identified and mapped in compliance with the UKHab guidance documents (2023), which included a habitat condition assessment done to the standard methodology (DEFRA, 2025).

6.3.6. Primary Habitats and urban features on-site were classified using Level 3, Level 4 or Level 5 of the UKHab hierarchy and are shown on **Figure 6.3**, with secondary codes used to further describe the primary habitat present. Dominant plant species were noted, as were any protected, uncommon, invasive species or species indicative of particular habitat types, but there was no attempt to compile exhaustive species lists for this element of the site assessment. Botanical nomenclature in this chapter follows Stace (2020) for both scientific and English names.

6.3.7. The survey method was 'extended' through the additional recording of specific features indicating the presence, or likely presence, of protected species or other species of nature conservation significance and any habitats which would be suitable for them. Descriptive Target Notes (TN) were recorded for characteristic habitats, features too small to map, or any other features of ecological interest.

NVC Survey

6.3.8. The National Vegetation Classification (NVC) survey was undertaken on 9th and 10th April 2025 by a suitably qualified and experienced botanical surveyor using the NVC (Rodwell, 1991 – 2000, 5 volumes) and in accordance with NVC survey guidelines (Rodwell, 2006). The NVC scheme provides a standardised system for classifying and mapping semi-natural habitats and ensures that surveys are carried out to a consistent level of detail and accuracy.

6.3.9. Homogenous stands and mosaics of vegetation were identified and mapped by eye, drawn as polygons on field maps; these polygons were surveyed qualitatively to record dominant and constant species, sub-dominant species and other species present. In practice the vegetation was mapped progressively across the site to ensure that no areas were missed and that mapping was accurate. An aerial photograph of the site was also used to aid accurate mapping of vegetation boundaries. NVC communities were attributed to the mapped polygons using surveyor experience and matching field data against published floristic tables (Rodwell, 1991 – 2000). Stands were classified to sub-community where possible.

6.3.10. Although the dominant NVC community has been attributed to each polygon, due to vegetation and habitat variability across the site, and the numerous transitional zones between similar NVC communities, some polygons may include mosaics of the NVC communities rather than pure stands.

Groundwater Dependent Terrestrial Ecosystems

6.3.11. As part of the NVC exercise, any wetland habitats identified with 50m of the Site were evaluated in terms of their potential to be GWDTE, making reference to SEPA guidance (SEPA, 2017), modified from the United Kingdom Technical Advisory Group (UKTAG) list of NVC communities and associated groundwater dependency scores.

6.3.12. A GWDTE is defined by the UKTAG (2003) as:

"*A terrestrial ecosystem of importance at Member State level that is directly dependent on the water level in or flow of water from a groundwater body (that is, in or from the saturated zone). Such an ecosystem may also be dependent on the concentrations of substances (and potential pollutants) within that groundwater body, but there must be a direct hydraulic connection with the groundwater body.*"

6.3.13. A detailed study of vegetation communities allows the potential level of groundwater dependency to be determined.

Protected Species Survey

6.3.14. A protected mammal species survey was conducted during 6th and 7th March 2025. This involved a walkover of the Site and species-specific survey buffers of up to 200m (where accessible) to look for and record any signs of protected species. Any evidence of protected species was recorded and geo-referenced using a handheld GPS with the feature of interest photographed.

6.3.15. For specific survey methodology relating to badger *Meles meles,* bats, otter *Lutra lutra*, water vole *Arvicola amphibius*, pine marten *Martes martes*, red squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris* and wildcat *Felis silvestris* please refer to **Appendix 6.1: Protected Species and UKHab Survey Report** (Atmos Consulting, 2025a).

Biodiversity Net Gain

6.3.16. A biodiversity metric calculator (DEFRA statutory biodiversity metric version 4.0) will be used to quantify the biodiversity unit (BU) value of the habitats within the Site, as well as in other habitat management areas within the wider landownership. This will be done for both the baseline and for areas post development (including both the Proposed Development itself as well as habitat creation and enhancement measures) in order to demonstrate a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain, as required in Highland Council guidance.

Limitations

6.3.17. The habitat surveys were conducted in good weather conditions. However, the surveys were undertaken in what is considered to be a sub-optimal time of year for Scotland (early March and April), when majority of plant species have died back and new shoots are not out yet. This should be considered a minor limitation to the assessment, as especially herbaceous plants (graminoids, forbs, ferns) are difficult to identify and can also be easily overlooked, leading to skewed botanical lists and causing difficulty categorising the habitat following UKHab methodology and classifying NVC vegetation types. Furthermore, the NVC survey was undertaken by a very experienced surveyor and the limitation is not considered to be significant.

6.3.18. Protected species surveys were conducted in good weather conditions, with no recent heavy rainfall that could have washed protected species signs away. Access to some parts of the Site and buffer zone was restricted, mainly where fenced off for farming pheasants. These areas constitute a small part of the overall Site including the buffer zone only, and are not considered to be a significant limitation to the assessment as those areas were not considered to provide suitable habitat while active pheasant management is ongoing.

Assessment

6.3.19. The CIEEM Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland (CIEEM, 2024) (henceforth referred to as the CIEEM guidelines) form the basis of the impact assessment presented in this Chapter. These guidelines set out a process of identifying the value of each ecological receptor and then characterising the “impacts” that are predicted, before discussing the “effects” on the integrity or conservation status of the receptor, proposed mitigation and residual impacts.

6.3.20. The initial stage for assessment of impacts is to determine which features should be subject to detailed assessment. The ecological receptors to be the subject of more detailed impact assessment should be of sufficient value that impacts upon them may be significant in EIA terms. This typically means receptors which have a nature conservation value of greater than local, although where receptors have special legal protection (i.e. listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended (WCA)) then further consideration may also

be given to ensure protection is in place to prevent unlawful acts such as disturbance arising from the Proposed Development. The receptors should also be vulnerable to significant impacts arising from the development.

6.3.21. All designated nature conservation sites, bird species and communities that occur within the "zone of impact" (ZoI) of the Proposed Development are defined as potential ecological features (as described below). The zone of impact is defined for individual receptors based upon the potential effects and if there is any research showing the range of those effects.

Determining Value

6.3.22. The CIEEM guidelines recommend that the value of ecological features is determined based on a geographic frame of reference. For this project the following geographic frame of reference is used:

- International (nature conservation designation, habitat or populations of species of international importance, e.g., a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or significant numbers of a designated population outside the designated site);
- National (nature conservation designation, habitat or populations of species of Scottish importance, e.g., a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or a National Nature Reserve (NNR), a nationally important population / assemblage of a European Protected Species and / or a species listed on Schedule 1 or 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981);
- Regional (nature conservation designation, habitat or populations of species of Highland and Islands area importance, e.g., a site / population that meets SSSI designation criteria but has not been designated due to better examples being present in the regional area or a regionally important population / area of an SBL priority species / habitat);
- County (i.e. Ross) (a population of high conservation species which represent an important part of the county population of that species or a nature conservation designation or habitat of importance to Ross);
- Local (a nature conservation site, habitat, or species of importance in the local or district area, e.g., a breeding population / viable area of an SBL or local BAP species / habitat); and
- Less than local (unremarkable habitat / common species of little or no intrinsic nature conservation value).

Valuing Habitats

6.3.23. The value of habitats, according to the CIEEM guidelines, is measured against published selection criteria where available. Reference may, therefore, be made to both the SBL and Habitat Action Plans (HAPs) contained within the Highland Council's Highland Nature Biodiversity Action Plan (2021 – 2026).

6.3.24. As the guidelines note, the presence of a HAP reflects the fact that the habitat concerned is in a sub-optimal state and hence the action plan is required and a HAP does not, therefore, necessarily imply any specific level of importance for the habitat.

6.3.25. It must be noted that features may be assigned greater value if there is reasonable chance that they can be restored to a higher value in the future as per the requirements of the guidance.

6.3.26. Notwithstanding the above, the principal guidance driving compensation and enhancement is the 1:10 loss to compensation ratio and a further 10% enhancement requirement for priority peatland habitats, as set out in guidance (NatureScot, 2023).

6.3.27. The enhancement fraction is considered to be 10% of potential National interest Priority Peatlands, which at the Site are M17 mire and M19 mire and associated sub-communities. However, only 0.02ha and 0.03ha of M17 and M19 are to be lost, respectively.

Valuing Species

6.3.28. In assigning a level of value to a species, it is necessary to consider its distribution and status, including a consideration of trends based on available historical records. Rarity is an important consideration because of its relationship with threat and vulnerability.

6.3.29. However, because some species are inherently rare, it is necessary to look at rarity in the context of status. A species that is rare and declining should be assigned a higher level of importance than one that is rare with a stable population.

6.3.30. Reference may also be made to the SBL and Species Action Plans (SAPs) contained within the Highland Council's Highland Nature Biodiversity Action Plan (2021 – 2026) and other indicators of conservation status, as appropriate, although, as above with HAPs, the existence of an SAP does not necessarily imply any specific level of importance.

Predicting and Characterising Impacts and Effects

6.3.31. The CIEEM guidelines suggest that the process of predicting ecological impacts and effects should take account of relevant ecosystem structure and function such as:

- Available resources – e.g., territory, food and water;
- Environmental process – e.g., flooding, erosion, eutrophication, deposition and climate change;
- Ecological processes and relationships – e.g., population dynamics, vegetation dynamics and predator / prey relationships;
- Human influences – e.g., animal husbandry, burning, pollution, disturbance from public access; and

- Historical context – e.g., natural range of variation, historical human influences, and geomorphological evolution.

6.3.32. In accordance with the CIEEM guidelines, when describing impacts and effects, reference is made to the following, where appropriate:

- Confidence in predictions – the level of certainty that an impact will occur as predicted, based on professional judgement and where possible evidence from other schemes – this is based on a four-point scale: certain / near certain; probable; unlikely; and extremely unlikely;
- Magnitude – the size of an impact in quantitative terms where possible;
- Extent – the area over which an impact occurs;
- Duration – the time for which an impact is expected to last;
- Reversibility – a permanent impact is one that is irreversible within a reasonable timescale or for which there is no reasonable chance of action being taken to reverse it. A temporary impact is one from which a spontaneous recovery is possible; and
- Timing and frequency – i.e., whether impacts occur during critical life stages or seasons.

6.3.33. Both direct and indirect impacts are considered:

- Direct ecological impacts are changes that are directly attributable to a defined action, e.g., the physical loss of habitat occupied by a species during the construction process; and
- Indirect ecological impacts are attributable to an action, but which affect ecological resources through effects on an intermediary ecosystem, process, or receptor, e.g., external sourcing of stone for road surfaces may cause growth of plant species not generally found in that area of the Proposed Development Site.

6.3.34. The potential for cumulative effects was also considered. Cumulative effects can arise from individually insignificant but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time or concentrated in a location. Ecological features may already be exposed to pressure and further impact could cause irreversible decline (CIEEM, 2024).

Significance Criteria

6.3.35. In accordance with the CIEEM guidelines, a significant impact, in ecological terms, is defined as;

"*an impact (whether negative or positive) on the integrity of a defined site or ecosystem and / or the conservation status of habitats or species within a given geographical area, including cumulative and in-combination impacts*".

6.3.36. The approach adopted here aims to determine an impact to be significant or not on the basis of a discussion of the factors that characterise it, i.e. the ecological significance of an impact is not dependent on the value of the feature in question. The value of a feature that will be significantly affected is used to determine the geographical scale at which the impact is significant, e.g. an ecologically significant impact on a feature of local importance would be considered to represent a significant impact at a local area level. This in turn is used to determine the implications in terms of legislation, policy and/or development control.

6.3.37. Any significant impacts remaining after mitigation (the residual impacts), together with an assessment of the likelihood of success of the mitigation, are the factors to be considered against legislation, policy and development control when determining the application.

Mitigation, Compensation and Enhancement

6.3.38. It is important as part of any ecological assessment, wherever possible, to clearly differentiate between mitigation, compensation and enhancement and these terms are defined here as follows:

- Mitigation is used to refer to measures to avoid, reduce or remedy a specific negative impact in situ. Mitigation is only required for negative impacts assessed as being significant or where required to ensure compliance with legislation. Specific to the Proposed Development, mitigation is differentiated between inherent mitigation, which is embedded into the Site design and additional mitigation which is used to address potentially significant effects or as a matter of best practice or legislative compliance.
- Compensation is used to refer to measures proposed in relation to specific negative impacts but where it is not possible to fully mitigate for negative impacts in situ. Compensation is only required for negative impacts assessed as being significant or where required to ensure compliance with legislation.
- Enhancement is used to refer to measures that will result in positive ecological impacts, but which do not relate to either specific significant negative impacts or where measures are required to ensure legal compliance.

Geographical Scope

6.3.39. With the exception of statutory designated sites with bats listed as a feature, which used a 10 km search radius, a 2 km buffer from the Site was used for all other statutory designations, non-statutory designated sites and for protected species records.

6.3.40. With respect to vegetation and most fauna the assessment focuses on areas extending up to 50m out from the Site boundary, i.e., areas which are considered to be potentially impacted upon by the Proposed Development.

6.3.41. The faunal surveys cover a wider area, so impacts have been assessed within the zone of impact appropriate for each receptor, which at its maximum accounts for otter up to 200 m of

infrastructure (the distance within which NatureScot considers disturbance impacts on a natal holt to be possible).

Temporal Scope

6.3.42. The assessment presented in this Chapter will consider potential effects occurring during the following temporal phases:

- Pre-construction Site clearance;
- Approximately 6-12 month construction period; and
- Operational phase. The BESS will have an operational lifetime of 40 years. It is likely that initial repowering exercises will be undertaken after 10 – 15 years and then again at 20 – 25 years.

6.4. Baseline Conditions

6.4.1. A summary of survey and desk study results are described below.

Nature Conservation Designations

Statutory Designated Sites

6.4.2. Glen Affric to Strathconon Special Protection Area (SPA) lies within 2 km of the Site. Please refer to **Chapter 7: Ornithology** for further details on this designation.

6.4.3. No other designated sites of international or national importance have been identified within a 2 km radius of the Site.

Non-statutory Designated Sites

6.4.4. No non-statutory designated sites have been identified within 2 km of the Site.

Ancient Woodland

6.4.5. A small area of the Site overlaps with an area, Coille Ceann, classed under the Ancient Woodland Inventory as Ancient & Semi-Natural Woodland. However, areas within the Site that have been identified as Ancient & Semi-Natural Woodland are not woodland but comprise the existing access track or grassland.

Habitats

UKHab Survey

6.4.6. The majority of the Site consists of conifer plantations of various age classes and with different management interventions, leading to a contrast between dense plantations dominated by spruce *Picea* sp. and more open woodland structures. Some of the thinned plantations are broadleaved dominated, mainly by silver birch *Betula pendula*, and others are conifer dominated. Habitats on Site are frequently mixed with Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) Rhododendron *Rhododendron ponticum*. Habitats within the Site boundary also include degraded blanket bog and wet heathland with cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*.

6.4.7. Within the 50m survey buffer, there are areas of conifer plantation, Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris* woodland, upland birch woodland and other broadleaved woodland. The grassland along the access track are heavily grazed and predominantly classed as other neutral grassland with areas of modified grassland and acid grassland. See **Appendix 6.1: Protected Species and UKHab Survey Report** (Atmos Consulting, 2025a) for further details on UKHab descriptions.

NVC Survey

6.4.8. The survey recorded vegetation communities that are considered to be of potential conservation interest due to their status as Annex I habitats within the European Habitats Directive, appearing on the SBL, or by being classified as potential GWDTEs.

6.4.9. Where these communities were floristically distinct, they were assigned into corresponding sub-communities. NVC communities of particular interest recorded during the survey were:

- Mires, flushes and swamps: M17 and M19;
- Grasslands and tall herb communities: U4;
- Heath: M15; and
- Woodland: W16.

6.4.10. These are described further at **Appendix 6.3: NVC Survey Report** (Atmos Consulting, 2025b). Analysis of GWDTEs in terms of their hydrogeological value is detailed in **Chapter 10: Hydrology and Hydrogeology**, with analysis regarding peat outlined in **Chapter 9: Geology and Peat**.

6.4.11. In addition, the survey recorded MG6 *Lolium perenne – Cynosurus cristatus* grassland and U20 *Pteridium aquilinum-Galium saxatile* community.

6.4.12. Quadrat sampling was carried out in each of the other woodland types identified in the earlier UKHab survey. The results of the Table fit analyses showed that none of these quadrats fitted with recognised NVC communities. Descriptions of the quadrats are included as TNs in Appendix B, Table 3 within **Appendix 6.3: NVC Survey Report** (Atmos Consulting, 2025b).

6.4.13. The following habitats did not fit any NVC community, therefore will be referred to using UKHab classifications:

- Other Scots pine woodland – w2b;
- Other coniferous woodland – w2c;
- Other woodland mixed (mainly broadleaved) – w1h5;
- Other woodland mixed (mainly conifer) – w1h6;
- Other woodland broadleaved – w1g;
- Other neutral grassland – g3c;
- Modified grassland – g4;
- Other standing water – r1g;
- Ditches;
- Buildings – u1b5; and
- Artificial unvegetated unsealed surface – u1c.

6.4.14. MG6 and g4 are an improved and poor semi-improved grasslands and U20 is continuous bracken. Together with the u1b5 buildings and u1c artificial unvegetated unsealed surface habitats, these are habitats of no or limited conservation interest, and none of them is ground water dependent. These communities are therefore not considered further in this chapter.

6.4.15. **Figure 6.1** shows the final Site layout, and this figure uses OS mapping at 1:10,000 to map ditches. However, it should be noted that the series of multiple narrow man-made ditches (TN7; see **Appendix 6.1 Protected Species and UKHab Survey Report** (Atmos Consulting, 2025a) and **Figure 6.3**) which runs through an area of forestry were noted to disappear and re-appear across this woodland, with some sections holding water at the time of survey. Therefore, they are not a continuous wet ditch; as shown on the OS mapping on **Figure 6.1**.

Evaluation of NVC, GWDTEs and Conservation Status

6.4.16. **Table 6.1** evaluates each of the NVC communities in the survey area in terms of nature conservation interest and potential groundwater dependence with respect to the most recent version of the Land Use Planning System SEPA Guide (SEPA, 2017).

Table 6.1 Evaluation of recorded NVC communities.

NVC Community	Potential Groundwater Dependence	Nature Conservation Status
M15 *Trichophorum germanicum – Erica tetralix* wet heath	Moderate (dependent on the hydrogeological setting)	Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* (Annex 1) Alpine and Boreal heaths (Annex 1) Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration (Annex 1) Blanket bogs (Annex 1) Blanket bog (SBL) Upland flushes, fens and swamps (SBL) Upland heathland (SBL)
M17 *Trichophorum germanicum – Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire	None	Blanket bogs (Annex 1) Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion (Annex 1) Blanket bog (SBL) Upland heathland (SBL)
M19 *Calluna vulgaris – Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire	None	Active raised bogs (Annex 1) Blanket bogs (Annex 1) Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion (Annex 1) Blanket bog (SBL) Upland heathland (SBL)
W16 *Quercus – Betula – Deschampsia flexuosa* woodland	None	Old sessile oakwoods (Annex 1) Caledonian forest (Annex 1) Upland birchwoods (SBL)
U4 *Festuca ovina – Agrostis capillaris – Galium saxatile* grassland	None	None

Definitions:

Annex 1 - Annex 1 of the European Union Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)

SBL - Scottish Biodiversity List

Protected and Otherwise Notable Species

6.4.17. Please refer to the **Protected Species and UKHab Survey Report** (Atmos Consulting, 2025a) and **Protected Species Survey (Access Splay) Report** (Atmos Consulting, 2025c) for further details and photographs from faunal surveys.

Badger

6.4.18. No records of badger *Meles meles* were identified during the desk study from within 2 km of the Site. In addition, there were no signs of badger activity and no setts identified during any of the field surveys. The woodland habitat within the Site provides potential habitat for badger sett creation, whilst grassland areas within the Site and the wider landscape provide good foraging habitat.

Bats

6.4.19. A single tree within the Site, situated west of the access track at NGR NH 33541 63580, contained a large trunk cavity suitable to support multiple bats (PRF-M); shown on **Figure 6.2**. The Site contains mixed woodland with a significant proportion of mature trees, which could support features suitable for bats to utilise. However it was not considered appropriate to individually assess every tree in all the woodland likely to be impacted and as such the woodlands subject for removal were assessed as blocks; and were considered as likely suitable to support individual bats only (PRF-I).

6.4.20. Surveys completed for the access visibility splay identified a silver birch tree with a large trunk cavity suitable for supporting roosting bats (PRF-M) at NGR NH 33471 63480, plus a giant *Sequoia* sp. tree with multiple woodpecker holes at NGR NH 33542 63427 also assessed as PRF-M. These are referred to as TN2 and TN7, respectively in the **Protected Species Survey (Access Splay) Report** (Atmos Consulting, 2025c). Five other trees were noted to support individual bats only (PRF-I); as detailed within the **Protected Species Survey (Access Splay) Report** (Atmos Consulting, 2025c).

6.4.21. The Site is suitable for foraging and commuting bats, with woodland edges and ditches providing suitable commuting features whilst foraging opportunities exist via the woodland plus semi-improved and acid grasslands. Overall, the Site is considered to have moderate to high commuting and foraging suitability for bats.

Otter

6.4.22. There were no signs of otter *Lutra lutra* such as spraints, prints, or holts recorded on the ditches during the survey work undertaken. However areas of denser woodland could provide suitable holt creation opportunities and it is considered possible that this species may range through the area, with ditches within the Site being connected to Loch Luichart to the south; offering suitable habitat for foraging. Therefore whilst suitable habitat for foraging, holts or couches within the Site is limited, ditches may be used for commuting.

Water Vole

6.4.23. No recent records of European water vole were returned from the desk study from within 2 km of the Site.

6.4.24. No field signs indicative of this species were identified during the survey, with a ditch shown on **Figure 6.3** that crosses the existing access track in the west of the Site offering only sub-optimal habitat due presence of only rushes upstream with eroded bank downstream; reducing opportunities for feeding and shelter. A series of ditches (TN7; see **Protected Species and UKHab Survey Report** (Atmos Consulting, 2025a) and **Figure 6.3**) which runs through an area of predominantly w1h6 - other woodland; mixed (mainly conifer), was also sub-optimal because water vole prefer steep sided banks whereas these ditches were characterised by shallow sloping banks. In addition, the water depth was shallow across all ditches whereas water vole typically require a minimum depth of 0.3 m; further reducing suitability across the Site. A man-made culverted drainage ditch (TN6; see **Protected Species and UKHab Survey Report** (Atmos Consulting, 2025a) and **Figure 6.3**) is present within wet heath in the far east of the Site and, given that this ditch is used for drainage, it is possible that banks are breached when rainfall is high; reducing habitat suitability for water vole. Furthermore TN6 did possess steep banks (70°) which are favoured by water vole for burrowing, but the banks were rocky and so provided no burrowing opportunities; rendering it unsuitable.

6.4.25. Overall whilst the exposed nature of the ditches and low bank height is not ideal, and the rocky banks of the man-made ditch is unsuitable for burrowing, opportunities for this species does exist, albeit limited, and their presence cannot be entirely ruled out.

Pine Marten

6.4.26. No recent records of pine marten were returned from the desk study from within 2 km of the Site however, two scats were recorded in the stretch between the proposed BESS area and the existing substation; shown on **Figure 6.2**.

6.4.27. The habitat within the Site and surrounding area is considered suitable for pine marten with a variety of plantations and semi-natural woodlands for den creation combined with more open felled areas; providing hunting opportunities.

Red Squirrel

6.4.28. Records of red squirrel were returned by NBN within 2 km of the Site; however, no evidence of this species was found during surveys.

6.4.29. Areas of mature Scots pine woodland provide ideal habitat for dreys whilst fruit producing trees within the Site provide an additional foraging resources that could be utilised.

Wildcat

6.4.30. No recent records of wildcat were returned from the desk study from within 2 km of the Site, whilst no signs of use of the Site by this species was identified during surveys.

6.4.31. However, wildcats tend to occupy the woodland edge or a mosaic of habitats incorporating woodland, rough grassland and moorland. Therefore the Site is considered suitable because it comprises various woodlands plus supports grassland, degraded blanket bog and wet heathland; providing a combination of areas suitable for shelter as well as more open habitat which is likely used by voles, providing hunting opportunities. Furthermore the Site is located near the Strathpeffer wildcat priority area (NatureScot, 2014).

Other Mammals

6.4.32. There are no recent records of other mammals within 2 km of the Site.

6.4.33. The Site lacks any suitable habitat for mountain hare *Lepus timidus* and no evidence of this species was noted.

Amphibians and Reptiles

6.4.34. The Site contains dry and wet habitats, varied vegetation structure, open areas and ecotones, and is considered generally suitable for a variety of reptile and amphibian species. Furthermore common frogs *Rana temporaria* were noted on Site, including one sighting in a roadside ditch and sighting of two frogs in an artificial drainage feature within the wet heath habitat to the east of the Site (see **Figure 6.2**). Both ponds appeared almost stagnant, with a slow flow and may be suitable for foraging as well as spawning.

6.4.35. However, the Site lies outside the known range of great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*, with the nearest known population located approximately 25 km around Inverness, and it is therefore considered that this species is not present within the vicinity of the Site. In addition, the ponds are located over 250 m away from any proposed works, so even in the unlikely event that great crested newts are present no direct construction impacts are anticipated.

Fish

6.4.36. No rivers or streams are present within the Site, with the only waterbodies being drainage ditches that lack suitable habitat for migrating and spawning salmonid fish.

Invertebrates

6.4.37. Records returned from NBN did not indicate the presence of protected or priority invertebrate species within or adjacent to the Site. The habitats within the Site are common and widespread in the local area and unlikely to support invertebrate species of importance. Furthermore no notable species were observed during any of the survey visits undertaken across the years.

Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)

6.4.38. Rhododendron was found within all woodland types across the Site except w2b and w1g, whilst saplings up to larger shrubs were noted across areas of M17 *Trichophorum germanicum – Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire and M19 *Calluna vulgaris – Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire.

Evaluation of Baseline Features

6.4.39. **Table 6.2** below presents an evaluation of the nature conservation value of the sites, habitats and species present on/in proximity to the Site which are then taken forward to the impact assessment.

Table 6.2 Evaluation of Ecological Receptors.

Receptor	Reason for Evaluation	Evaluation
Coille Ceann Ancient Woodland	**Annex I**: **SBL**: **HBAP**: Woodland and forest (includes ancient woodland).	County
M17 *Trichophorum germanicum – Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire	**Annex I**: 7130 Blanket bogs. **SBL**: Blanket bog. **HBAP**: Blanket bogs.	Regional
M19 *Calluna vulgaris – Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire	**Annex I**: 7130 Blanket bogs. **SBL**: Blanket bog. **HBAP**: Blanket bogs.	Regional
M15 *Trichophorum germanicum – Erica tetralix* wet heath	**Annex I**: 4010 Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix.* **SBL**: M15 is included in the priority habitat description for both blanket bog and upland heathland (Maddock, 2011). **HBAP**: Upland heaths.	Regional
W16 *Quercus – Betula – Deschampsia flexuosa* woodland	**Annex I** : Old sessile oakwoods and Caledonian forest **SBL**: Upland birchwoods **HBAP**: -	County
U4 *Festuca ovina – Agrostis capillaris – Galium saxatile* grassland	**Annex I** : - **SBL**: - **HBAP**: -	Local
U20 *Pteridium aquilinum-Galium saxatile* community	**Annex I** : - **SBL**: - **HBAP**: -	Less than local

MG6 *Lolium perenne – Cynosurus cristatus* grassland	**Annex I** : - **SBL**: - **HBAP**: -	Less than local
Other woodland mixed (mainly broadleaved) – w1h5	**Annex I** : - **SBL**: - **HBAP**: Woodland and forest	Local
Other woodland broadleaved – w1g	**Annex I** : - **SBL**: - **HBAP**: Woodland and forest	Local
Other woodland mixed (mainly conifer) – w1h6	**Annex I** : - **SBL**: - **HBAP**: Woodland and forest	Local
Other Scots pine woodland – w2b	**Annex I** : - **SBL**: - **HBAP**: -	Less than local
Other coniferous woodland – w2c (plantation)	**Annex I** : - **SBL**: - **HBAP**: -	Less than local
Other neutral grassland – g3c	**Annex I** : - **SBL**: - **HBAP**: -	Local
Modified grassland – g4	**Annex I** : - **SBL**: - **HBAP**: -	Less than local
Other standing water – r1g	**Annex I** : - **SBL**: Ponds **HBAP**: -	Local
Ditches	**Annex I** : - **SBL**: - **HBAP**: -	Local
Buildings – u1b5	**Annex I** : - **SBL**: - **HBAP**: -	Less than local
Artificial unvegetated unsealed surface – u1c	**Annex I** : - **SBL**: - **HBAP**: -	Less than local

Badger	**Protection of Badgers Act 1992 (amended by the WANE Act in Scotland)**	Less than local
Bats	**European Protected Species** **SBL:** listed **HBAP:** listed	Local
Otter	**European Protected Species** **Schedule 5 WCA** **SBL:** listed **HBAP:** -	Less than local
Water Vole	**Schedule 5 WCA** **SBL:** listed **HBAP:** listed	Less than local
Pine Marten	**Schedule 5 WCA** **SBL:** listed **HBAP:** listed	Local
Red Squirrel	**Schedule 5 WCA** **SBL:** listed **HBAP:** listed	Local
Wildcat	**European Protected Species** **Schedule 5 WCA** **SBL:** listed **HBAP:** -	Local
Other mammals	**Schedule 5 WCA** **SBL:** mountain hare listed **HBAP:** mountain hare listed	Less than local
Great crested Newt	**European Protected Species** **Schedule 5 WCA** **SBL:** listed **HBAP:** -	Less than local
Other amphibians and reptiles	**Schedule 5 WCA** **SBL:** common toad, slow-worm, adder and common lizard listed **HBAP:** -	Less than local

Key Potential Conservation Priority:

Annex I - Potential Annex I habitat

SBL – Potential Scottish Biodiversuity List prioirty habitat

HBAP – Highland Council Biodiversity Action Plan habitat

Future Baseline

6.4.40. If the current land management practices were to continue, it is likely that the range and condition of habitats currently present would deteriorate given management pressures as evidenced through the declining condition of many of the bog and heath habitats recorded during surveys.

6.4.41. The conifer plantation will be harvested and replanted once mature, resulting in the temporary loss of this habitat and the species that depend on it for shelter, foraging and commuting.

6.4.42. Other changes over time may occur as a result of climatic change; these are difficult to predict but are likely to involve increased precipitation and gradual increases in average temperatures. Some change in the vegetation assemblage is likely to occur as a result of these changes.

6.5. Assessment of Effects

Good Practice Measures (Embedded and Standard Mitigation)

6.5.1. In line with CIEEM guidance, the impact assessment carried out in this Chapter is done on the basis that mitigation measures will be applied during the construction and operational phases of the project. This section therefore describes ecological receptors already taken account of during the design process and identifies mitigation and good practice measures which will be adopted during the construction and operational phases.

6.5.2. The impact assessment presented is undertaken with the assumption that good practice construction measures will be employed during the site clearance and construction phases via a Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP). This will include but not be limited to best practice measures for pollution prevention of watercourses/waterbodies, fencing (e.g. Heras or similar) of areas not subject to works in order to protect habitats/species present, daytime working, employment of Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMS) for protected species, presence of an Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW), pre-construction surveys, covering of excavations and/or provision of ramps to avoid trapping wildlife and no use of overnight lighting near habitat features.

Design

6.5.3. The design has evolved iteratively to minimise the effect on potential GWDTEs and priority habitats so as to avoid the potential National interest Priority Peatlands (M17 and M19) and ecological receptors through taking account of NVC results and hydrological assessments, protected species survey results and the location of ponds/ditches.

6.5.4. The Site roads will be designed at an appropriate camber with drainage and filters/screens to ensure any leaching or pollutant spill is avoided into adjacent waterbodies via engineering design.

Construction Phase

6.5.5. During the construction phase there will be appropriate pollution prevention measures implemented to ensure there is no pollution of ponds/ditches. Protective fencing will be installed around retained habitats and ponds/ditches to define the working area. The Site compound location will be agreed with the ecologist prior to constructing. Ecological supervision will be adopted during Site clearance to ensure no habitats or protected species are impacted.

6.5.6. The loss of plant communities is an unavoidable consequence of the Proposed Development however, incidental habitat loss would be avoided by minimising the footprint of construction activities. This would be achieved by:

- Operating machinery and storing materials within the footprint of permanent construction features wherever practicable; and
- Ensuring that vehicles and their operators do not inadvertently stray onto adjacent habitat areas.

6.5.7. Other indicative measures within the CEMP would be:

- Reinstatement of habitats – best practice techniques for vegetation and habitat reinstatement would be adopted and implemented on areas subject to disturbance, such as the temporary construction compound area, as soon as is reasonably practicable;
- Materials and other temporary infrastructure would be removed off site and all temporary construction areas will be reinstated;
- The surface layer of soil and vegetation would be stripped separately from the lower soil layers, stored separately, and replaced as intact as possible once the construction phase is complete. Turf material will be replaced as far as reasonably practicable in similar locations to where it was removed;
- Soils removed from the excavated area would be stored separately in piles, no greater than 3 m in height, directly adjacent to, or near the tracks on ground appropriate for storage of materials. i.e., relatively dry and flat ground, a minimum of 50 m away from watercourses;
- Wherever reasonably practicable, reinstatement of ground disturbed to facilitate construction of the track would be carried out as track construction progresses;
- No refuelling would be permitted at works locations within 50 m of watercourses (where reasonably practicable);
- There would be no direct dewatering to watercourses during the construction phase. All outflows from drainage associated with construction would be by diffuse overland drainage at appropriate locations;

- The time between excavating and backfilling of individual sections of cable trench would be minimised near GWDTEs. As a rule, these should be backfilled within three days to minimise drying and disturbance;
- Impermeable barriers and/or clay plugs would be used to avoid the trenches acting as preferential conduits of groundwater;
- Areas of identified sensitivity (GWDTE, priority peat) would be marked out / fenced to prevent accidental vehicular access;
- As there would be potential for fauna to access the Site, excavations/holes will be covered at the end of each working day, or a wooden plank placed inside to allow faunal species to escape, should they enter the hole. Any temporarily exposed open pipe system would be capped in such a way as to prevent wildlife gaining access;
- Works would be conducted during daylight hours where possible, avoiding the sensitive periods of dawn and dusk when wildlife is most active;
- No in-channel obstructions (floodlighting, fencing or diversions) would be permitted within watercourses unless specifically authorised in writing by the relevant authority (i.e., Environment Agency and/or a suitably experienced freshwater Ecologist);
- Measures would be implemented to reduce the potential for construction impacts to bats, e.g., downward-directed artificial lighting would be used to shine light to the working area only and reduce 'light leakage' that may temporarily affect bat flightlines;
- In the event that a protected species is discovered on site, all work in that area would stop immediately and the ECoW would be contacted. Increased buffer areas may be required in these locations. Details of the local police Wildlife Crime Officers, NatureScot Area Officer, and Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) relevant Officer would be held in the site emergency procedure documents; and
- A Site speed limit of 15 mph would be in place at all times to reduce the risk of collision and protected species mortality associated with construction vehicles.

Bats (roosting)

6.5.8. Prior to the removal of any trees within the woodlands an aerial inspection survey of potential roost features using an endoscope is recommended. Any trees identified as containing features that could support individual bats only (PRF-I) following the aerial inspection will require soft felling under ecological supervision.

6.5.9. If bat roosts are found to be present, works must stop immediately and a licence from NatureScot will be required.

Other Mammals

6.5.10. A pre-construction survey will be carried out prior to works commencing to ensure there has been no badger sett/otter holt/water vole burrow/drey creation within Site in addition to checking for signs of pine marten or wildcat dens. The following survey buffers will be used:

- 30 m from the Proposed Development for badger setts;
- 200 m from the Proposed Development for otter holts in case of natal or breeding holts;
- 50 m from the Proposed Development for water vole burrows;
- 50 m from the Proposed Development for pine marten dens;
- 50 m from the Proposed Development for red squirrel dreys in case breeding dreys; and
- 200 m from the Proposed Development for wildcat dens.

6.5.11. If a sett/holt/burrow/den/drey is identified, appropriate mitigation will be put in place which may include a licence application to NatureScot to disturb the feature in question, dependent on location; resulting in no significant impacts anticipated on the above fauna.

Amphibians and Reptiles

6.5.12. Precautionary working measures should be implemented prior to and during construction to prevent killing or injuring amphibians and reptiles including the implementation of phased vegetation clearance of suitable habitat such as heath and scrub.

6.5.13. Initially, any vegetation to be removed in these habitats should be cut down to approximately 150 mm above ground level by hand under the instruction and supervision of a competent ecologist. This should persuade amphibians and reptiles to move away from the works areas due to the disturbance and reduced amount of cover. After at least 24 hours, the vegetation should then be cut down to ground level, again under the instruction and supervision of the ECoW. A fingertip search will be undertaken by the ECoW in this vegetation. Any individual amphibians and/or reptiles found during these clearance works at any time will be carefully captured by hand and translocated away from the works by the ECoW.

6.5.14. The topsoil should then be stripped immediately after the fingertip search under the instruction and supervision of the ECoW and stored on Site to be reused. Again, any amphibians and/or reptiles found at this stage will be carefully captured and translocated away from the works.

6.5.15. The removal of any potential hibernacula (i.e. rubble piles / dead wood) and scrub should be undertaken outside of the hibernation period during the active period for amphibians/common reptiles, typically between March and October (weather dependent). In the long-term, mitigation for the loss of any suitable habitat should be compensated through creation of refugia in the form of log piles within areas of retained habitat. A toolbox talk should be

provided to site operatives, whilst general construction safeguards should be laid out within the CEMP.

6.5.16. In the unlikely event that any great crested newt are discovered, advice should be sought from an ecologist and licensing may be required.

Operational Phase

6.5.17. The compound lighting will be bat friendly, directed away from any bat features and will be activated by motion sensors to reduce any night-time illumination impacting any foraging or commuting bats. There will be no other lighting within the Proposed Development, aside from infra-red lighting detectable by security cameras.

Receptors Brought Forward for Assessment

6.5.18. The impact assessment below will focus on the designated sites, habitats and species of local or higher value; these are considered Important Ecological Features (IEFs) in the assessment.

6.5.19. However, some IEFs are not vulnerable to effects from the Proposed Development. These are set out in **Table 6.3** below, along with the reasoning behind their exclusion. Protected species are also included in the table even when not identified as an IEF because even harm done to a single individual might constitute a legal offence.

Table 6.3 IEFs scoped out from further assessment.

Feature to be scoped out	Location (on / off Site and impact pathway)	Justification
Ancient & Semi-Natural Woodland	On Site	The area identified as Ancient & Semi-Natural Woodland within the Site was confirmed to be hardstanding (existing access track) and grassland, not woodland. Furthermore this designation will be retained and not directly and/or indirectly impacted by Proposed Development.
W16 *Quercus – Betula – Deschampsia flexuosa* woodland	On Site	Areas of this HPI will be retained and not directly and/or indirectly impacted by Proposed Development.
Other woodland broadleaved – w1g	On Site	Areas of this woodland will be retained and not directly and/or

		indirectly impacted by Proposed Development.
Other woodland mixed (mainly broadleaved) – w1h5	On Site	Areas of this woodland will be retained and not directly and/or indirectly impacted by Proposed Development.
Other neutral grassland – g3c	On Site	Areas of this grassland will be retained and not directly and/or indirectly impacted by Proposed Development.
Ponds and Ditches	On Site and within 50 m	Ponds are listed as a HPI for the conservation under the SBL. There are multiple ditches and two ponds within 50 m of the Site which were all holding water at the time of survey. The ponds and ditches are to be retained and will not be lost as part of the Proposed Development. Ditches and waterbodies will be fenced to avoid encroachment of the works. Pollution Prevention Plans will be in place and implemented during construction to reduce the risk of a pollution incident. Further safeguards could include sediment fencing, straw bale filters and silt curtains.
Badger	On Site	Although there were no records or fields signs during the surveys, there is the potential for sett creation within 30 m of the Proposed Development prior to the commencement of the construction phase. Furthermore foraging badgers could be disturbed by the construction phase via trapping in excavations. Therefore measures to safeguard badger are provided within “Good Practice Measures (Embedded Mitigation)” to address this. Provided mitigation is followed

		then no significant impacts are anticipated.
Bats (roosting)	On Site	One mature birch tree, assessed as PRF-M, is situated west of the access track near the main road; however, this tree will be retained. Two additional trees assessed as PRF-M and detailed within the **Protected Species Survey (Access Splay) Report** (Atmos Consulting, 2025c) will also be retained. There are trees within the woodlands that offer suitable opportunities for roosting bats and some woodland will be lost to facilitate the Proposed Development. However it is understood that the only woodland to be lost is predominantly conifer (w1h6 and w2c), and conifer species typically present fewer suitable roosting features for bats compared to broadleaved species. Although the presence of roosting bats cannot be ruled out within the predominantly conifer woodland subject for removal therefore, measures to safeguard roosting bats are provided within “Good Practice Measures (Embedded Mitigation)” to address this. Provided mitigation is followed then no significant impacts are anticipated.
Bats (foraging and commuting)	On Site	There will be no night time works however directional task lighting may be required during normal construction hours in winter months. Outside of normal construction working hours, motion-activated directional security lighting may be used at the Site, which will reduce night-

		time illumination impacts on any foraging or commuting bats. During the operational phase, bat-friendly lighting will be in place within the main compound, directed away from any bat features, and will be activated by motion sensors at the entrances to the storage units and buildings to reduce any night-time illumination impacting any foraging or commuting bats. This will only be activated during occasional visits by maintenance personnel, which will be undertaken in daylight hours during the bat active season (April-October). Therefore no impacts on foraging bats is anticipated during operation of the Proposed Development.
Otter	On Site	No signs of otter holts or field signs were recorded during the surveys, but it is considered probable that they may range onto Site via the ditches. Commuting and foraging otters could be disturbed by the construction phase via trapping in excavations or by noise and disruption from the construction works. Therefore measures to safeguard otter are provided within “Good Practice Measures (Embedded Mitigation)” to address this. Provided mitigation is followed then no significant impacts are anticipated.
Water Vole	On Site	No evidence of water vole was found during surveys and, while the ditches do not provide overly suitable habitat, opportunities for this species does exist, plus they

		may range throughout the wider area. A pollution event could potentially have a moderate adverse significant effect on the wider populations of water vole in the absence of mitigation. Therefore measures to safeguard water vole are provided within "Good Practice Measures (Embedded Mitigation)" to address this. Provided mitigation is followed then no significant impacts are anticipated.
Pine Marten	On Site	Pine marten scats were found and, whilst no dens were noted, the presence of pine marten dens cannot be ruled out within the woodland subject for removal therefore, measures to safeguard pine marten are provided within "Good Practice Measures (Embedded Mitigation)" to address this. Provided mitigation is followed then no significant impacts are anticipated.
Red Squirrel	On Site	No evidence of red squirrel was found during surveys, although the presence of squirrel dreys cannot be ruled out within the woodland subject for removal. Therefore, measures to safeguard red squirrel are provided within "Good Practice Measures (Embedded Mitigation)" to address this. Provided mitigation is followed then no significant impacts are anticipated.
Wildcat	On Site	No signs of wildcat dens or field signs were recorded during the surveys, but it is considered possible that they may range onto Site so could be disturbed by the

		construction phase via trapping in excavations or by noise and disruption from the construction works. Therefore measures to safeguard wildcat are provided within "Good Practice Measures (Embedded Mitigation)" to address this. Provided mitigation is followed then no significant impacts are anticipated.
Other mammals	On Site	The Proposed Development will not impact small mammal populations.
Great crested newt	On Site	Given the geographical location, distance from the ponds, small impacts of the Proposed Development and unlikely chance of this supporting a large population of newts, these waterbodies have been discounted from further consideration.
Other amphibians and reptiles	On Site	No evidence of reptiles were identified during the survey, whilst common frog was the only amphibian noted. Suitable habitat for amphibians is present in the form of two ponds and wet ditches whilst the heathland, habitat mosaics, woodland rides/edges and open areas for basking provide suitable habitat for reptiles. Construction works, in the absence of mitigation, could result in the death or injury of individual herpetofauna, if present. Therefore, measures to safeguard amphibians and reptiles are provided within "Good Practice Measures (Embedded Mitigation)" to address this. Provided

		mitigation is followed then no significant impacts are anticipated.

6.5.20. IEFs brought forward to the ecological impact assessment stage therefore include the following:

- M17 *Trichophorum germanicum – Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire;
- M19 *Calluna vulgaris – Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire;
- M15 *Trichophorum germanicum – Erica tetralix* wet heath;
- Other woodland mixed (mainly conifer) – w1h6; and
- Other coniferous woodland – w2c.

Construction Effects

6.5.21. The following impacts may arise during construction:

- Direct and/or indirect habitat loss during the construction stage.

6.5.22. Indirect habitat losses could include indirect drying effects caused by the Proposed Development. However, no buffer from proposed infrastructure has been used to calculate any indirect losses because the extensive network of drains within the forestry means that drying impacts on potential priority peatlands, which also applies to all habitats including GWDTEs, from BESS cannot be quantified accurately.

M17 *Trichophorum germanicum – Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire and **M19 *Calluna vulgaris – Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire**

6.5.23. Areas of M17 exist within the Site, and these align with two HPIs and two Annex 1 habitats; whilst areas of M19, which is also present, align with two HPIs and three Annex 1 habitats (see **Table 6.1** above).

6.5.24. Direct losses on M17 equate to 8.59%, with a total of 0.02 ha lost. Direct losses on M19 equate to 10.87%, with a total of 0.03ha lost. Although these losses are partly an artefact of the habitat mapping resulting in artificially hard boundaries between habitat polygons. In reality, there is a transition zone in habitats that partly reflects increasing peat depth, and the degraded bog vegetation in the zone of overlap has character of wet heath with scattered trees. All the habitats in the area have been subject to systematic drainage, as is evident from the dense network of forestry drains shown clearly on aerial imagery, and the scattered trees in both the heath and bog habitats suggest degradation and drying of these habitats.

6.5.25. HPI/Annex 1 habitat M17 and M19 are of Regional importance and therefore any losses on these habitats are typically considered to have a major adverse significant impact however, given the small proportion to be lost and the degraded and transitional nature, losses are

assessed to have no more than a **moderate adverse significant effect**. Mitigation measures are discussed in the "Additional Mitigation, Compensation and Enhancement Measures" section below to reduce these impacts.

M15 *Trichophorum germanicum – Erica tetralix* wet heath

6.5.26. Areas of M15 exist within the Site, align with three HPIs and four Annex 1 habitats (see **Table 6.1** above). Direct losses on this habitat total 12.35%, with a total of 0.18ha lost. HPI/Annex 1 habitat M15 is of Regional importance and therefore any losses on these habitats are considered to have a **moderate adverse significant effect**. Mitigation measures are discussed in the "Additional Mitigation, Compensation and Enhancement Measures" section below to reduce these impacts. M15 habitats have moderate ground water dependency and measures to protect GWDTE will be included with a CEMP.

Other woodland mixed (mainly conifer) – w1h6

6.5.27. A total of 10.56% (0.94 ha) of w1h6 woodland in poor condition will be lost during construction; however, these habitats are widespread in the local area with little ecological value and do not constitute HPI/Annex 1 habitats. This habitat is commercial rotation forestry, thus areas would be subject to felling by design; therefore the loss of this habitat is considered **not significant**. Confidence in this prediction is near certain.

Other coniferous woodland – w2c

6.5.28. There will be 0.10 ha, equivalent to 3.95%, of habitat loss to conifer plantation for the Proposed Development; a habitat of less than local value, which is widespread in the local area. The loss of this habitat is considered **not significant.** Confidence in this prediction is near certain.

Operational Effects

6.5.29. The following impacts are considered for the operational phase:

- Minor pollution events and habitat loss connected to machinery used for maintenance.

6.5.30. Once the BESS is constructed and is in operation, there will be no further significant impacts on the following IEFs:

- M17 *Trichophorum germanicum – Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire;
- M19 *Calluna vulgaris – Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire;
- M15 *Trichophorum germanicum – Erica tetralix* wet heath;
- Other woodland mixed (mainly conifer) – w1h6; and
- Other coniferous woodland – w2c.

6.5.31. Whilst effects from construction on hydrologically sensitive habitats, may persist into operation, there are no new effects generated by the operational phase. Overall, **no significant** effects are considered likely.

Assessment Summary

6.5.32. A summary of the effects on the ecological receptors listed above is included in **Table 6.4**, in the absence of additional mitigation.

Table 6.4 Assessment Summary.

Stage	Receptor	Nature of the Effects	Impact Level
Construction and site clearance	M17 *Trichophorum germanicum – Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire	Loss of habitat	**Significant**
	M19 *Calluna vulgaris – Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire	Loss of habitat	**Significant**
	M15 *Trichophorum germanicum – Erica tetralix* wet heath	Loss of habitat and indirect impacts from pollution event.	**Significant**
	Other woodland mixed (mainly conifer) – w1h6	Loss of habitat	Not Significant
	Other coniferous woodland – w2c	Loss of habitat	Not Significant
Operation	Habitats	No impacts once construction completed.	Not Significant

Additional Mitigation, Compensation and Enhancement Measures

6.5.33. In addition to the mitigation measures embedded in the Proposed Development, this section sets out proposed additional mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures for ecological features for which a significant effect is predicted during the construction or operational phase.

6.5.34. Full details of habitat creation and enhancement measures will be provided in an Habitat Management Plan (HMP) and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Plan to be agreed with the Highland Council, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, post-consent but prior to development commencing.

Annex 1 Habitats/Habitats of Principal Importance

6.5.35. Approximately 0.02ha, 0.03ha and 0.18ha are predicted to be lost from the NVC communities M17 *Trichophorum germanicum – Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire, M19 *Calluna vulgaris – Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire and M15 *Trichophorum germanicum – Erica tetralix* wet heath, respectively, to facilitate the Proposed Development. To mitigate for these losses an HMP will be produced post-consent but prior to development commencing, outlining habitat enhancement to be completed within an agreed offsite area within the landownership boundary.

6.5.36. To compensate peatland loss in Scotland, NatureScot (2023) guidance states that a 1:10 (lost : restored) ratio of priority peatland (defined as showing 'evidence of being undisturbed and actively forming peat') should be undertaken. Following this guidance, total priority peatland loss during construction accounts for 0.05 ha; therefore on a x10 basis, 0.50 ha would require restoration under the NatureScot (2023) guidance. For enhancement, an additional 10% of priority peatlands is required, which amounts to 0.05 ha based on the 0.45 ha of these peatland types within the Site. As such, 0.55 ha is required in total under guidance however the exact location for peatland restoration is not yet known.

6.5.37. The location of the Proposed Development has targeted an area of shallow peat supporting M15 *Trichophorum germanicum – Erica tetralix* wet heath and plantation. However, as shown on **Figure 6.4**, there is a small (0.05 ha) overlap with degraded bog (M17 and M19), but this is partly an artefact of the habitat mapping, as discussed above. It should be noted that a commitment is also made to restore peatland habitat elsewhere within the landownership in addition to the area of peatland restoration to achieve a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain. This is considered a significant enhancement when considered in the context that guidance defines priority peatlands as peatlands which show 'evidence of being undisturbed and actively forming peat'; yet the majority of habitat to be lost is not actively peat forming and is being actively drained. In addition, M15 falls under the NatureScot category of *"priority peatland communities that are unlikely to raise issues of national interest"* and so are typically not subject to the 1:10 requirement. As such, the small loss of degraded bog M17 and M19 habitats are considered a **minor and not significant impact**.

6.5.38. The areas for peatland restoration have not yet been agreed and, while it is likely that these areas will be degraded based on the habitats in the vicinity of the Site, a walkover survey will be required post-consent and pre-construction to ascertain the best areas to enact the restoration measures (details of which will be included within the HMP yet to be produced). Should these restoration areas be unsuitable or already in good condition, it is recommended that consultation with the Highland Council should be undertaken to agree on appropriate compensation and offsetting. Habitat enhancements within areas of peatland will be done following ground investigation and/or peat probing. Following the results of the post-consent walkover survey, confirmation/identification of suitable enhancement areas and the production of a suitably detailed HMP, this will reduce a major adverse significant effect to **not significant**.

Invasive Non-Native Species

6.5.39. *Rhododendron ponticum*, which is listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, was identified within the Site. It is an offence to cause to grow in the wild, any plant listed on the Schedule. As such, it is recommended that appropriate safeguards be put in place to prevent the spread of this Schedule 9 species during the Proposed Development works. To prevent the spread of this species an Invasive Species Management Plan (ISMP) should be produced as part of the CEMP and implemented during the works. Such measures may include the manual pulling and removal of plants (suitable for seedlings and small bushes prior to flowering). Application of herbicide to Rhododendron stumps on the day of cutting could also be used, which is suitable for more mature bushes. Further management details will be detailed within the HMP once produced.

Enhancement Measures

6.5.40. Measures to enhance offsite habitats will be included in the BNG calculations for the Proposed Development once an area for these enhancements has been secured and agreed. Full details of habitat creation and enhancement measures will be provided in the OHMP (see **Appendix 6.5 Outline Habitat Management Plan**), which includes additional detail on planting schemes, and a BNG Plan (see **Appendix 6.4 Biodiversity Net Gain Report**) to be agreed with the Highland Council post-consent.

Protected Species

6.5.41. Four bat boxes will be affixed to suitable mature retained trees across the Site and situated away from felling locations. These should be of a type similar to '1FF Schwegler Bat Box', which are suitable for crevice dwelling species, such as common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* and soprano pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*. The boxes will be placed on the south, south-western or south-eastern aspect of the trees, at least 2.8 m from the ground, and protected from direct rainfall and artificial light.

6.5.42. In addition, four hibernacula will be created in the areas of acid grassland and wet heath. Hibernacula should be checked prior to the start of the hibernation period (before November) and any damage or wear identified. Hibernacula that are damaged will be repaired or replaced. Hibernacula should be left undisturbed during the reptile and amphibian hibernation period (November-February, inclusive).

Assessment of Cumulative Effects

6.5.43. Cumulative effects can occur where impacts from one development, which may not be significant at the population level itself, when combined across many developments could result in a detrimental effect on a wider scale. This could mean habitat loss, disturbance to species (for example if several developments adjacent to each other were to be in construction either simultaneously or consecutively) or impacts across connected receptors, such as watercourses which form part of one river system.

6.5.44. Another BESS is proposed immediately adjacent to the east of the Site; namely land at Correimoillie Quarry Garve for a BESS with capacity of up to 200MW and associated infrastructure, that remains under consideration (24/05255/S36). The application is supported by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA), submitted in December 2024; however, no further ecological assessments appear to have been undertaken. The PEA does not provide habitat losses and does not include a formal Biodiversity Net Gain exercise, although that site is dominated by other coniferous woodland – w2c with areas of wet heath (likely M15 *Trichophorum germanicum Erica tetralix* wet heath). The indicative site layout plan for the Correimoillie Quarry Garve BESS suggests that there will be losses to both these habitats, similar to the losses to these habitats for the Proposed Development; therefore it is possible for there to be a cumulative impact on habitats should planning permission be granted for both BESS developments. Conversely, the majority of losses from the Corriemoillie Quarry Garve BESS will be from w2c plantation, which is of low ecological value as a habitat and remains widespread in the local area; thus, the combined losses from both developments on this habitat would be unlikely to cause any significant negative impacts. Although losses to wet heath habitat at Corriemoillie Quarry Garve BESS, combined with 0.18ha lost to the Proposed Development, is a cumulative loss on a habitat of Regional importance. It is understood that an offsite area dominated by wet heath was surveyed for the Corriemoillie Quarry Garve BESS site with the aim of restoring and enhancing this area to offset any losses from their development. Therefore, should both BESS developments be granted then the offsite restoration/enhancements at the Corriemoillie Quarry Garve site, combined with offsite enhancements proposed for the Proposed Development, will mitigate any losses to this habitat of Regional importance and remove any cumulative effects caused through habitat loss.

6.5.45. Whilst there are unlikely to be any cumulative impacts on habitats from both developments, should construction occur simultaneously then there could be a greater chance of disturbing a sett, roost, den or drey within the woodland to be lost across both development sites, with fauna displaced from one site unable to seek shelter in the neighbouring one due to concurrent construction works. Although it should be noted that both sites are active forestry and so are subject to regular disturbance via felling. Therefore, provided that the pre-commencement checks detailed in the “Additional Mitigation, Compensation and Enhancement Measures” section above are adhered to then these measures are considered sufficient to identify the presence of any notable species within the Site before any works begin. To further safeguard any protected fauna should construction works occur simultaneously it is recommended that all construction workers are to be briefed on the potential presence of badger, roosting bats, otter, water vole, pine marten, red squirrel, wildcat and herpetofauna in the form of toolbox talks. These talks should include details on the legislation and protection of the relevant species/species groups in addition to providing the contact details for the project ecologist.

6.5.46. An additional application currently under consideration, located within the Site, is a scoping application for 7.5km of 132kV overhead line to connect the proposed Carn Fearna Wind Farm to the existing Corriemoillie Substation (25/02377/SCOP). Similar to the Proposed Development, the scoping report for that development has identified potential impacts to badger, bats, otter, water vole, pine marten, red squirrel and wildcat; but similar to the Corriemoillie Quarry Garve BESS development, no cumulative impacts are anticipated provided mitigation is followed. No habitat surveys have been done yet; therefore, it is not

possible to assess whether habitat losses from installation of this overhead line will result in cumulative impacts with the Proposed Development.

Residual Effects

6.5.47. As a result of a commitment being made to restore peatland habitat elsewhere, likely within the landownership boundary, and to achieve a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain in relation to HPIs/Annex 1 habitats, plus further mitigation/monitoring in relation to badger, bats, otter, water vole, pine marten, red squirrel, wildcat and herpetofauna, **no residual effects are considered likely to remain**. The Ecological Impact Assessment concludes no significant adverse impacts should the Proposed Development go ahead.

6.6. Summary and Statement of Significance

6.6.1. The Site is located north of the A832, approximately 5 km west of Garve. The Site is dominated by coniferous forestry plantation with other habitats present including degraded blanket bog, wet heathland, Scots pine woodland, upland birch woodland, other neutral grassland, modified grassland and acid grassland.

6.6.2. Night time working will be avoided with sensitive lighting used to reduce adverse impacts on commuting and foraging bats during the construction and operation phase. Whilst pollution prevention plans and fencing of the working area are also included as embedded mitigation to avoid encroachment onto sensitive areas and will ensure **no significant adverse** effect on ponds/ditches.

6.6.3. The presence of roosting bats cannot be ruled out within the woodland subject for removal therefore, construction works have the potential to destroy roosts and injure/kill/disturb bats (if present) and unmitigated. Precautionary mitigation by way of an aerial inspection with an endoscope followed by soft felling under ecological supervision is recommended for any tree to be lost with features that may support roosting bats; thus resulting in a **not significant** effect.

6.6.4. The ditches on Site are suitable to support commuting otter and are sub-optimal for water vole, but these are to be retained and protected. No evidence of badger, otter, water vole, red squirrel or wildcat were recorded on Site. Precautionary mitigation by way of a pre-construction check for all of these species provides assurance that should a sett, holt, burrow, drey or den be excavated/identified in the working area, mitigation can be put in place to either avoid effects or obtain a development licence from NatureScot for its' disturbance or destruction, thus resulting in a **not significant** effect.

6.6.5. Two pine marten scats were identified during and, whilst no dens were noted, the presence of pine marten dens cannot be ruled out within the woodland subject for removal. This has the potential to injure/kill/disturb pine marten (if present) or to destroy dens. Similarly to fauna above, precautionary mitigation by way of a pre-construction check provides assurance that should evidence of this species be found, mitigation can be put in place to either avoid effects or obtain a development licence from NatureScot for disturbance or destruction of dens; thus resulting in a **not significant** effect.

6.6.6. An OHMP (see **Appendix 6.5 Outline Habitat Management Plan**) illustrating the restoration of bog habitat as required under NatureScot (2023) guidance, in addition to a BNG Plan showing how a minimum of 10% net gain will be achieved, will be produced post-consent for approval by the Highland Council. As these restoration and enhancement areas are not yet decided, a walkover survey will be required post-consent and pre-construction to ascertain the best areas to enact the OHMP and BNG Plan measures. With the threat of climate change and the need to move towards renewable energy, the Proposed Development would have positive impacts regarding carbon reductions, provided the Highland Council are willing to discuss options that could be used to mitigate these losses, if the proposed areas are unsuitable. Options could include purchasing of additional land to manage if the landownership areas are unsuitable. Following the results of the post-consent walkover survey, confirmation/identification of suitable enhancement areas and production of a detailed HMP and BNG Plan, these measures will result in a **not significant** effect.

6.7. References

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Appendix

Appendix A: Legislation and Policy

Table 6.5 Legislation Summary.

Scotland	Description
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (the 'WCA')	The Wildlife and Countryside Act is the key legislation for the protection of habitats and species. Schedules attached to the Act categorise species. The level of protection given to a species depends on the schedule it's listed on. The main schedules are: • Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 Schedules 1, 1A, A1, 2, 3 and 4 – birds • Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 Schedules 5 and 6 – animals • Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 Schedule 8 – plants
Habitats Directive and The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended)	EEC Council Directive 92/43/EEC, The Conservation of Natural Habitats and of wild fauna and flora, known as the 'Habitats Directive', protects over 1,000 animal and plant species, as well as 200 habitat types, listed in the Directive's annexes are protected in various ways: • Annex II species (about 900): core areas of their habitat are designed as Sites of Community importance (SCIs) and included in the UK site network. These sites must be managed in accordance with the species own ecological needs. • Annex IV species (over 400, including many annex II species): a strict protection regime must be applied across their entire natural range within the EU, both within and out-with Natura 2000 sites. • Annex V species (over 90): Member States must ensure that their exploitation and taking in the wild is

		compatible with maintaining them in a favourable conservation status. • The objectives in relation to the UK site network (previously 'Natura 2000' sites) are to: - maintain or restore certain habitats and species listed in the Habitats Directive to favourable conservation status (FCS); and - contribute to ensuring the survival and reproduction of certain species of wild bird in their area of distribution and to maintaining their populations at levels which correspond to ecological, scientific and cultural requirements, while taking account of economic and recreational requirements
	The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended) (the 'Habitats Regulations')	These regulations translate the Habitats Directive into domestic law. This legislation protects habitats and species across Europe and so includes species on animal found in the UK. These species are known as European Protected Species (EPS) and these regulations are the primary regulations protecting these species, rather than the WCA
	The Protection of Badgers Act 1992	The Protection of Badgers Act ensures that it is a criminal offence to kill, injure, take a badger as well as damaging or interfering with a sett unless a specific license is gained from a statutory authority.
	The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 (as amended)	The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 is an Act of the Scottish Parliament that places a duty on all public bodies in Scotland to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their responsibilities. The Act deals with conserving biodiversity and protecting and enhancing Scotland's natural features.
	The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 (as amended) (the 'WANE Act')	The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 requires every public body in Scotland to produce a publicly available report, on their compliance with the Biodiversity Duty. This must be completed once every three years.

Table 6.6 Policy Summary.

Scotland	Description
Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) (2014)	Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) sets out how nationally important planning matters should be addressed. It contains policies on the development of local plans, development design and the determination of planning applications. Among the key principles that relate to the Natural Environment are that the planning system should: • Conserve and enhance protected sites and species, taking account of the need to maintain healthy ecosystems and work with the natural processes which provide important services to communities; • Protect and enhance ancient semi natural woodland as an important and irreplaceable resource, together with other native or long-established woods, hedgerows and individual trees with high nature conservation or landscape value; and • Seek benefits for biodiversity from new development where possible, including the restoration of degraded habitats and the avoidance of further fragmentation or isolation of habitats. The Scottish Planning Policy includes policies on protected sites, protected species, areas of wild land and woodland and makes clear that planning permission should be refused where the nature or scale of proposed development would have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment. It also sets out the criteria for the designation of local nature conservation sites.
National Planning Framework 4 (2023)	Scotland's 4th National Planning Framework (NPF4) contains detailed national policy of a number of planning topics and for the first time, spatial and thematic planning policies

	are addressed in one place. The most distinctive characteristics of NPF4 is that it has been purposefully designed to help achieve a net zero, sustainable Scotland by 2045 and to secure positive effects for biodiversity and nature recovery.