

6 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

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6. Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 The purpose of this Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) is to identify and record the potential effects that the Proposed Development may have on physical elements of the landscape; landscape character; wild land areas; areas that have been designated for their scenic or landscape-related qualities; and views from various locations such as settlements, routes, tourism features and other sensitive locations.
- 6.1.2 The assessment and review process has been undertaken on behalf of the Applicant by landscape architects at Optimised Environments Limited (OPEN) (part of SLR), led by James Welch BA Hons FLI.
- 6.1.3 This LVIA chapter is based on the LVIA that was submitted in April 2021 for Sallachy wind farm (granted Planning Permission in May 2022). The Proposed Development has not been altered in any way since the April 2021 LVIA was carried out, and the findings of the assessment therefore remain the same. There have, however, been some changes to relevant guidance and planning policy, and this LVIA has been updated to reflect these.
- 6.1.4 The 2021 LVIA included a full assessment of cumulative landscape and visual effects, based on the various cumulative scenarios of operational, under construction, consented and application stage wind farms that were relevant at that time. As Sallachy wind farm was consented in the context of the April 2021 cumulative scenarios, it is not considered relevant to update the cumulative assessment to reflect the current cumulative scenario (as of August 2024) as this could misrepresent the cumulative effects of the wind farm in comparison with the effects arising at the time it was granted Planning Permission. The LVIA's for wind farms that have been submitted as applications subsequent to the approval of Sallachy will incorporate Sallachy into their cumulative assessment, and thus the implication of more up to date cumulative scenarios will anyway be considered.
- 6.1.5 The April 2021 LVIA included a set of figures and visualisations (conforming with both NatureScot and The Highland Council (THC) visualisation standards). As the design and appearance of the Proposed Development has not changed since these figures and visualisations were prepared, the majority of the 2021 figures are still relevant and have not been included within this revised application as the 2021 figures can still be used for reference. Viewpoint photography has not been retaken. It should be noted that the cumulative scenarios that are shown in the wireline visualisations reflect the cumulative situation as of April 2021 and do not reflect the current cumulative scenarios for the reasons described above.
- 6.1.6 While there have been no revisions to the majority of the 2021 figures, the following figures have been revised and are included as part of this 2024 application:
- Figures 6.5a to 6.5c (Wild Land figures) – Wild Land study area revised and viewpoint locations removed where no longer relevant;
 - Figures 6.6a and 6.6b (Principal Visual Receptors figures) – National Cycle Route 1 removed;
 - Figures 6.11a to 6.11d (Wild Land with ZTV figures) - Wild Land study area revised, viewpoint locations removed where no longer relevant and notes added; and
 - Figure 6.12 (Principal Visual Receptors with ZTV figure) – National Cycle Route 1 removed.
- 6.1.7 The figures that have been updated for this application have been suffixed with '(2024)' in order to distinguish them from the 2021 LVIA figures.

- 6.1.8 There are two technical appendices to this chapter:
- Appendix 6.1: LVIA Methodology; and
 - Appendix 6.2: Residential Visual Amenity Assessment.

Scope of Assessment

- 6.1.9 The landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) covers the construction, operation and decommissioning phases of the Proposed Development. The proposed wind farm will consist of nine turbines and associated long-term and short-term infrastructure, including access tracks and a substation with associated compound. Temporary components that are required during construction include a borrow pit and a construction compound. The grid connection to the local distribution network will be subject to a separate assessment and application.
- 6.1.10 The turbines in the Proposed Development have a maximum height of 149.9 m from ground to blade tip and for the purposes of this assessment a maximum rotor diameter of 133 m (as shown in the visualisations that accompany the LVIA).

Definition of Study Area

- 6.1.11 The initial step in the LVIA is the establishment of the study area to be considered in the assessment. NatureScot Guidance (Visual Representation of Wind Farms Version 2.2, February 2017 (SNH)) indicates that an area with a radius of 40 km from the nearest turbine is appropriate for turbines of the size proposed at this wind farm. This study area is shown in Figure 6.1 and a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) analysis has been carried out for this area.
- 6.1.12 Within this wider study area, the assessment focuses on a local study area that covers a 20 km radius from the nearest turbine (shown on Figure 6.1).
- 6.1.13 Mapping of the various characteristics and features of the study area that are relevant to the assessment (i.e. landform, landscape character types, principal visual receptors and landscape-planning designations) is presented with both 40 km and 20 km study areas in order that the wider context can be seen at a broad scale while the local context can be seen at a more detailed scale.

6.2 Legislation, Policy and Guidelines

- 6.2.1 Planning policy and legislation that is relevant to the Proposed Development is described in detail in Chapter 5 (Energy & Planning Policy). A summary of those aspects that are of key relevance to the LVIA is included below.

National Policy

- 6.2.2 Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) was published by the Scottish Government in February 2023. NPF4 sets out spatial principles, regional priorities, national developments and national planning policy. It is intended to be read as a whole and replaces NPF3 and Scottish Planning Policy.
- 6.2.3 NPF4 includes provision for the protection of areas of landscapes that are recognised for their landscape-related qualities at a national level, including National Scenic Areas (NSAs), National Parks (NPs), Wild Land Areas (WLAs) and Gardens and Designed Landscapes (GDLs). The relevant paragraphs from NPF4 are described in the baseline section of this chapter (see Section 6.5).

Regional Policy

- 6.2.4 The current Highland Council (THC) statutory Development Plan for the 40 km study area comprises the following:

- Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) (adopted April 2012);
 - Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (adopted August 2018); and
 - West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan (adopted September 2019).
- 6.2.5 Relevant policies from these documents are described in Chapter 5 of the EIA Report and, where they are specifically relevant to the LVIA, are referred to in the baseline section of this chapter (see Section 6.5).
- 6.2.6 THC has produced Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (November 2016), which forms part of the Development Plan. This is referred to in Chapter 5.

Guidelines

- 6.2.7 The following sources have been utilised in the formulation of methodology for the assessment and the presentation of graphics:
- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment: Third Edition (Landscape Institute and IEMA, 2013) (GLVIA3);
 - Landscape Institute (2019). Visual Representation of Development Proposals: Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/19;
 - Landscape Institute (2019). Technical Guidance Note 2/19 Residential Visual Amenity Assessment;
 - NatureScot (2021). Guidance - Assessing the cumulative landscape and visual impact of onshore wind energy developments;
 - NatureScot (2020, Revised August 2023 to reflect NPF4). Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Areas Technical Guidance;
 - SNH (2010). The special qualities of the National Scenic Areas. Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No. 374;
 - SNH (June 2014). Map of Wild Land Areas;
 - SNH (2017). Description of Wild Land Areas;
 - SNH (2017). Siting and Designing Wind Farms in the Landscape Version 3a;
 - SNH (2017). Visual Representation of Wind Farms, Version 2.2;
 - SNH (2018). Working draft Guidance for Assessing the Effects on Special Landscape Qualities;
 - THC (November 2016) Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance; and
 - THC (July 2016). Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments.

6.3 Consultation

- 6.3.1 Consultation on LVIA matters has not been carried out for this application. The subject of the application does not differ from that made in April 2021 and it has therefore not been necessary to carry out further consultation. Full details of the consultation carried out for the previous application and the actions undertaken by the Applicant in response to consultation feedback can be seen in Table 6.1 of the 2021 LVIA.

6.4 Assessment Methods and Significance Criteria

6.4.1 This section summarises the methodology used to carry out the LVIA, which is described in full in Appendix 6.1. This methodology replicates that used for the April 2021 LVIA in order to maintain consistency between the assessments.

Desk Study

6.4.2 The assessment is initiated through a desk study of the site and 40 km radius study area. This study identifies aspects of the landscape and visual resource that may require to be updated since the production of the April 2021 LVIA, such as changes to relevant planning policy .

Site Visits

6.4.3 Field surveys were carried out throughout the 40 km radius study area in 2020 and 2021 for the production of the April 2021 LVIA. Further site visits have not been undertaken for this LVIA as relevant aspects of the landscape and visual resource are not known to have altered in a way that would materially affect the assessment.

Categories of Effects

6.4.4 The LVIA is intended to determine the effects that the Proposed Development will have on the landscape and visual resource. For the purpose of assessment, the potential effects on the landscape and visual resource are grouped into five categories:

Effects on Physical Elements

6.4.5 Physical effects are restricted to the area within the Proposed Development site boundary and are the direct effects on the existing fabric of the site, such as the removal of forestry and alteration to ground cover. This category of effects is made up of landscape elements, which are the components of the landscape, such as moorland, that may be directly and physically affected by the Proposed Development.

Effects on Landscape Character

6.4.6 Landscape character is the distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occurs consistently in a particular type of landscape, and the way that this pattern is perceived. Effects on landscape character arise either through the introduction of new elements that physically alter this pattern of elements, 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 landscape-related designated areas.

Effects on Wild Land Areas

6.4.7 The assessment of effects on WLAs is carried out in accordance with NatureScot guidance (Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Areas Technical Guidance, 2020, Revised August 2023 to reflect NPF4).

Effects on Views

6.4.8 The assessment of effects on views is an assessment of how the introduction of the Proposed Development will affect views throughout the study area. The assessment of effects on views is carried out in two parts:

- An assessment of the effects that the Proposed Development will have on a series of viewpoints; and
- An assessment of the effects that the Proposed Development will have on views from principal visual receptors, which include relevant settlements and routes throughout the study area.

Cumulative Effects

- 6.4.9 Cumulative effects arise where the study areas for two or more wind farms overlap so that both of the wind farms are experienced at proximity where they may have a greater incremental effect, or where wind farms may combine to have a sequential effect, irrespective of overlap in study areas.

Significance of Effects

- 6.4.10 The previous section of this chapter describes how the landscape and visual assessment is carried out in five parts: the assessment of effects on physical elements; the assessment of effects on landscape character; the assessment of effects on WLAs; the assessment of effects on views; and the assessment of cumulative effects. The broad principles used in the assessment of significance of these parts are the same (other than the assessment of effects on WLAs) and are described below. The detailed methodology for the assessment of significance does, however, vary, and the specific criteria used are described in Appendix 6.1.
- 6.4.11 The objective of the assessment of the Proposed Development is to predict the likely significant effects on the landscape and visual resource. In accordance with the Environmental Impact Assessment (Scotland) Regulations 2017, (referred to hereafter as the ‘EIA Regulations’) the LVIA effects are assessed to be either significant or not significant. The LVIA does not define intermediate levels of significance as the EIA Regulations do not provide for these. GLVIA3 also provides guidance on this, noting that “LVIA should always distinguish clearly between what are considered to be the significant and non-significant effects...it is not essential to establish a series of thresholds for different levels of significance of landscape and visual effects, provided that it is made clear whether or not they are considered significant” (GLVIA3 paragraphs 3.32 and 3.33).
- 6.4.12 The significance of effects is assessed through a combination of two considerations; the **sensitivity** of the landscape receptor or view and the **magnitude of change** that will result from the addition of the Proposed Development. While this methodology is not reliant on the use of a matrix to arrive at the conclusion of a significant or not significant effect, a matrix is included below (Table 6.2) to illustrate how combinations of sensitivity and magnitude of change ratings can give rise to significant effects. The matrix also gives an understanding of the threshold at which significant effects may arise.

Table 6.2– Illustrative Significance Matrix

Magnitude Sensitivity	High	Medium-High	Medium	Medium-Low	Low	Negligible
High	Significant	Significant	Significant	Significant/ Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
High-Medium-	Significant	Significant	Significant/ Not Significant	Significant/ Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Medium	Significant	Significant/ Not Significant	Significant/ Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Medium-Low	Significant/ Not Significant	Significant/ Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant

Low	Significant/ Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant

6.4.13 Effects within the dark grey boxes in the matrix are considered to be significant in terms of the EIA Regulations. Effects within the light grey boxes may be significant or not significant depending on the specific relevant factors that arise at a particular landscape or visual receptor. In accordance with GLVIA3, experienced professional judgement is applied to the assessment of all effects and reasoned justification is presented in respect of the findings of each case.

6.4.14 A significant effect occurs where the Proposed Development would provide one of the defining influences on a landscape element, landscape character receptor or view. A not significant effect occurs where the effect of the Proposed Development is not material, and the baseline characteristics of the landscape element, landscape character receptor, view or visual receptor continue to provide the definitive influences.

6.4.15 This assessment assumes clear weather and optimum viewing conditions. This means that effects that are assessed to be significant may be not significant under different, less clear conditions.

Sensitivity

6.4.16 Sensitivity is an expression of the ability of a landscape receptor or view to accommodate the Proposed Development. The sensitivity is determined through a combination of the value of the receptor and its susceptibility to the Proposed Development. The factors that determine these criteria are described in Appendix 6.1.

6.4.17 Levels of sensitivity (high, medium, and low) are applied in order that the judgement used in the process of assessment is apparent. As shown in Table 6.2, intermediate levels (medium-high and medium-low) may also be applied where the particular combination of value and susceptibility results in an intermediate definition.

Magnitude of Change

6.4.18 Magnitude of change is an expression of the extent of the effect on landscape receptors and views that will result from the introduction of the Proposed Development. The magnitude of change is assessed in terms of a number of variables, including the size and scale of the impact and the extent of the affected area. The factors that determine these criteria are described in Appendix 6.1.

6.4.19 Levels of magnitude of change (high, medium, low and negligible) are applied in order that the judgement used in the process of assessment is apparent. As shown in Table 6.2, intermediate levels (medium-high, medium-low and low-negligible) may also be applied where the particular combination of variables results in an intermediate definition.

Assessment of Cumulative Effects

6.4.20 The objective of the cumulative assessment is described in NatureScot guidance as to “...describe, visually represent and assess the ways in which a proposed wind farm would have additional impacts when considered with other consented or proposed wind farms. It should identify the significant cumulative impacts arising from the proposed wind farm”.

6.4.21 The outcome of the assessment is the identification of any significant cumulative effects that may arise from the addition of the Proposed Development to the cumulative situation, in accordance with

the NatureScot guidance, which states that cumulative assessment should “*focus on the likely significant impacts and those which are likely to influence the outcome of the consenting process*”.

6.4.22 In relation to the significance of cumulative landscape effects, GLVIA3 notes (paragraph 7.28) that “*the most significant cumulative landscape effects are likely to be those that would give rise to changes in the landscape character of the study area of such an extent as to have major effects on its key characteristics and even, in some cases, to transform it into a different landscape type. This may be the case where the project being considered itself tips the balance through its additional effects.*”

6.4.23 GLVIA3 (paragraph 7.38) goes on to state the following in relation to the significance of cumulative visual effects:

“Higher levels of significance may arise from cumulative visual effects related to:

- *developments that are in closer proximity to the main project and are clearly visible together in views from the elected viewpoints;*
- *developments that are highly inter-visible, with overlapping ZTVs – even though the individual developments may be at some distance from the main project and from individual viewpoints, and when viewed individually not particularly significant, the overall combined cumulative effect on a viewer at a particular viewpoint may be more significant.”*

6.4.24 It should be noted that if the Proposed Development itself is assessed to have a significant effect, it does not necessarily follow that the cumulative effect would also be significant.

Nature of Effects

6.4.25 The ‘nature of effects’ relates to whether the effects of the Proposed Development are positive (beneficial) or negative (adverse). Effects may also be neutral. Guidance provided in GLVIA3 states that “*thought must be given to whether the likely significant landscape and visual effects are judged to be positive (beneficial) or negative (adverse) in their consequences for landscape or for views and visual amenity*”. The nature of effect is therefore one that requires interpretation and reasoned professional opinion.

6.4.26 In relation to many forms of development, the EIA Report will identify positive and negative effects under the term ‘nature of effect’. The landscape and visual effects of wind farms are difficult to categorise in either of these brackets as, unlike other disciplines, there are no definitive criteria by which these effects can be measured as being categorically positive or negative. For example, in disciplines such as noise or ecology it is possible to identify the nature of the effect of a wind farm by objectively quantifying its effect and assessing the nature of that effect in prescriptive terms. However, this is not the case with landscape and visual effects, where the approach combines quantitative and qualitative assessment.

6.4.27 In this assessment, positive, neutral and negative effects are defined as follows:

- Positive effects contribute to the landscape and visual resource through the enhancement of desirable characteristics or the introduction of new, beneficial attributes. The removal of undesirable existing elements or characteristics can also be beneficial, as can their replacement with more appropriate components.
- Neutral effects occur where the Proposed Development neither contributes to nor detracts from the landscape and visual resource, and is accommodated with neither beneficial nor adverse effects, or where the effects are so limited that the change is hardly noticeable. A change to the landscape and visual resource is not considered to be adverse simply because it constitutes an alteration to the existing situation.

- Negative effects are those that detract from or weaken the landscape and visual resource through the introduction of elements that contrast, in a detrimental way, with the existing characteristics of the landscape and visual resource, or through the removal of elements that are key in its characterisation.
- 6.4.28 This assessment adopts a precautionary approach, which assumes that significant landscape and visual effects will be weighed on the negative side of the planning balance, although positive or neutral effects may arise in certain situations. Unless it is stated otherwise, the effects of the Proposed Development on landscape and visual amenity are considered to be negative.

Duration and Reversibility

- 6.4.29 The effects of the Proposed Development are of variable duration, and are assessed as short-term or long-term, and permanent or temporary/reversible. It is anticipated that the operational life of the Proposed Development will be 30 years. The turbines, site access tracks and substation (with associated compound) will be apparent during this time, and these effects are considered to be long-term.
- 6.4.30 Other infrastructure and operations such as the construction processes and plant (including tall cranes for turbine erection) and construction and storage compounds will be apparent only during the initial construction period of the Proposed Development and are considered to be short-term effects. Borrow pit excavation will also be short-term as borrow pits will be restored at the end of the construction process, although a permanently altered ground profile may remain evident.
- 6.4.31 The reversibility of effects is variable. The most apparent effects on the landscape and visual resource, which arise from the presence of the turbines, are temporary/ reversible as the turbines will be removed on decommissioning, as will the substation compound. The effects of the tall cranes and heavy machinery used during the construction and decommissioning periods are also temporary.
- 6.4.32 The access tracks may be left in situ at decommissioning at the request of the landowners, or they will otherwise be covered with topsoil and left to naturally regenerate. Turbine foundations (except for the top 1 m which would be removed) and underground cabling will be left in-situ below ground with no residual landscape and visual effects.
- 6.4.33 In order to avoid repetition, the duration and reversibility of effects are not reiterated throughout the assessment.

Limitations to the Assessment

- 6.4.34 There are limitations in the theoretical production of ZTVs, and these should be borne in mind in their consideration and use:
- The ZTVs illustrate the 'bare ground' situation, and do not take into account the screening effects of vegetation, buildings, or other local features that may prevent or reduce visibility.
 - The ZTVs do not indicate the reduction in visibility that occurs with increased distance from the Proposed Development. The nature of what is visible from 3 km away will differ markedly from what is visible from 20 km away, although both are indicated on the ZTVs as having the same level of visibility.
 - It is important to remember that there is a wide range of variation within the visibility shown on the ZTV. For example, an area shown on the blade tip ZTV as having visibility of all of the turbines may gain views of the smallest extremity of blade tips, or of full turbines. This can make a considerable difference in the effects of the Proposed Development on that area.

6.4.35 These limitations mean that while the ZTVs are used as a starting point in the assessment, providing an indication of where the Proposed Development will theoretically be visible, the information drawn from the ZTVs is not completely relied upon to accurately represent visibility of the Proposed Development.

6.4.36 NatureScot guidance (Visual Representation of Wind Farms (SNH, 2017)) provides the following information on the limitations of visualisations in Annex A:

“Visualisations of wind farms have a number of limitations which you should be aware of when using them to form a judgement on a wind farm proposal. These include:

- A visualisation can never show exactly what the wind farm will look like in reality due to factors such as: different lighting, weather and seasonal conditions which vary through time and the resolution of the image;*
- The images provided give a reasonable impression of the scale of the turbines and the distance to the turbines, but can never be 100 % accurate;*
- A static image cannot convey turbine movement, or flicker or reflection from the sun on the turbine blades as they move;*
- The viewpoints illustrated are representative of views in the area, but cannot represent visibility at all locations;*
- To form the best impression of the impacts of the wind farm proposal these images are best viewed at the viewpoint location shown;*
- The images must be printed at the right size to be viewed properly (260mm by 820mm);*
- You should hold the images flat at a comfortable arm’s length. If viewing these images on a wall or board at an exhibition, you should stand at arm’s length from the image presented to gain the best impression.*
- It is preferable to view printed images rather than view images on screen. If you do view images on screen you should do so using a normal PC screen with the image enlarged to the full screen height to give a realistic impression. Do not use a tablet or other device with a smaller screen to view the visualisations described in this guidance.”*

6.4.37 This information makes several notable points in relation to the importance of assessment on site rather than from visualisations (bullet points one, two, three and five) and the representative nature of viewpoints (bullet point four).

6.4.38 In relation to the first of these points, it should be noted that assessment is carried out from observations in the field, with copies of visualisations, and this process cannot be replicated by a desk-based review of visualisations. It is, however, acknowledged that not all viewpoints are accessible to all people, and when this is the case, the visualisations and text provided in this LVIA should provide a suitable indication of the likely effects of the Proposed Development, its appearance, and the context in which it will be seen.

6.4.39 In relation to the second point, it is important to note that almost all of the viewpoints are intended to be representative of the views that may be gained of the Proposed Development from the wider study area, and not just a series of very specific locations. NatureScot guidance (Visual Representation of Wind Farms (SNH, 2017)) provides the further information on this aspect of assessment in paragraph 69.

“It is important to stress that viewpoint assessment forms just one part of LVIA. Because of the powerful nature of viewpoint images and the widespread recognition of some of the locations from where these are taken, there is often over-emphasis of their role. However, LVIA also includes assessment of the following:

- *the extent and pattern of visibility throughout the study area (considering those areas from where a wind farm would not be seen, as well as those areas from where it may);*
- *views of the proposed wind farm from areas of potential visibility other than the selected viewpoints; and*
- *sequential views.”*

6.5 Baseline Conditions and Preliminary Assessment

6.5.1 The baseline section of the LVIA records the existing conditions of the study area. Establishing a baseline helps to gain an understanding of what makes the landscape distinctive and what its important components or characteristics are, and is instrumental in the identification of the landscape character receptors, visual receptors and viewpoints that are included in the assessment. This section is presented under the following headings:

- landscape character;
- landscape planning designations;
- wild land areas;
- principal visual receptors;
- viewpoints; and
- cumulative wind farm developments.

6.5.2 This section also identifies which of the landscape and visual receptors have potential to undergo significant effects or significant cumulative effects as a result of the Proposed Development, and therefore require to be assessed in detail. This is implemented through a two-stage filtering process.

6.5.3 Firstly, ZTV mapping is used to identify those receptors which will gain any theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development. Where there is no theoretical visibility, receptors are discounted from the assessment. Secondly, the receptors that are shown on the ZTV mapping to gain some visibility of the Proposed Development have a preliminary assessment to ascertain if they have potential to undergo a significant effect or a significant cumulative effect. This preliminary assessment considers various factors that contribute to the sensitivity of the receptor, the magnitude of change that will result from the addition of the Proposed Development, and the level of visibility and influence of cumulative wind farms. Various methods of verification are used in this second stage, including site visits, ZTVs, GIS mapping, wirelines and aerial photography.

6.5.4 In the case of some receptors, this preliminary assessment indicates that the landscape or visual receptor does not have potential to undergo a significant effect or significant cumulative effect as a result of the Proposed Development, despite gaining visibility of it. This is most frequently due to a combination of the limited predicted level of visibility and influence of the Proposed Development and/or other wind farms, and the limited sensitivity of the receptor. Where this is the case, the potential effects on the receptor do not need to be assessed in any further detail and at this stage they can be discounted from the assessment.

6.5.5 Where the preliminary assessment indicates that there is potential for the receptor to undergo a significant effect or cumulative effect as a result of the Proposed Development, this is assessed in detail subsequently in this chapter.

Landscape Character

6.5.6 Landscape character information is drawn from NatureScot’s 2019 digital dataset of landscape character, which updated and reviewed the original Landscape Character Assessments (LCAs) that were produced to cover the whole of Scotland during the 1990s. The 2019 dataset is based on the original LCAs and updated to ensure greater consistency in the approach and structure, to reduce cross boundary discrepancies, and to make the mapping more accessible and readily legible.

6.5.7 Guidance on the NatureScot web page advises that landscape capacity studies should take precedence over the NatureScot 2019 dataset where relevant to specific types of development, such as wind farms. While a THC landscape sensitivity appraisal for Sutherland is currently underway, this is not yet available for public view and the study area is not specifically covered by such a capacity study. NatureScot’s 2019 dataset is therefore used as the basis of the characterisation of the landscape.

6.5.8 The NatureScot 2019 dataset divides the landscape into tracts that are referred to as landscape character types (LCTs). Landscape character across the study area is shown on Figures 6.3a (to a 40 km radius) and 6.3b (to a 20 km radius) and is shown in relation to the blade tip ZTV on Figure 6.9 (20 km radius). Many LCTs are extensive, sometimes covering several areas that are geographically separate, and the effects of the Proposed Development can vary widely across a single landscape character type. Several of the landscape character types have therefore been divided into ‘units’, and these are shown on Figures 6.3b and 6.9 . The landform of the site and study area is also of relevance in the survey of landscape character, and this is shown in Figure 6.2 .

6.5.9 In the NatureScot 2019 dataset, the LCTs across Scotland are suffixed by the area in which they lie so, for example, the LCTs in the 20 km study area are suffixed by ‘Caithness and Sutherland’. In this assessment, the suffix is not reiterated with each mention of the relevant LCTs as there are not multiple regional incidences of any LCTs.

Landscape Character of the Site

6.5.10 The site lies within the *rounded hills-Caithness and Sutherland* (LCT 135). This LCT is extensive, covering large parts of the 40 km study area, particularly to the south of Loch Shin where it extends as far south as Ardgay. *Rounded hills* LCT is described as having the following key characteristics in the NatureScot National Landscape Character Assessment (SNH, 2019):

- *“Rolling hills forming broad, subtly rounded summits but with some more pronounced hills also occurring, these often featuring steeper slopes along the coast or where truncated by deep glens.*
- *Hills cut by numerous narrow burns and small lochans lie within dips, corries and on plateau summits.*
- *Predominantly dense heather ground cover and moorland grasses, but also some areas of bog.*
- *Fragments of broadleaf woodland in inaccessible locations.*
- *Scarcely settled with a largely uninhabited interior and widely scattered crofts and farms on lower slopes adjoining straths and farmed landscapes.*
- *Narrow glens and lower hill slopes often rich in archaeology with features such as standing stones, brochs and medieval townships.*

- *Wind farms located in more accessible and generally lower rolling hills, either close to extensive forestry or the high voltage transmission line aligned broadly parallel to the south-east Sutherland coast.*
 - *Convex character of hill slopes limiting distant visibility and views of the hill tops when travelling through the landscape.*
 - *Views into the interior of the hills very restricted.*
 - *Strong sense of wild character can be experienced within the more remote and little modified parts of this landscape.”*
- 6.5.11 This description is broadly applicable to the area of *rounded hills* LCT within which the site lies. There are also local characteristics that distinguish the site and its vicinity from the more key characteristics of the wider area of *rounded hills* LCT. The NatureScot National Landscape Character Assessment makes several references to more local characteristics, including the following, with an explanation in brackets:
- *“Landform...there are several groups of hills within this Landscape Character Type which have distinct identities...Swathes of more subtly rolling hills and moorland occur...west of Loch Shin...Occasional pockets of flatter wet peatland and more gently sloping ground occur within these areas [the site lies within one of these areas of more subtly rolling hills and moorland, west of Loch Shin].*
 - *Settlement...wind farm development is present within parts of this landscape character type, being generally associated with the more subtly undulating and lower hills set within the interior of these uplands [this includes Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms, which are to the south-east of the site].*
 - *Perception...the peripheral rounded hills...are more visible...from major routes such as the...A836 and from roads and settlement within the Straths – Caithness & Sutherland [the peripheral rounded hills within which the site is located are visible from the A836, but from some distance away].”*
- 6.5.12 The key characteristics of *rounded hills* LCT, as quoted above, includes a reference to ‘wildness’. This is further clarified in relation to the description of ‘perception’, which notes that *“A strong sense of wild character can be experienced in the more remote and less modified parts of the Landscape Character Type, especially in the remote Ben Armine Forest and also to some extent within the higher hills either side of Strath of Kildonan.”*
- 6.5.13 The area of *rounded hills* LCT within which the site lies is neither within Ben Armine Forest nor near the Strath of Kildonan, and does not display the *“strong sense of wild character”* that is especially found in this areas. The north-facing slope of *rounded hills* LCT that covers the southern side of Loch Shin, including the site area, is particularly influenced by the nearby A838 road and its associated development, particularly around Overscaig, north of the site, where there is a group of houses. Prominent fencing, transmission lines and forestry along the road also influence the character of the south side of Loch Shin.
- 6.5.14 The area of the *rounded hills* LCT within which the site lies is characterised by hydro-electric infrastructure including powerlines, a tarmac road, a mast, and the Cassley hydro-electric substation on the shore of the loch.
- Landscape Character around the Study Area
- 6.5.15 The prevalent LCT across the 20 km study area is *rounded hills* LCT, which covers the central, southern and north-eastern parts of the study area and is described above in relation to the landscape character

of the site area. *Rounded hills* LCT is frequently abutted by *sweeping moorland and flows* (LCT 134), which is found primarily in the eastern part of the study area with smaller areas to the north and west. The transition between these two LCTs is subtle and gradual, and together they form a widespread upland moorland/forested backdrop to smaller localised areas of other LCTs, including *strath* (LCT 142), *farmed and forested slopes with crofting* (LCT 145), and *lone mountains* (LCT 138).

- 6.5.16 *Strath* LCT is found at Glen Cassley, Strath Oykel, and the Kyle of Sutherland, all to the south of the site and enclosed by *rounded hills* LCT, and Strath Tirry, to the south-east. *Farmed and forested slopes with crofting* LCT is a diverse mix of crofting land, coniferous plantation, semi-natural woodlands and moorland that provides the landscape setting to Lairg, in the south-eastern edge of the 20 km study area. In the study area, this LCT is primarily surrounded by *rounded hills* LCT and *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT, providing a contrasting more complex, settled landscape.
- 6.5.17 There is one key area of *lone mountains* LCT in the 20 km study area. This covers Ben Klibreck, which perfectly exemplifies lone mountains; a distinctive individual and isolated Munro that lies within a surrounding expanse of comparatively gentle and undulating *rounded hills* LCT and *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT. Parts of two other areas of *lone mountains* LCT that cover the distinctive landforms of Quinag and Canisp lie just within the western edge of the study area.
- 6.5.18 The western and north-western part of the study area is dominated by the massive landform of *rugged mountain massif* (LCT 139), which consists of high mountains (including Ben More Assynt, Ben Hee, and Beinn Leoid) with a rugged, irregular and complex form. Parts of this LCT lie within the Assynt-Coigach and North-West Sutherland National Scenic Areas (NSAs). To the west an area of *rocky hills and moorland* (LCT 136) lies beyond the *rugged mountain massif* LCT, separating the mountain landscape from the *cnocan* (LCT 137) that extends to the west coast and largely surrounds the *lone mountains* LCT of Suilven, Canisp and Quinag.

Landscape Character Units

- 6.5.19 *Rounded hills, rugged mountain massif, strath* and *sweeping moorland and flows* LCTs are divided into units for the purpose of this assessment, where relevant. The specific unit divisions are listed below and shown on Figures 6.3a , 6.3b and 6.9 :
- *rounded hills* LCT;
 - *Loch Shin/Glen Cassley*;
 - *Loch Fiag*;
 - *other areas*;
 - *rugged mountain massif* LCT;
 - *Ben More/Ben Hee*;
 - *other areas*;
 - *strath* LCT;
 - *Glen Cassley, Strath Oykel, and Kyle of Sutherland*;
 - *Strath Tirry*;
 - *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT;
 - *Crask/Overscaig*;
 - *Fionn Loch Mor*; and
 - *other areas*.

Landscape Character Types Included in the Detailed Assessment

6.5.20 Table 6.3 includes the preliminary assessment of all of the LCTs and units that are found in the 20 km radius study area, and indicates which of them are considered to have potential to undergo a significant effect as a result of the Proposed Development (including cumulative effects), and which of them do not require further detailed assessment. The LCTs and units that do have potential to undergo a significant effect, or significant cumulative effect, as a result of the Proposed Development, are assessed in full subsequently in this chapter.

Table 6.3 – Preliminary Assessment of Landscape Character Types within the 20 km Study Area

Status	Landscape Character Type/ Area/ Unit	Comment
Included in detailed assessment due to level of influence and visibility of the Proposed Development.	Rounded hills (LCT 135) - Loch Shin/Glen Cassley unit	The Proposed Development lies within this unit.
	Rounded hills (LCT 135) - Loch Fiag unit	ZTV shows intermittent visibility from a minimum of 4.5 km away.
	Rugged mountain massif (LCT 139) - Ben More/ Ben Hee unit	A very short stretch of upgraded access track lies within this receptor, and the ZTV shows intermittent visibility of the turbines from a minimum of 4.5 km away.
	Sweeping moorland and flows (LCT 134) - Crask/Overscaig unit	The site entrance and a very short stretch of upgraded access track lie within this receptor, and the ZTV shows intermittent visibility of the turbines from a minimum of 2 km away.
Not included in detailed assessment: limited and/or distant visibility and influence of the Proposed Development and no specific association with the site area.	Farmed and forested slopes with crofting (LCT 145)	ZTV shows very intermittent theoretical visibility, parts of it blade tip only, from a minimum of approximately 18 km away. The Proposed Development may have some effect on landscape character but this will not be significant.
	Rounded hills (LCT 135) – other areas	ZTV shows very intermittent theoretical visibility, much of it blade tip only, from a minimum of approximately 12.6 km away. The Proposed Development may have some effect on landscape character but this will not be significant.
	Rugged mountain massif (LCT 139) – other areas	ZTV shows very intermittent theoretical visibility, parts of it blade tip only, from a minimum of approximately 11.3 km away. The Proposed Development may have some effect on landscape character but this will not be significant.
	Strath (LCT 142) - Glen Cassley, Strath Oykel, and Kyle of Sutherland unit	ZTV shows negligible theoretical visibility, all of it blade tip only, from a minimum of approximately 5 km away. The Proposed Development may have some effect on landscape character but this will not be significant.

	Strath (LCT 142) – Strath Tirry unit	ZTV shows intermittent theoretical visibility, parts of it blade tip only, from a minimum of approximately 12.2 km away. The Proposed Development may have some effect on landscape character but this will not be significant.
	Sweeping moorland and flows (LCT 134) - Fionn Loch Mor unit	ZTV shows very intermittent theoretical visibility, the great majority of it blade tip only, from a minimum of approximately 4.8 km away. The Proposed Development may have some effect on landscape character but this will not be significant.
	Sweeping moorland and flows (LCT 134) – other areas	ZTV shows intermittent/very intermittent/negligible theoretical visibility from a minimum of approximately 13 km away. The Proposed Development may have some effect on landscape character but this will not be significant.
	Lone mountains (LCT 138)	ZTV shows very intermittent theoretical visibility, the great majority of it blade tip only, from a minimum of approximately 14 km away. The Proposed Development may have some effect on landscape character but this will not be significant.
Not included in detailed assessment: no visibility of the Proposed Development.	Rocky hills and moorland (LCT 136)	

Landscape Planning Designations

6.5.21 The site itself is not covered by any known international, national or regional landscape planning designations. Various designations are, however, found elsewhere in the study area. These have been considered in the assessment and are shown on Figures 6.4a (40 km radius) and 6.4c (20 km radius) and in conjunction with the blade tip ZTV on Figure 6.10a (40 km radius) and 6.10b (20 km radius).

6.5.22 There are three ways in which landscape designations are relevant to the LVIA.

- The presence of a designation can give an indication of a recognised value that may increase the sensitivity of a landscape character receptor, viewpoint or visual receptor, and may therefore affect the significance of the effect on that receptor.
- The presence of a relevant designation can lead to the selection of a representative viewpoint within the designated area, as the viewpoint will provide a representative outlook from that area.
- Designated areas may be included as landscape character receptors so that the effects of the Proposed Development on these features of the landscape that have been accorded particular value can be specifically assessed.

National Scenic Areas

- 6.5.23 NSAs are areas of national scenic value. The Town and Country Planning (National Scenic Areas) (Scotland) Designation Directions 2010 defines an NSA as an area "*of outstanding scenic value in a national context.*"
- 6.5.24 The relevant policy of NPF4 is Policy 4c, which states that:
- "c) Development proposals that will affect a National Park, National Scenic Area, Site of Special Scientific Interest or a National Nature Reserve will only be supported where:*
- i. The objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the areas will not be compromised; or*
- ii. Any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of national importance."*
- 6.5.25 There are four NSAs within or partially within the 40 km study area; Assynt–Coigach NSA, Dornoch Firth NSA, Kyle of Tongue NSA, and North-West Sutherland NSA.
- 6.5.26 The Assynt–Coigach NSA lies a minimum of approximately 5.2 km to the west of the nearest turbine in the Proposed Development and the eastern part of the NSA is shown on the ZTV to gain very intermittent theoretical visibility. This NSA is assessed in full subsequently in this chapter.
- 6.5.27 The other three NSAs are shown on the ZTV to gain limited, negligible or no visibility (where there is visibility this is partly blade only) from a minimum of 23 km away, and are therefore not assessed in any further detail as while the Proposed Development may have some influence on them, this will not be significant due to a combination of distance and limited/ lack of visibility.

Gardens and Designed Landscapes

- 6.5.28 Gardens and Designed Landscapes (GDLs) are considered in Policy 7i of NPF4, which is concerned with 'Historic assets and places'. Policy 7i states that:
- "i) Development proposals affecting nationally important Gardens and Designed Landscapes will be supported where they protect, preserve or enhance their cultural significance, character and integrity and where proposals will not significantly impact on important views to, from and within the site, or its setting."*
- 6.5.29 There is one GDL within the 40 km study area – Leckmelm – which is over 38 km to the south-west of the nearest turbine in the Proposed Development. The Proposed Development will not have any influence on this GDL due to the lack of visibility as shown on the ZTV, and it is therefore discounted from the assessment.

Special Landscape Areas

- 6.5.30 SLAs are areas of land considered to be important at a local level, as designated by THC.
- 6.5.31 Detailed citations for each of the 27 SLAs that lie within THC administrative area are provided in 'Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas' (THC in partnership with SNH, 2011). These citations describe each SLA in terms of its "*key landscape and visual characteristics, the special qualities for which it is valued, its key sensitivities to landscape change, and possible measures for its enhancement.*"
- 6.5.32 There are five SLAs within, or partially within, the 40 km study area: Ben Griam and Loch nan Clar SLA; Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA; Eriboll East and Whiten Head SLA; Fannichs, Beinn Dearg and Glen Calvie SLA; and Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA.

- 6.5.33 The closest SLA to the Proposed Development is Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA, a minimum of 13.6 km to the north-east of the nearest turbine in the Proposed Development. Visibility of the Proposed Development from this SLA is intermittent/very intermittent, with the great majority gaining no visibility at all. These factors ensure that the effect on the overall integrity of the SLA will be not significant.
- 6.5.34 The remaining four SLAs all lie over 25 km away from the Proposed Development and while it may have some influence on these SLAs, the distance from the site and the limited/ lack of visibility ensures that there will not be a significant effect on the overall integrity of the designated areas. The Ben Griam and Loch nan Clar SLA, Eriboll East and Whiten Head SLA, Fannichs, Beinn Dearg and Glen Calvie SLA, and Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA are therefore discounted from the assessment and are not assessed in any further detail.

Wild Land Areas

- 6.5.35 Wild Land Areas (WLAs) are identified on NatureScot’s 2014 wild land mapping and referred to in Policy 4g of NPF4, which states that:

“Development proposals in areas identified as wild land in the Nature Scot Wild Land Areas map will only be supported where the proposal:

- *i. will support meeting renewable energy targets; or,*
- *ii. is for small scale development directly linked to a rural business or croft, or is required to support a fragile community in a rural area.*

All such proposals must be accompanied by a wild land impact assessment which sets out how design, siting, or other mitigation measures have been and will be used to minimise significant impacts on the qualities of the wild land, as well as any management and monitoring arrangements where appropriate. Buffer zones around wild land will not be applied, and effects of development outwith wild land areas will not be a significant consideration.”

- 6.5.36 There are eight WLAs within or partially within the 40 km study area as shown on Figure 6.5a (2024) and in conjunction with the blade tip ZTV on Figure 6.11a (2024). These eight WLAs are:
- Ben Hope–Ben Loyal WLA (Area 38);
 - Ben Klibreck-Armine Forest WLA (Area 35);
 - Cape Wrath WLA (Area 40);
 - Foinaven–Ben Hee WLA (Area 37);
 - Inverpolly–Glencanisp WLA (Area 32);
 - Quinag WLA (Area 33);
 - Reay–Cassley WLA (Area 34); and
 - Rhidorroch–Beinn Dearg–Ben Wyvis WLA (Area 29).

- 6.5.37 The Proposed Development lies just within the eastern edge of the south-eastern fork of the Reay–Cassley WLA (Area 34), and an assessment of effects on the wild land qualities of this WLA is included within this Chapter, in accordance with NPF4. The Proposed Development lies outwith the other WLAs and they are therefore discounted from the assessment, also in accordance with NPF4. It is relevant to note that a full assessment of effects on Foinaven–Ben Hee WLA (Area 37) was carried out in the

April 2021 LVIA due to its location in relation to the Proposed Development, and this found that the effect of the Proposed Development on this WLA would be not significant.

Principal Visual Receptors

- 6.5.38 A number of visual receptors such as settlements and travel routes are considered in the assessment as views from them may be affected by the Proposed Development. It is not possible to consider every potential visual receptor in the study area due to the extent of ground that it covers and the assessment therefore concentrates on the ‘principal’ visual receptors that may gain visibility of the Proposed Development. Principal visual receptors are shown on Figure 6.6a (2024) (40 km radius) and 6.6b (2024) (20 km radius), and in conjunction with the blade tip ZTV on Figure 6.12 (2024) (20 km radius).

Settlements

- 6.5.39 The 40 km study area comprises sparsely populated upland landscapes with only a few towns and villages, which are found in sheltered, low-lying coastal and strath locations. The settlements included in the assessment are those that are classified as ‘settlements’ in THC Development Plan Mapping.
- 6.5.40 The larger settlements include Ullapool, Lochinver, Kinlochbervie, Bonar Bridge, and Ardgay, all of which are ranged around the coastline and on the Dornoch Firth. The largest inland settlement is Lairg, which lies within a crofting landscape at the southern end of Loch Shin. There are also a few smaller villages, both inland and coastal, including Rosehall, Scourie and Invershin. The closest settlement to the Proposed Development is Rosehall, approximately 17 km south-south-east of the Proposed Development, while Lairg is slightly further away at around 18 km to the south-east. All other settlements lie more than 20 km away from the Proposed Development.
- 6.5.41 Lairg is the only one of these settlements that is shown on the ZTV to gain theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development. This visibility is intermittent, very limited and partly blade only, and gained from some distance away (a minimum of approximately 18 km away). Viewpoints 20 and 21 are located within and on the periphery of Lairg respectively, and illustrate the very limited influence that the Proposed Development may have on views from the settlement. Lairg and the other settlements in the study area are therefore discounted from the assessment due to lack of visibility and are not assessed in any further detail.

Routes

- 6.5.42 Routes include roads, walking routes, railways, and cycle routes. Routes included as principal visual receptors in the assessment are determined by four criteria:
- the extent to which the route traverses the study area or extends across a notable part of it;
 - the proximity of the route to the Proposed Development;
 - the importance of the route in terms of recognition, traffic volume and usage; and
 - the potential for the Proposed Development to contribute to cumulative effects along the route.
- 6.5.43 The location and extent of roads in the study area reflects the settlement pattern as they follow the more accessible coastline and low-lying straths. Interior areas are considerably less accessible by road, although there are some well-defined private access routes through the landscape which in places provide recreational access (e.g. the access track serving the existing hydro plant on the site and in the adjoining Glen Cassley). The roads in the study area that are considered as principal visual receptors, due to various combinations of the criteria listed above, are as follows:

- A836, which enters the edge of the 40 km study area to the south-east of Ardgay, passes through Lairg and northwards towards Tongue, where it leaves the northern edge of the study area;
 - A837, which runs from the A836 at Invershin to Lochinver, passing to the south and west of the Proposed Development;
 - A838, which effectively forms a large loop off the A836, running north-west from Lairg to Laxford Bridge along Loch Shin, then north-east to Durness, and finally east/south-east to Tongue where it rejoins the A836;
 - A839, which runs through Strath Fleet, linking Rosehall in the west with the A9 in the east; and
 - The minor dead-end road that runs up Glen Cassley from Rosehall.
- 6.5.44 Of these roads, the A837 and minor Glen Cassley road are shown on the ZTV to gain no visibility of the Proposed Development. These roads are therefore discounted from the assessment and are not assessed in any further detail. The A839 has a short stretch of intermittent theoretical visibility around Lairg that is largely of blades only, a minimum of around 19.5 km from the Proposed Development, and is also discounted from the assessment as it will not undergo a significant effect.
- 6.5.45 The A836 and A838 do, however, gain theoretical visibility as shown on the ZTV and they are assessed in detail subsequently in this chapter. Where these roads comprise part of Scotland's National Tourist Routes (shown on Figures 6.6a (2024) and 6.6b (2024)) this is taken into consideration in the assessment.
- 6.5.46 There is one railway line in the study area, the main line from Inverness to Wick and Thurso, which runs in a loop from the south side of the Dornoch Firth up to Lairg and then eastwards to Golspie. This railway line is shown on the ZTV to gain only a very short stretch of intermittent visibility, almost all of blades only, from over 21 km away, just south of Lairg. It is therefore discounted from the assessment and is not assessed in any further detail.
- 6.5.47 There are no National Cycle Routes (NCRs) in the Study Area. While NCR1 previously passed to the east of the site, following the A9 and A836 and extending as far as Orkney, the part of the route north of Tain has been reclassified and is no longer part of the network.
- 6.5.48 The Cape Wrath Way, one of Scotland's Great Trails, runs in combination with the Scottish National Trail across the western part of the study area. This route is shown on the ZTV to gain very limited visibility of the Proposed Development from over 35 km away and is therefore discounted from the assessment.
- 6.5.49 Core paths in the study area are primarily located around settlements and are largely located outwith the 20 km study area. Within the 20 km radius, core paths are largely concentrated around Lairg and Rosehall, with three isolated paths also found to the west and north-west of the Proposed Development. The Rosehall paths are shown on the ZTV to gain no visibility and are therefore discounted from the assessment. There is some limited theoretical visibility from paths around Lairg but the Proposed Development lies a minimum of around 18.7 km away. This visibility is almost all blade only, and the paths where hubs are theoretically visible (SU16.02 and SU16.07) are enclosed within woodland, so will gain very little visibility. Lairg paths are therefore also discounted from the assessment. There is one core path (SU16.05) to the north of Lairg that gains theoretical hub and blade visibility, but at over 16.7 km away and with screening by vegetation, the effect on views from this path will be not significant. The three paths that lie to the west and north-west (SU17.03, Bone Caves; SU17.04, Gleann Dubh to Traligill Caves; and SU25.01, Loch Glendhu) are shown on the ZTV to gain no theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development and are therefore discounted from the assessment.

6.5.50 The LVIA considers recognised long-distance walking routes and relevant core paths, as described above. In addition to these, there are a number of other paths in the study area, including Rights of Way (RoW), permissive paths and informal routes. In accordance with the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, all parts of the Scottish countryside are accessible to all (subject to specific exclusions set out in the Act and as long as users behave responsibly) under statutory access rights. As access to the countryside is not restricted to specific routes, the consideration of all path routes is not relevant to the LVIA, and the assessment focusses on those key recreational routes that are nationally recognised as long-distance routes or identified on the Core Paths Plan. Paths other than core paths and national long-distance walking routes are therefore not considered in the LVIA.

Viewpoints

6.5.51 The assessment of landscape and visual effects is informed by a series of viewpoints that are selected to represent visibility from LCTs, landscape planning designations and principal visual receptors around the study area. These include points of specific importance such as recognised viewpoints, designated landscapes, settlements and routes. It should be noted that while the majority of the viewpoints are chosen to represent receptors that have potential to undergo a significant effect this is not always the case, and some viewpoints are included to demonstrate a lower level of visibility from certain locations. Viewpoints for the LVIA were discussed and agreed in consultation with NatureScot and THC at the time of the April 2021 LVIA.

6.5.52 The viewpoint assessment is used to inform and illustrate the assessment of effects on landscape character as well as the assessment of effects on views and principal visual receptors. The viewpoints used in the assessment are described in Table 6.4.

6.5.53 The viewpoint locations are shown in conjunction with the blade tip ZTV on Figures 6.7a (A3 size), 6.7b (A1 size), and 6.7c (A0 size) and with the hub height ZTV on Figures 6.8a (A3 size), 6.8b (A1 size), and 6.8c (A0 size).

Table 6.4– Viewpoints

Viewpoint	Grid reference Approx. distance to nearest turbine	Comments
1. Track near Maovally	238046, 920762 2.21 km	Included to represent recreational users (walkers/cyclists) of the Maovally track. Within the Reay-Cassley WLA. Elevated, accessible viewpoint location. Requested by THC in pre-application advice.
2. Ben More Assynt	231838, 920069 8.46 km	Popular Munro within Reay-Cassley WLA and Assynt-Coigach NSA. Included to illustrate visibility within the WLA/NSA and views gained by recreational users.
3. Coire Ceann Loch	234377, 926544 8.14 km	Viewpoint at the western end of Loch Shin, west of the property at Corriekinloch and within Reay-Cassley WLA and Assynt-Coigach NSA. Included at the request of NatureScot to illustrate visibility from a low-level within the WLA/NSA.
4. Arsaig track, Loch Shin	250931, 914142 9.12 km	Within Reay-Cassley WLA. Included to illustrate visibility within the WLA, views gained by recreational users of the track, and as an accessible, low-level view from the south side of Loch Shin.
5. A838 near Colaboll	255804, 910675	First in a series of views along the A838, north side of Loch Shin. This is the first open view gained towards

Viewpoint	Grid reference Approx. distance to nearest turbine	Comments
	15.10 km	the Proposed Development as the A838 rounds the bend at Colaboll. Gained by westbound travellers only.
6. A838 near Achnairn	254769, 912103 13.45 km	Second view from the A838, located at the junction of the Achnairn road with the A838. Gained by westbound travellers only.
7. A838 Cnoc an Laoigh	249835, 919215 6.40 km	Third view from the A838, open view across the loch from a relatively elevated location. Gained by westbound travellers only.
8. A838 near Fiag	244946, 920952 2.21 km	Fourth view from the A838, located where the road runs directly along the edge of the loch, opposite the eastern end of the site.
9. A838 west of Overscaig	241197, 923496 2.75 km	Fifth view from the A838, and the final view gained by westbound travellers (albeit perpendicular) located opposite the western end of the site. Slightly elevated and open view gained as the road drops down to Overscaig. Gained primarily by eastbound travellers.
10. A838 Loch a' Ghriama	239351, 926878 6.04 km	Sixth viewpoint on the A838, gained by eastbound travellers only. This viewpoint marks the start of a stretch of eastbound theoretical visibility leading eastwards to Overscaig.
11. A838 near West Merkland	238644, 932685 11.89 km	Final viewpoint on the A838, gained by eastbound travellers only, located in a small area of limited theoretical visibility. This viewpoint represents the westernmost visibility gained from the A838.
12. Ben Hee	242662, 933928 13.24 km	View from summit of the Corbett Ben Hee, within the Foinaven-Ben Hee WLA. Included at the request of NatureScot to illustrate visibility within the WLA and views gained by recreational users.
13. Cnoc an Alaskie	249511, 926764 9.59 km	Located at a local high point within the Foinaven-Ben Hee WLA. Cumulative effects with Creag Riabhach.
14. West Shinness	253391, 915139 10.80 km	Viewpoint included to represent views gained from residential properties at West Shinness, in a slightly elevated position above the loch.
15. Achnairn	255141, 912564 13.52 km	Viewpoint included to represent views gained from residential properties at Achnairn, in a slightly elevated position above the loch.
16. A836 near Lairg	256991, 908500 17.36 km	The first in a series of views gained from the A836 to the north of Lairg. This is located in a layby where a more open view is available than elsewhere on this stretch of the road.
17. A836 north Dalchork	253694, 921146 10.41 km	The second A836 viewpoint. Visibility between this viewpoint and the previous viewpoint is very limited and this is one of the few open views. Gained primarily

Viewpoint	Grid reference Approx. distance to nearest turbine	Comments
		by northbound travellers but may be seen obliquely by southbound travellers.
18. A836 Crask Viewpoint	252148, 923991 9.87 km	Final A836 viewpoint, located at the signposted Crask viewpoint, where there is an interpretation board, parking and picnic bench. Outwith, but close to the eastern edge of the Foinaven-Ben Hee WLA. Gained by people who stop at the Crask viewpoint and a perpendicular view may also be seen by northbound and southbound travellers on the A836.
19. Ben Klibreck	258529, 929905 18.42 km	Popular Munro within Ben Klibreck-Armine Forest WLA and Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA. Included to illustrate visibility within the WLA/SLA and views gained by recreational users.
20. Lairg	258286, 906381 19.71 km	Viewpoint in the settlement of Lairg, included to illustrate visibility from within Lairg.
21. Rhian Breck, Lairg	259896, 904815 21.95 km	Viewpoint included to represent views gained from the crofting area to the south-east of Lairg. There is very limited visibility from the majority of Lairg.
22. Quinag	220921, 929200 21.03 km	There is very limited visibility from the more distant western part of the study area, and this viewpoint provides a view from this direction. Within the Quinag WLA and Assynt-Coigach NSA.
23. Arkle	231066, 944995 25.78 km	There is very limited visibility from the more distant north-western part of the study area, and this viewpoint provides a view from this direction. Within the Foinaven-Ben Hee WLA and North-West Sutherland NSA.

Cumulative Wind Farm Developments

- 6.5.54 Cumulative effects are defined in NatureScot guidance ‘Assessing the cumulative landscape and visual impact of onshore wind energy developments’ (NatureScot, 2021) as the “*combined effect of a set of developments*” and may arise where a landscape receptor, visual receptor or view is affected by more than one wind farm. This occurs where the study areas for two or more wind farms overlap so that both are experienced at proximity where they may have a greater incremental effect, or where wind farms may combine to have a sequential effect, irrespective of any overlap in visibility.

Wind Farm Sites Included in the Cumulative Assessment

- 6.5.55 The 2021 LVIA included a full assessment of cumulative landscape and visual effects, based on the various cumulative scenarios of operational, under construction, consented and application stage wind farms that were relevant at that time, with a cut-off date of 14 January 2021. As Sallachy wind farm was consented in the context of the April 2021 cumulative scenario, it is not considered relevant to update the cumulative assessment to reflect the current cumulative scenario (as of August 2024) as this could misrepresent the cumulative effects of the wind farm in comparison with the effects arising at the time of its consent. The LVIA for wind farms that have been submitted as applications subsequent to the consenting of Sallachy will incorporate the consented Sallachy into their cumulative

assessment, and thus the implication of more up to date cumulative scenarios will anyway be considered elsewhere.

- 6.5.56 In accordance with best practice guidance, the cumulative assessment included in the April 2021 LVIA initially covered a radius of 60 km from the Proposed Development, and included wind farms that were operational, consented, and planning or Section 36 applications. The scoping sites at Garvary Wind Farm and Lairg 2 Resubmission Wind Farm were also considered to be relevant due to their anticipated submission dates and the availability of fixed layouts, and their inclusion in the cumulative assessment was agreed with THC.
- 6.5.57 Wind farm sites within a 60 km radius of the Proposed Development, as of January 2021, are shown on Figure 6.13a . Before the cumulative assessment was carried out, it was necessary to ascertain which of these sites would be relevant to the cumulative assessment. A wind farm is considered to be relevant if the addition of the Proposed Development to this and other wind farms could result in a significant cumulative effect on a landscape character receptor, view or visual receptor. NatureScot guidance on cumulative assessment (NatureScot, 2021) suggests that the study area for detailed cumulative assessment will generally extend to a “35 km radius from the outer boundary of proposal but may be extended due to the nature of likely cumulative effects identified above. The study area may need to be wider for larger turbines.” In the case of the Proposed Development, this radius was increased to 40 km due to the study area radius of the Proposed Development itself being 40 km. Wind farm sites outwith the 40 km radius may be included where, for example, a more distant wind farm would be seen from the same route as the Proposed Development and the visibility of both sites could lead to significant cumulative effects. In the case of the Proposed Development, no wind farms that lie beyond 40 km away were considered to be relevant to the assessment.
- 6.5.58 Table 6.5 lists the wind farms included in the April 2021 cumulative assessment, within 40 km of the Proposed Development (as shown on Figure 6.13b).

Table 6.5 – Wind Farms included in the April 2021 Cumulative Assessment (40 km radius)

Wind Farm Name	Status (January 2021)	Number of Turbines (January 2021)	Turbine Dimensions (January 2021)	Approx. Distance to Proposed Development (January 2021)
Achany	Operational	19 turbines	100 m to blade tip	14.5 km
Braemore	Consented	18 turbines	126 m to blade tip	20 km
Coigach Community turbine	Operational	1 turbine	77 m to blade tip	38 km
Creag Riabhach	Under construction	22 turbines	125 m to blade tip	11.5 km
Garvary	Scoping	37 turbines	180 m to blade tip	24 km
Kilbraur and Extension	Operational	27 turbines	115 m/125 m to blade tip	36 km
Lairg	Operational	3 turbines	100 m to blade tip	23 km
Lairg 2	Consented	10 turbines	150 m/180 m to blade tip	23 km

Wind Farm Name	Status (January 2021)	Number of Turbines (January 2021)	Turbine Dimensions (January 2021)	Approx. Distance to Proposed Development (January 2021)
Lairg 2 Resubmission	Scoping	10 turbines	150 m/190 m/ 200 m to blade tip	23 km
Meall Buidhe	Application	9 turbines	149.5 m to blade tip	22 km
Rosehall	Operational	19 turbines	90 m to blade tip	15 km
South Kilbraur	Application	7 turbines	149.9 m to blade tip	36 km
Strath Tirry	Application	4 turbines	135 m to blade tip	15 km

6.5.59 Cumulative ZTVs that show the visibility of these sites along with the visibility of the Proposed Development are included (Figures 6.14a to 6.14m). The cumulative sites are also shown in the wirelines for each of the representative viewpoints in Figures 6.15 to 6.37 . The wirelines are produced in increments of 90° and cover a variable width of the view, ranging from 90° to 360°, dependent on the horizontal field of view that has been used for each viewpoint.

6.5.60 In some instances, wind farms appear in the wirelines although they are beyond their own study area radius (i.e. the radius that is appropriate for the turbine tip height of the wind farm in accordance with NatureScot guidance (SNH, 2017)). Where this occurs, the wind farm is not included in the written assessment as it is considered to lie beyond the radius within which it may contribute to a significant cumulative effect.

6.6 Mitigation

6.6.1 The layout design of the Proposed Development is a vital part of the EIA process and is the stage where the biggest contribution can be made to mitigate potential landscape and visual effects, creating a wind farm which is appropriate for the existing landscape character and visual features of an area. Landscape and visual objectives have driven the wind farm design from an early stage, while allowing environmental constraints, technical and economic factors to be fed in by the EIA team and the Applicant (see Chapter 3). Landscape and visual mitigation measures have therefore been incorporated through the iterative design process in order to prevent or reduce potential adverse landscape and visual effects, as described in the Design and Access Statement.

6.7 Residual Effects

6.7.1 This section of this chapter includes the assessment of effects on the landscape and visual receptors that have been identified in Section 6.5, above, as having potential to undergo a significant effect as a result of the Proposed Development.

6.7.2 This assessment is presented in four categories, as described in Section 6.4, above:

- effects on physical elements;
- effects on landscape character;
- assessment of effects on wild land; and
- assessment of effects on views.

6.7.3 The assessment of cumulative effects is incorporated into these categories where relevant.

Effects on Physical Elements

6.7.4 The first category of effects covered in the assessment is physical effects, which are direct effects on the fabric of the site, such as changes to ground cover. Physical effects are found only on the site, where existing landscape elements may be removed or altered by the Proposed Development. This category of effects is made up of landscape elements, and in this case there is one element involved: rough grassland/moorland. It should be noted that this landscape element is assessed with reference to its contribution to the landscape resource rather than in ecological terms.

Rough Grassland/Moorland

6.7.5 The construction of access tracks and other infrastructure will require the removal of areas of rough grassland and moorland ground cover from the site area.

Baseline and Sensitivity

6.7.6 The rough grassland and moorland that covers the site is typical of the area. The value of rough grassland/ moorland is medium; it is a relatively widespread landscape element that is not rare or specifically recognised for its value but it is a key characteristic element of the *rounded hills* LCT that covers the site and surrounding areas; the NatureScot 2019 description of this LCT notes that it is characterised by “*predominantly dense heather ground cover and moorland grasses, but also some areas of bog*”.

6.7.7 The susceptibility to change of this landscape element is medium-low due to the potential for reinstatement and restoration of the ground cover following construction and at the end of the lifetime of the Proposed Development. The combination of the medium value and medium-low susceptibility to change of the landscape element results in a medium sensitivity for rough grassland and moorland ground cover.

Magnitude of Change

6.7.8 The area of rough grassland and moorland to be removed or disturbed in the construction and operation of the Proposed Development is limited in relation to the total area found on the site and beyond. In relation to the overall area, the magnitude of change of this removal is considered to be **medium-low**.

Significance of the Effect

6.7.9 The effect of the Proposed Development on rough grassland and moorland will be **not significant**. This is due to the medium sensitivity of the landscape element and the medium-low magnitude of change on it.

Summary of Physical Effects

6.7.10 The Proposed Development will affect one landscape element: rough grassland and moorland ground cover. The effects on this element will be **not significant**.

Assessment of Effects on Landscape Character

Introduction

6.7.11 Landscape character is the distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occurs consistently in a particular type of landscape, and the way that this pattern is perceived. Effects on landscape character occur both on the site, where the pattern of elements that characterises the landscape will be directly altered by the addition of the Proposed Development to the landscape; and off-site, where visibility of the Proposed Development may alter the way in which this pattern of elements is perceived. For

example, if the Proposed Development is visible from an area of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT, the perceived experience of this area may be altered as visibility of the Proposed Development introduces different external, contextual characteristics despite its physical location in another, separate area.

- 6.7.12 It should be noted that levels of magnitude of change on landscape character receptors are generally found to be lower than the magnitude of change on viewpoints that lie within these landscape character areas. This means, for example, that if a viewpoint is assessed to undergo a medium-high magnitude of change it does not necessarily follow that the landscape character area within which it lies would also undergo a medium-high magnitude of change, but may undergo a medium magnitude of change instead.
- 6.7.13 This is because the effects on viewpoints are assessed within the context of a specific outlook of the Proposed Development and are usually specifically selected to gain a direct view over the site. The landscape character of a receptor is not necessarily determined so specifically by the outlook over the Proposed Development, and there are many other considerations, both visual and perceptual, that may combine to give an area its landscape character. This means that the Proposed Development may have a lesser degree of influence on landscape character than on a specific view. This is particularly true of areas that lie slightly further away from the Proposed Development. In the immediate vicinity of the site, up to around 2 km away - the magnitude of change on viewpoints and landscape character is likely to be similar, but beyond this, the magnitude of change on landscape character is found to often diminish more rapidly as the influence of the turbines is subsumed in the many other influences on landscape character. Viewpoints are referred to in this assessment as they give a useful indication of the appearance of the Proposed Development from specific locations within the various landscape receptors, but the level of magnitude of change may vary between the viewpoint assessment and the landscape character assessment.
- 6.7.14 The assessment of effects on landscape character covers two groups of receptors, landscape character types and units, and landscape planning designations. The effects on these receptors are assessed below.

Rounded Hills (LCT 135) - Loch Shin/Glen Cassley Unit

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.15 The Loch Shin/Glen Cassley unit of the *rounded hills* LCT covers the ridge of hills that separate Loch Shin and Glen Cassley and the northern side of the ridge that separates Glen Cassley and Glen Oykel, stretching from Lairg in the east to Corriekinloch in the west. Loch Shin itself also lies within this unit. *Rounded hills* LCT, which is found extensively across the study area, is formed of higher and more defined rounded hills that lie adjacent to the lower and more gently undulating and lower-lying *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT.
- 6.7.16 The Loch Shin/Glen Cassley unit is a long and linear area of *rounded hills* LCT that covers the eastern part of a vast area of this LCT which extends from Loch Shin in the north and east to Coigach and Strath Mulzie in the west and close to Strath Rusdale in the south. The north-eastern boundary of this unit follows the northern Loch Shin shoreline between Lairg and Corriekinloch, while the south-western boundary broadly follows the outer ridgeline of high ground that separates Glen Cassley from Glen Oykel, with the high point of Beinn an Eoin lying within the unit. The unit has been defined on the basis of this distinctive linear, enclosing landform and the resultant level of influence of the Proposed Development that may be gained.
- 6.7.17 The key characteristics of *rounded hills* LCT are described in the 2019 dataset. The majority of these are relevant to the Loch Shin/Glen Cassley unit, and these are quoted below.

- *“Rolling hills forming broad, subtly rounded summits but with some more pronounced hills also occurring.*
 - *Hills cut by numerous narrow burns and small lochans lie within dips, corries and on plateau summits.*
 - *Predominantly dense heather ground cover and moorland grasses, but also some areas of bog.*
 - *Fragments of broadleaf woodland in inaccessible locations.*
 - *Scarcely settled with a largely uninhabited interior and widely scattered crofts and farms on lower slopes adjoining straths and farmed landscapes.*
 - *Narrow glens and lower hill slopes often rich in archaeology with features such as standing stones, brochs and medieval townships.*
 - *Convex character of hill slopes limiting distant visibility and views of the hill tops when travelling through the landscape.*
 - *Views into the interior of the hills very restricted.*
 - *Strong sense of wild character can be experienced within the more remote and little modified parts of this landscape.”*
- 6.7.18 The description also includes the following specific comment in relation to the Loch Shin/Glen Cassley unit:
- “There are several groups of hills within this Landscape Character Type which have distinct identities;*
- Swathes of more subtly rolling hills and moorland occur north-west of Strath of Kildonan, west of Loch Shin and between Strath Fleet and the Dornoch Firth. Occasional pockets of flatter wet peatland and more gently sloping ground occur within these areas. Some of the hills fringing these more subdued areas are often prominent in views from adjoining settled Straths and coastal areas despite being relatively low.”*
- 6.7.19 The northern part of Loch Shin/Glen Cassley unit of *rounded hills* LCT, to the south of Loch Shin, has a higher level of development than many areas of this LCT, with coniferous forestry, tarmac roads, a mast, hydroelectric generation infrastructure, transmission lines, a fish farm and houses all lying within the unit. Achany and Rosehall wind farms also lie within this unit. External influences of settlement and coniferous forestry on the north side of Loch Shin, towards which the landform along the southern edge of the loch is orientated, also add to the perception of development. This ensures that the key *rounded hills* LCT characteristic of *“strong sense of wild character can be experienced within the more remote and little modified parts of this landscape”* does not apply to this area.
- 6.7.20 Viewpoints 1 and 4 lie within this receptor while Viewpoints 5, 6, 8, 9 and 16 are located on its north-eastern boundary, on the A836 and A838.
- 6.7.21 Operational, under construction and consented wind farms that were relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA include the operational wind farms at Achany and Rosehall which lie within the southern end of this unit and, approximately 700 m outwith the southern boundary, the consented Braemore wind farm. Around 4.6 km to the south-east is the operational wind farm at Lairg, adjoined by the consented site at Lairg 2. The operational wind farm at Kilbraur and Extension lies approximately 20 km away to the east, while 8.5 km away to the north is Creag Riabhach.
- 6.7.22 The Loch Shin/Glen Cassley unit of *rounded hills* LCT has a medium-high value; while the great majority is not covered by any scenic designations (a very small area on the western edge is within the Assynt-

Coigach NSA) and some areas display elements of development and human influence such as coniferous forestry and hydro-electric infrastructure, the majority of the unit does lie within the Reay-Cassley WLA (although it should be noted that this is not a scenic designation). The landscape has scenic quality in its distinctive landscape characteristics and in its setting to Loch Shin and Glen Cassley. The enclosure provided by this area of uplands to Loch Shin and Glen Cassley, and the separation of these features, is of value, as is the recreational use of tracks/ paths and the waterbody of Loch Shin.

6.7.23 The susceptibility of *rounded hills* LCT – Loch Shin/Glen Cassley is medium. This is a distinctive and generally undeveloped, remote landscape. However, this landscape is affected by internal and external baseline human influences, including wind farms, the hydro-electric infrastructure, forestry, and roads and buildings along Loch Shin, and this tempers susceptibility to a medium level as the Proposed Development will be located in this context. The large scale and simplicity of the landform and landscape patterns also tempers susceptibility.

6.7.24 The combination of a medium susceptibility and medium-high value of the landscape results in a **medium-high** sensitivity for *rounded hills* LCT – Loch Shin/Glen Cassley.

Magnitude of Change

6.7.25 All of the turbines and the majority of the infrastructure (including existing and new access tracks, the substation compound, and borrow pit search area) of the Proposed Development are located within the north-western corner of this unit, and the site area will therefore undergo direct physical effects from the construction and operation of the turbines, access tracks and hardstandings, borrow pit, construction compound and substation compound, as well as perceived effects that arise through visibility of the Proposed Development.

6.7.26 This unit of *rounded hills* LCT gains theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development from on the site itself up to approximately 18.5 km away. This theoretical visibility is variable and reflects the landform within the unit; the north-east-facing slopes that enclose the southern sides of Loch Shin and Glen Cassley are shown to gain intermittent visibility, much of it blade only, as this landform is orientated towards the site, while the southern side of the ridge that separates Loch Shin from Glen Cassley gains negligible visibility as it is orientated away from the site, and views are screened by the intervening landform of the northern ridge.

6.7.27 Magnitude of change will vary within this unit. The site area and its vicinity will have a **high** magnitude of change due to both direct physical effects on the landscape and perceived effects that rise through visibility of the Proposed Development. The high magnitude of change arises from the following considerations.

- The site area is an upland moorland landscape with limited evidence of large-scale built form or development. The presence of the Proposed Development will result in a direct effect to this baseline character through the addition of new, unfamiliar features, primarily the turbines, providing a highly-visible, prevailing influence and introducing uncharacteristic elements in terms of movement, materials, colour, and structures.
- In addition to the physical effects, there will be a perceptual alteration to the character of the landscape setting, arising from visibility of the colour, movement, scale, texture and form of the turbines, which are uncharacteristic of the landscape.

6.7.28 While the magnitude of change on the site and its close vicinity will be high, there are factors that mitigate the level of change to some extent, although these are not sufficient to reduce the level of magnitude of change:

- The Proposed Development infrastructure that lies within this unit is not unfamiliar in the site area due to the hydro-electric infrastructure that already affects the vicinity, including the power station and access tracks. This means that the landscape lacks the unspoilt remote, wildness characteristics with which the Proposed Development would have the greatest contrast.
 - The Proposed Development will not affect any of the key characteristics (quoted above) that are important in the creation of the distinctive character of this landscape (as noted above, the key characteristic of “*strong sense of wild character can be experienced within the more remote and little modified parts of this landscape*” does not apply to this area due to the influence of hydro infrastructure and other developed influences).
 - The generally large, sweeping scale, simplicity and lack of enclosure that characterise the receptor prevent the occurrence of uncomfortable scale comparisons and provide an appropriate receiving environment for the Proposed Development.
 - The location of the Proposed Development within the *rounded hills* LCT ensures that there is a buffer of this landscape type around the turbines, so they do not appear to extend up to the boundary of the receptor, but are in a broader area of consistent landscape type.
- 6.7.29 The extent of the high magnitude of change will vary around the Proposed Development. To the north-east, it is likely to extend up to around the southern shore of Loch Shin, approximately 1.5 km from the turbines. This area will have the greatest influence from the turbines as they are located upslope and are likely to appear prominent due to their position on the higher ground, and will also be seen at their full height. To the south-west of the turbines, however, theoretical visibility is more limited due to landform screening, and the turbines will lie downslope of this area, reducing their prominence. In this direction, the high magnitude of change is therefore likely to extend to a maximum of around 1 km from the turbines.
- 6.7.30 Beyond this immediate area, the magnitude of change will drop to a **medium-high**, and then **medium** level. This reduction in the level of change results from various factors including the reduction in the extent of the setting that will be affected by the Proposed Development so that the turbines become a less notable external influence on landscape character; the increased distance between the Proposed Development and these parts of the receptor; and the increasing importance of other influences on landscape character as the Proposed Development decreases in influence. There will also be no physical effects on this part of the receptor, and effects on landscape character will arise solely from visibility and perceived influence of the Proposed Development.
- 6.7.31 The extent of the various levels of magnitude of change will again vary around the Proposed Development. To the north, east and north-east, a **medium-high** and then **medium** level of change is likely to extend to the boundary of the LCT, which follows the northern side of Loch Shin and is a maximum of around 4 km from the nearest turbine. Viewpoints 8 and 9 lie on the edge of *rounded hills* LCT in this direction, around 2.2 km and 2.75 km respectively to the north of the nearest turbine, and illustrate the appearance of the Proposed Development as seen from this periphery of the receptor.
- 6.7.32 To the south, east, west, north-west, south-east and south-west, the **medium-high** and then **medium** magnitude of change will extend to a maximum around 4.5 km from the nearest turbine, and considerably less than this in some areas due to the rapid reduction in visibility and influence of the Proposed Development in these directions. Viewpoint 1 lies around 2.2 km to the west of the nearest turbine and illustrates the appearance of the Proposed Development as seen from this part of the landscape.

- 6.7.33 Where there is some visibility of the turbines from beyond around 4.5 km away – that is, to the north-west, south-east, and further away, the south and south-west - the magnitude of change will drop to a **medium-low, low or negligible** level as the influence of the Proposed Development reduces with reduced visibility, distance, and the reduced extent of the setting to the receptor that are affected by the Proposed Development.
- 6.7.34 The southern side of the ridge that separates Loch Shin from Glen Cassley will have **negligible** or no change due to the negligible visibility and therefore influence of the Proposed Development.
- 6.7.35 Various elements of infrastructure lie within this unit as well as the turbines, including access tracks and the substation compound. These elements almost all lie within the areas described above as having a high, medium-high or medium magnitude of change, and will not lead to any additional magnitude of change on these areas. There is, however, one small section of upgraded access track that lies at the northern end of the unit, between around 4.5 km and 5.5 km from the nearest turbine. In this area, the magnitude of change arising from the turbines will be a maximum of **medium-low**, as described above. In this area, the upgrading of the access track will contribute to the magnitude of change but will not exceed a **medium-low** level due to the relatively limited influence that the upgrading of the existing track will have on landscape character.

Significance of the Effect

- 6.7.36 The effect of the Proposed Development on the landscape character of *rounded hills* LCT – Loch Shin/Glen Cassley will vary. The effect on the great majority of the receptor will be **not significant** due to a combination of the factors considered in the medium-high sensitivity of the receptor and the medium-low, low or negligible magnitude of change upon it.
- 6.7.37 A combination of a medium-low magnitude of change and a medium-high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect on the areas of the LCT that have a medium-low magnitude of change (that is, limited areas to the south, north-west and south-east of the site, beyond 4.5 km from the nearest turbine) is judged to be not significant primarily because the landform of these parts of the receptor is not notably orientated towards the Proposed Development, and other landscape characteristics or features will retain their baseline influence.
- 6.7.38 There will, however, be a **significant** effect on the site area itself and the area that extends up to a maximum of around 4.5 km from the nearest turbine in the Proposed Development. This effect arises from a combination of the factors considered in the medium-high sensitivity of the receptor and the high, medium-high or medium magnitude of change upon it. This effect will be long-term and reversible.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

- 6.7.39 The location of operational and consented wind farms within and around this receptor is described in the baseline description above. In addition to these wind farms, application-stage sites at Meall Buidhe, Strath Tirry and South Kilbraur lie at 6.6 km to the south and 3.8 km and 19 km to the east respectively. The scoping sites at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are 5.6 km and 4.3 km respectively to the south-east.
- 6.7.40 The great majority of theoretical visibility of the cumulative wind farms is gained from the south-eastern part of the receptor, within which Achany and Rosehall wind farms are located while Braemore, Garvary, Lairg, Lairg 2, Strath Tirry and Meall Buidhe form an arc around the south-eastern edge. There is also some theoretical visibility of these sites from the western side of Glencassley, but visibility from the northern part of the receptor is very limited as the ridge of *rounded hills* LCT screens visibility from the south and south-east.

- 6.7.41 Theoretical visibility of Creag Riabhach and Strath Tirry wind farms is gained largely from the eastern slope of the receptor that falls down to Loch Shin, with some theoretical visibility of Creag Riabhach also gained from the western side of Glen Cassley. Kilbraur and Extension and South Kilbraur have been discounted from the assessment due to the limited and distant theoretical visibility of these sites.
- 6.7.42 There are four potential cumulative scenarios to which the Proposed Development may be added: operational/under-construction wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented and application-stage wind farms; and operational/under-construction plus consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms.
- 6.7.43 The cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development in any scenario will vary across the receptor. The highest cumulative magnitude of change in any scenario will arise on those limited areas in the central part of the receptor that lie between the Proposed Development and the cumulative wind farms. Here, there is some intermittent mid-range influence from the Proposed Development to the north-west; of the group of sites that lies to the south of Lairg to the south-east; and Creag Riabhach and/or Strath Tirry to the east/north-east. These intermittent areas of cumulative visibility lie at a distance where both the Proposed Development and the cumulative sites may have some influence on landscape character, and the addition of the Proposed Development to the north-west while the cumulative sites are to the south-east or east/north-east can result in the Proposed Development introducing wind energy influence to an aspect of the receptor that is not otherwise affected, leading to visibility of wind farms in three directions around the receptor.
- 6.7.44 However, the elevated landform ridge of *rounded hills* LCT that lies between the Proposed Development and the south-eastern group of wind farms ensures there are very few areas where the Proposed Development is visible and influential along with other wind farms of various statuses, and concurrent visibility is generally found more along the lower ground that forms the southern side of Loch Shin, where long views up and down the loch are available. Viewpoint 4 lies on the edge of the loch, and illustrates the level of influence of the Proposed Development and cumulative wind farms to the east and south-east.
- 6.7.45 In the operational/under-construction cumulative scenario, the addition of the Proposed Development to varying levels of influence of Achany, Creag Riabhach, Lairg and Rosehall will have a maximum **low/medium-low** cumulative magnitude of change on these central parts of the receptor. This arises from visibility of the Proposed Development to the north-west while the other wind farms are seen to the north-east and the south-east, and thus leads to a wind farm being theoretically visible on three sides of Loch Shin. It is limited to a low/medium-low level by the limited and relatively distant visibility of the cumulative wind farms, the restricted turbine size of Achany, Lairg and Rosehall, the very small proportion of the view that they will occupy; and the similar landscape setting of Achany, Rosehall Lairg and the Proposed Development within *rounded hills* LCT. The limited influence of the Proposed Development is also relevant.
- 6.7.46 In the operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms cumulative scenario, with Lairg 2 and Braemore also considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development will increase to a **medium-low** level. This is due to the increased wind farm influence arising from Lairg 2, with its larger turbine dimensions and extent across the view, despite its grouping with Lairg wind farm.
- 6.7.47 In the operational/under-construction plus application-stage wind farms cumulative scenario, with the application stage wind farms at Meall Buidhe and/or Strath Tirry also considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development will increase slightly due to the addition of theoretical visibility of a further wind farms, but will remain a maximum of **medium-**

low due to the very limited visibility and influence of Meall Buidhe and Strath Tirry on these central areas of the receptor.

- 6.7.48 In the operational/under-construction plus consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms cumulative scenario, the scoping wind farms at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are also considered. These sites are given less weight than application-stage wind farms as there is no certainty as of the cut-off date that they will be submitted as applications. The additional consideration of Lairg 2 Resubmission would not lead to any notable increase in the **medium-low** cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development in the previous scenario due to the minor increase in the visibility of turbines over that of the consented Lairg 2 turbines. Garvary would add a further wind farm to the scenario to which the Proposed Development would be added, but would be seen in conjunction with the group at Lairg and would not increase wind farm influence notably around the view. When Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development may increase slightly but would not increase over a **medium-low** level.
- 6.7.49 It is possible that a scenario may arise where the Proposed Development is added to one or both of the scoping sites, but the application-stage sites are no longer relevant. In this case, the consideration of Lairg 2 Resubmission and/or Garvary would not increase the cumulative magnitude of change over the **medium-low** level assessed in the operational/under-construction plus consented scenario.
- 6.7.50 Away from these central parts of the receptor, the cumulative magnitude of change will be lower than the maximum medium-low level found here. This is due to the more limited, intermittent and distant visibility of the Proposed Development and cumulative wind farms. In some areas, the Proposed Development will not notably increase wind farm influence around the setting to the receptor but will be seen in conjunction with other wind farms, thus reducing its cumulative effect.
- 6.7.51 The cumulative effect on the landscape character of *rounded hills* LCT – Loch Shin/Glen Cassley will be **not significant** in any scenario. This is due to a combination of the factors that lead to the maximum medium-low cumulative magnitude and the medium-high sensitivity of the receptor.
- 6.7.52 A combination of a medium-low cumulative magnitude of change and a medium-high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be not significant primarily due to the very limited parts of the receptor that may be notably influenced by the Proposed Development and other wind farms and the separation of the Proposed Development from other wind farms, which ensures that the influence of the Proposed Development and cumulative wind farms cannot concurrently be sufficient to lead to a significant cumulative effect.

Rounded Hills (LCT 135) - Loch Fiag Unit

- 6.7.53 The Loch Fiag unit of *rounded hills* LCT is to the north of Loch Shin and is part of a wider area of *rounded hills* LCT that links the *rugged mountain massif* LCT of Ben Hee in the west to Loch Naver and the *lone mountains* LCT of Ben Klibreck in the east. This unit of *rounded hills* LCT abuts extensive areas of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT to the north and south, forming a ridge of high ground that separates the massive expanses of moorland that cover the area north of Altnaharra in the north and Strath Tirry and Glen Fiag in the south. The high point in this unit, Creag Dhubh More (555 m), is in the north-western corner, close to Ben Hee, from where the ground drops gradually to the south and east.
- 6.7.54 The key characteristics of rounded hills as described in the 2019 dataset are quoted above in relation to *rounded hills* LCT – Loch Shin/Glen Cassley. These are generally relevant to the Loch Fiag unit, which displays little development and retains a sense of wildness.

- 6.7.55 There are no viewpoints within this LCT. However, Viewpoint 10 lies on its south-western boundary, at the boundary with *rugged mountain massif* LCT and the south-western part of *rounded hills* LCT – Loch Fiag can be seen in the outlook towards the Proposed Development from Viewpoint 12.
- 6.7.56 Operational, under construction and consented wind farms that were relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA include Creag Riabhach, which lies partly within the south-eastern end of the unit. Achany and Rosehall lie a minimum of 18.5 km to the south of the unit, while Lairg Estate and the consented Lairg 2 are to 24 km to the south-east. Braemore is 23 km to the south, and the operational Kilbraur and Extension lies over 32 km to the south-east.
- 6.7.57 The Loch Fiag unit of *rounded hills* LCT has a medium-high value; while it is not covered by any scenic designations, the majority of the unit does lie within the Foinaven-Ben Hee WLA (although it should be noted that this is not a scenic designation). The landscape also has scenic quality in its massive, exposed and elevated landform, and the link between Ben Klibreck and the western mountains is also of value.
- 6.7.58 The susceptibility of *rounded hills* LCT – Loch Fiag is medium-high. This is a remote upland landscape with little internal large scale or readily apparent built or moving development, and the external influence of the Proposed Development will contrast with this. There is also an association between the south-western part of this receptor and the landscape within which the site lies, as they lie on either side of Loch Shin, enclosing the water body. However, the large scale and simplicity of the landform and landscape patterns prevents a high susceptibility, as does the location of the Proposed Development in a part of the setting to the receptor that is already affected by external development and human influences along Loch Shin.
- 6.7.59 The combination of a medium-high susceptibility to change of the landscape and the medium-high value of the landscape results in a **medium-high** sensitivity for *rounded hills* LCT – Loch Fiag.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.60 The Proposed Development lies outwith this receptor and effects will therefore arise from changes to the way that the landscape character is perceived as a result of visibility of the Proposed Development rather than as direct physical effects on landscape character.
- 6.7.61 *Rounded hills* LCT – Loch Fiag gains theoretical hub height and blade tip visibility of the turbines in the Proposed Development from a minimum of around 4.5 km away to the north up to a maximum of around 17.5 km to the north-east. This visibility is intermittent and irregular, arising where the slopes of the hills are facing southwards, towards the site. Some parts of the Proposed Development infrastructure lie at closer proximity to the receptor than the turbines but these will not notably increase the magnitude of change arising from the turbines due to their limited visibility and accommodation into the landscape context.
- 6.7.62 Magnitude of change will vary widely across *rounded hills* LCT – Loch Fiag due to the extensive nature of the LCT and the resultant variable influence of the Proposed Development.
- 6.7.63 The highest magnitude of change will be gained from the southern extremity of the western part of the receptor, which is in closest proximity to the Proposed Development – between approximately 4.5 km and 6.5 km away. This is a small part of the receptor that covers the south-facing slopes of the distinctive landform of Cnoc a' Ghriama (371 m AOD), which lies immediately to the east of the A838 near Viewpoint 10.
- 6.7.64 Within this area, the level of change will be **medium to medium-low** with medium being found on the closer and more enclosed area, where the Proposed Development will be seen in the open part of the setting to the receptor, dropping to medium-low as on the more distant and open higher ground,

where the Proposed Development will affect a much smaller proportion of the setting to the receptor. This will arise as a result of the following considerations.

- The site area is an upland moorland landscape with limited evidence of large-scale built form or development. The presence of the Proposed Development will result in a perceptual alteration to the character of the landscape setting, arising from visibility of the colour, movement, scale, texture and form of the turbines, which are uncharacteristic of the landscape.
- The landform of this part of the receptor (Cnoc a' Ghriama) is strongly orientated towards the Proposed Development, which lies on the opposite slope of Loch Shin, and this association will increase the influence of the Proposed Development.
- The Proposed Development will appear in the open aspect of the setting to the receptor, particularly from the more enclosed lower slope where other aspects are more enclosed by landform, and this will also increase its influence.

6.7.65 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a maximum **medium** or **medium-low** level are as follows.

- There will be no direct physical effects on this receptor, and effects are perceived only.
- The key characteristics that are important in the creation of the distinctive character of *rounded hills* LCT will not be affected by the Proposed Development. Importantly, the key characteristic of “*Strong sense of wild character can be experienced within the more remote and little modified parts of this landscape*” will not be affected as this part of *rounded hills* LCT – Loch Fiag is not remote and lacks the sense of wildness that is found elsewhere due to the presence of the A838, coniferous forestry, and other elements of development.
- The distance between the Proposed Development and this part of *rounded hills* LCT – Loch Fiag will reduce its influence as the inherent character of *rounded hills* LCT will continue to prevail, along with other external influences on the receptor.

6.7.66 Around 6.5 km away from the Proposed Development, the magnitude of change will drop to a **medium-low/low, low** and then **negligible** level. This reduction in the level of change results from various factors including the reduction in the extent of the setting that will be affected by the Proposed Development so that the turbines become a less notable external influence on landscape character; the increased distance between the Proposed Development and these parts of the receptor; the relatively low elevation of the turbines, which ensures that they will not appear as prominent vertical features; and the increasing importance of other influences on landscape character as the Proposed Development decreases in influence.

6.7.67 Extensive parts of the receptor are shown to gain no visibility of the Proposed Development due to landform screening, and there will be no change on these areas.

Significance of the Effect

6.7.68 The effect of the Proposed Development on the landscape character of *rounded hills* LCT – Loch Fiag will vary. The effect on the great majority of the receptor will be not significant due to a combination of the factors considered in the **medium-high** sensitivity of the receptor and the maximum **medium-low/low** magnitude of change upon it. However, the effect on the very small part of the receptor that covers the southern slopes of Cnoc a' Ghriama and lies closest to the site – between around 4.5 km and 6.5 km away - will be **significant** due to a combination of the factors considered in the medium-high sensitivity of the receptor and the medium to medium-low magnitude of change upon it.

6.7.69 A combination of a medium-low magnitude of change and a medium-high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect on the part of the receptor that has

a medium-low magnitude of change is judged to be significant largely due to of the orientation of landform towards the Proposed Development and the appearance of the Proposed Development in the open aspect of the setting to the receptor.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

- 6.7.70 The location of operational and consented wind farms within and around this receptor is described in the baseline description above. In addition to these wind farms, application-stage sites at Meall Buidhe, Strath Tirry and South Kilbraur lie at 28 km to the south and 13.8 km and 33 km to the south-east respectively. The scoping sites at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are 26 km and 24 km respectively to the south-east. Braemore, Lairg, Kilbraur and Extension, Meall Buidhe, and South Kilbraur have been discounted from the assessment due to the limited and very distant theoretical visibility of these sites.
- 6.7.71 Other than Creag Riabhach, the relevant cumulative wind farms of all statuses lie to the south and south-east of this receptor, and are contained within a limited part of the setting to the receptor (approximately 35°). The southern and south-eastern sites have limited and distant visibility from, and influence on the receptor, gained largely from the upper south- and south-east-facing slopes in the southern part of the receptor. The great majority of the northern and lower areas of the receptor will gain no influence of wind farms, including the Proposed Development.
- 6.7.72 Creag Riabhach, which lies partly within the south-eastern corner of the receptor, has a slightly different pattern of visibility and will have more influence on the eastern area and east-facing slopes.
- 6.7.73 There are four potential cumulative scenarios to which the Proposed Development may be added: operational/under-construction wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented and application-stage wind farms; and operational/under-construction plus consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms.
- 6.7.74 The cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development in any scenario will vary across the receptor. The highest cumulative magnitude of change in any scenario will arise in two areas: firstly, the ‘finger’ that extends south-eastwards from the main body of the receptor, forming the eastern side of Glen Fiag and covering the distinctive landform of Cnoc a’ Mhaoll Rhuaidh, Cnoc Allt an Ulbhaidh; and secondly, the southern slopes of Cnoc Maol na Cloiche Gile, which lies to the west of Glen Fiag.
- 6.7.75 These areas lie between the Proposed Development and Creag Riabhach, and are shown on the cumulative ZTVs to gain intermittent visibility of both wind farms, as well as very distant and limited visibility of the group of sites that lies to the south/south-east. In these areas, the addition of the Proposed Development to the cumulative scenario will introduce wind farm influence to the south-western aspect of the setting, adding to the influence of Creag Riabhach to the north-east and the distant and limited influence of the other sites to the south-east.
- 6.7.76 In the operational/under-construction cumulative scenario, the addition of the Proposed Development to varying levels of influence of Achany, Creag Riabhach and Rosehall will have a maximum **low/medium-low** cumulative magnitude of change on these parts of the receptor. This arises from visibility of the Proposed Development to the south-west while other wind farms are seen primarily to the north-east but also the south-east, and thus leads to a wind farm being theoretically visible on three sides of the receptor. It is limited to a low/medium-low level by the very intermittent nature of the effect; the very limited and relatively distant visibility of the south-eastern cumulative wind farms; the restricted turbine size of Achany and Rosehall, the very small proportion of the view that they will occupy; the retention of the northern, western and north-eastern aspects of the receptor with no wind energy influence; and the similar landscape setting of Achany, Creag Riabhach,

Rosehall and the Proposed Development within *rounded hills* LCT. The not significant influence of the Proposed Development is also relevant.

- 6.7.77 In the operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms cumulative scenario, with Lairg 2 also considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development will increase to a **medium-low** level. This is due to the increased wind farm influence arising from Lairg 2, with its larger turbine dimensions and extent across the view, which ensures that the south/south-eastern group of sites will have an increased influence.
- 6.7.78 In the operational/under-construction plus application-stage wind farms cumulative scenario, with the application stage wind farm at Strath Tirry also considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development will increase slightly due to the addition of theoretical visibility of a further wind farm, but will remain a maximum of **medium-low** due to the very limited and relatively distant visibility and influence of Strath Tirry on these areas of the receptor.
- 6.7.79 In the operational/under-construction plus consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms cumulative scenario, the scoping wind farms at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are also considered. These sites are given less weight than application-stage wind farms as there is no certainty as to the cut-off date that they will be submitted as applications. The additional consideration of Lairg 2 Resubmission would not lead to any notable increase in the **medium-low** cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development in the previous scenario due to the minor increase in the visibility of turbines over that of the consented Lairg 2 turbines. Garvary would add a further wind farm to the scenario to which the Proposed Development would be added, but would be seen in conjunction with the group at Lairg and would not increase wind farm influence notably around the view. When Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development may increase slightly but would not increase over a **medium-low** level.
- 6.7.80 It is possible that a scenario may arise where the Proposed Development is added to one or both of the scoping sites, but the application-stage sites are no longer relevant. In this case, the consideration of Lairg 2 Resubmission and/or Garvary would not increase the cumulative magnitude of change over the **medium-low** level assessed in the operational/under-construction plus consented scenario.
- 6.7.81 Away from these two specific parts of the receptor, the cumulative magnitude of change will be lower than the maximum medium-low level found here. This is often due to lack of visibility of the Proposed Development and/or cumulative wind farms, and where there is visibility, the increasingly more limited, intermittent and distant visibility of the Proposed Development and cumulative wind farms.
- 6.7.82 The cumulative effect on the landscape character of *rounded hills* LCT – Loch Fiag will be **not significant** in any scenario. This is due to a combination of the factors that lead to the maximum medium-low cumulative magnitude and the medium-high sensitivity of the receptor.
- 6.7.83 A combination of a medium-low cumulative magnitude of change and a medium-high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be not significant primarily due to the very limited parts of the receptor that may be notably influenced by the Proposed Development and other wind farms and the separation of the Proposed Development from other wind farms, which ensures that the influence of the Proposed Development and cumulative wind farms cannot concurrently be sufficient to lead to a significant cumulative effect.

Rugged Mountain Massif (LCT 139) - Ben More/Ben Hee Unit

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.84 The Ben More/Ben Hee unit of the *rugged mountain massif* LCT forms a rough arc to the west of the site with Ben Hee in the north, Ben More in the south and Ben Leoid at the centre. The unit has been

defined on the basis of this crescent of enclosing elevated landform that wraps around the head of Loch Shin, and the site area, and the resultant level of influence of the Proposed Development that may be gained.

6.7.85 *Rugged mountain massif* LCT, which is found in the north-western part of the study area, comprises elevated mountains of massive scale with a rugged, irregular and complex form. The Ben More/Ben Hee unit covers the south-eastern part of a vast area of *rugged mountain massif* LCT that extends from Foinaven in the north to Breabag in the south. The southern and eastern boundaries of this unit abut *rounded hills* LCT and *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT, including the Loch Shin/Glen Cassley unit of *rounded hills* LCT within which the site lies.

6.7.86 The key characteristics of *rugged mountain massif* LCT are described in the 2019 dataset. The majority of these are relevant to the Ben More/Ben Hee unit, and are quoted below.

- *“Mountains with very steep slopes which are often covered in scree and commonly feature narrow rocky ridges, buttresses, crags and pronounced peaks.*
- *High, generally lying above 800m.*
- *Different geology associated with each mountain group influencing their character.*
- *Deeply indented sea lochs of Lochs Glendhu and Glencoul and a number of sheer-sided glens, cut into the mountains of north-west Sutherland, generally orientated on long north-west to south-east fault lines.*
- *Dark, narrow lochs within some of the north-west Sutherland mountain glens.*
- *Mountain peaks form landmarks, rising above the interlocking mass of lower slopes and distinguished by their height, distinctive and recognisable profile.*
- *Largely uninhabited and difficult to access. The small number of settlements and roads which do exist tend to be located at the edges of this character type and at the intersection of a strath or loch.*
- *Interior of this landscape is mainly visited by hill walkers and deer stalkers.*
- *Limited visibility within the glens which lie between or at the foot of these mountains, due to their steepness of slope and immense size.*
- *Extensive views of the surrounding landscape and an exhilarating experience of openness and exposure from mountain ridges and summits.*
- *Natural unmodified character of the high mountains, with their remoteness, ruggedness, and difficulty of access, creating a strong wild character.”*

6.7.87 The description also includes the following specific comments in relation to the Ben More/Ben Hee unit:

“Quartzite scree on the sheer south-west flanks of Foinaven and Arkle and on the upper slopes of Ben More Assynt give these mountains a characteristically pale grey colour. The physical characteristics of these massif areas varies. The Foinaven massif has a complex form of...long, rocky narrow ridges and spurs, deeply scooped corries and many pronounced tops. Ben Hee and Ben Leoid have more rounded forms in views from the east, but with a massive scale. These are much rougher and rocky from their western aspect, and close association with the more irregular high mountain peaks.”

“There is a stronger landscape contrast however in the east where the lower-lying, expansive and simpler Sweeping Moorland and Flows abuts the high rugged mountains which stretch from Foinaven to Ben More Assynt.”

“There are dramatic views of the western Rugged Mountain Massif – Caithness & Sutherland from the A838, although some of the interior mountains are more hidden from view. This mountainous area is also seen to great effect across a foreground of smooth, low-lying Sweeping Moorland and Flows from the A836.”

- 6.7.88 While the majority of this unit does display the characteristic “*natural unmodified character of the high mountains, with their remoteness, ruggedness, and difficulty of access, creating a strong wild character*”, the character of the eastern periphery of the unit is modified by nearby elements of development, including the A838 corridor, coniferous forest, and general development along Loch Shin.
- 6.7.89 Viewpoints 2, 3, 11 and 12 lie within this receptor. Viewpoints 2 and 12 represent views from key summits – Ben More Assynt and Ben Hee respectively - while Viewpoints 3 and 11 are lower-level and show the view from within Coire Ceann Loch and from the A838 west of Ben Hee respectively. Viewpoint 23 (Arkle) is located at the northern end of the wider area of *rugged mountain massif* LCT.
- 6.7.90 At the time of the April 2021 LVIA, there were no operational, under construction or consented wind farms within the Ben More/Ben Hee unit of *rugged mountain massif* LCT, or within the wider area of *rugged mountain massif* LCT. The closest operational or under construction wind farm is Creag Riabhach, 8.5 km to the east. There is a more distant group to the south-east, including Achany and Rosehall, around 17 km away; Braemore, 22 km away; and Lairg and Lairg 2 just over 28 km away.
- 6.7.91 The Ben More/Ben Hee unit of *rugged mountain massif* LCT has a high value; the western part of the unit is within the Assynt-Coigach NSA and the majority lies within the Foinaven-Ben Hee and Reay-Cassley WLAs. The landscape has notable scenic quality in its distinctive landscape characteristics and the enclosure and contrast provided by the mountains to the adjacent *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT (as quoted above from the NatureScot landscape description). The recreational use of this landscape by hillwalkers also contributes to its value.
- 6.7.92 The susceptibility of the Ben More/Ben Hee unit of *rugged mountain massif* LCT is medium-high. This is a distinctive and undeveloped, remote upland landscape with no internal large-scale built or moving development, and the external influence of the Proposed Development will contrast with this. However, the Proposed Development will be seen in an aspect of the setting to *rugged mountain massif* LCT that is affected by baseline human influences, including more distant wind farm development and the roads, buildings and forestry along Loch Shin, and this tempers susceptibility to a medium-high level as the Proposed Development will be seen in this context. It is also relevant that *rugged mountain massif* LCT does not have a specific association with the site area, and is characterised primarily by its innate landscape elements and patterns.
- 6.7.93 The combination of a medium-high susceptibility to change and the high value of the landscape results in a **high** sensitivity for the Ben More/Ben Hee unit of *rugged mountain massif* LCT.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.94 The turbines and majority of infrastructure of the Proposed Development lie outwith this receptor and effects will therefore almost all arise from changes to the way that the landscape character is perceived as a result of visibility of the Proposed Development rather than as direct physical effects on landscape character. There is, however, one short stretch of upgraded access track (approximately 2 km long) just within the southern extremity of the unit, at the head of Loch Shin. This is the section of track that runs from the Loch a' Ghriama/Loch Shin bridge crossing in the east to the Abhainn a'

Choire burn crossing in the west. Along this stretch of the upgraded track, there will be physical effects as well as perceived effects.

- 6.7.95 The Ben More/Ben Hee unit of *rugged mountain massif* LCT gains theoretical hub height and blade tip visibility of the turbines in the Proposed Development from a minimum of around 4.5 km away to the north up to a maximum of around 15 km to the north-east. This visibility is intermittent and irregular, arising at high points and where the slopes of the mountains are facing towards the site.
- 6.7.96 Magnitude of change will vary widely across *rugged mountain massif* LCT – Ben More/Ben Hee due to the extensive nature of the LCT, its rugged, massive landform and the resultant variable influence of the Proposed Development.
- 6.7.97 The highest magnitude of change will arise on three areas within the inner arc of the unit, to the north and west of the Proposed Development. These are the steeply rising southern slopes of Sron na Garbh Uidh, which encloses the western side of Loch a’ Ghriama, to the north of the Proposed Development; the lower east-facing slopes of Ben More Assynt, to the west of the Proposed Development; and the incised glen of Coire Ceann Loch, to the north-west of the Proposed Development.
- 6.7.98 The first two of these areas - Sron na Garbh Uidh and the lower east-facing slopes of Ben More Assynt - lie between approximately 4.5 km and 7 km away from the nearest turbine in the Proposed Development. The third area - Coire Ceann Loch – is further away, extending up to around 8.2 km away from the nearest turbine; in this area, the influence of the turbines extends for a greater distance due to the channelling of landform towards the Proposed Development and the more enclosed, focused nature of this influence, as the wider setting of *rugged mountain massif* LCT is not so apparent as on the open, upper slopes.
- 6.7.99 Within these areas, the level of change will be **medium** to **medium-low** with medium being found on the closer and more enclosed area, where the Proposed Development will be seen in the open part of the setting to the receptor, dropping to medium-low as on the more distant and open higher ground, where the Proposed Development will affect a much smaller proportion of the setting to the receptor. This will arise as a result of the following considerations.
- The landform of these parts of the receptor is orientated towards the Proposed Development and this association will increase the external influence of the Proposed Development.
 - The Proposed Development will result in perceived effects on the mountainous upland character of this landscape through the addition of the external influence of new, unfamiliar features, primarily the turbines, which will provide a visible influence of uncharacteristic elements in terms of movement, materials, colour, and structures.
 - While the key characteristics that are important in the creation of the distinctive character of *rugged mountain massif* LCT will not be notably affected by the Proposed Development, there is likely to be some effect on the key characteristic of “*Natural unmodified character of the high mountains, with their remoteness, ruggedness, and difficulty of access, creating a strong wild character*”. This effect will, however, be moderated by the appearance of the Proposed Development in what is already a more developed and less remote or wild aspect of the views available.
 - The Proposed Development is also likely to affect some of the “*dramatic views of the western Rugged Mountain Massif...from the A838*” and, at a greater distance, views of “*this mountainous area...seen to great effect across a foreground of smooth, low-lying Sweeping Moorland and Flows from the A836*”.
 - The Proposed Development will appear in the open aspect of the setting to the receptor, particularly from the more enclosed lower slopes, and this will also increase its influence.

- The 2 km stretch of upgraded access track lies within this part of the receptor, at the foot of Sron na Garbh Uidh, and there will therefore also be a minor physical effect on this part of the landscape.
 - In Coire Ceann Loch, the channelling of landform to the south-east reduces the open aspect across the wider *rugged mountain massif* LCT which elsewhere dilutes the influence of the Proposed Development, thus increasing the influence of the turbines as they are seen in the open aspect of the setting.
- 6.7.100 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a maximum **medium** or **medium-low** level are as follows.
- There will be no direct physical effects on this receptor other than the minor effect of access track upgrading, and the great majority of effects are perceived only.
 - The key characteristics that are important in the creation of the distinctive character of *rounded hills* will not be notably affected by the Proposed Development. Importantly, the key characteristic of “*Extensive views of the surrounding landscape and an exhilarating experience of openness and exposure from mountain ridges and summits*” will not be affected as these peripheral parts of *rugged mountain massif* LCT do not include “*mountain ridges and summits*”, but are the relatively low-lying outer slopes of the LCT.
 - The Proposed Development will be seen in a relatively unremarkable part of the setting to *rugged mountain massif* LCT and not in the context of the massive, dramatic mountainous interior which is seen in other directions. The Proposed Development is also seen in the most developed aspect of the setting to the receptor, with external and internal human influences such as the A838, coniferous forestry, hydro-electric infrastructure all apparent, and this reduces its contrast with baseline landscape character and influences.
 - The distance between the Proposed Development and these parts of *rugged mountain massif* LCT reduces its influence as the very strong inherent character of the receptor will continue to prevail, along with other external influences on the receptor.
- 6.7.101 Viewpoint 3 is located in one of the these three areas, at the upper end of Coire Ceann Loch, and illustrates how the landform of the glen reduces the open aspect of the setting to the receptor, thereby increasing the influence of the Proposed Development. The magnitude of change on the landscape character in the glen, around this viewpoint, will be at the lower end of a **medium-low** level for the reasons described above.
- 6.7.102 Around 7 km away from the Proposed Development (or 8.2 km in the case of the Coire Ceann Loch area), the magnitude of change will drop to a **low** and then **negligible** level. This reduction in the level of change results from various factors including the continuous increase in the influence of the more dramatic parts of the *rugged mountain massif* LCT that lie to the north and west; the opening up of views, including panoramic views from summits and ridges, so that the proportion of the setting affected by the Proposed Development notably reduces; the increased distance between the Proposed Development and these parts of the receptor; and the relatively low elevation of the turbines, which ensures that they will not appear as prominent vertical features.
- 6.7.103 Viewpoint 2 (Ben More Assynt) lies within this area, just under 8.5 km to the west of the Proposed Development. This view illustrates how the extensive and open wider LCT of *rugged mountain massif*, which extends to the north, south and west, provides the key setting to this part of the unit, while the Proposed Development affects only a small, relatively developed proportion of the setting so that the wider *rugged mountain massif* landscape characteristics of the receptor remain prevalent.

- 6.7.104 Extensive parts of the receptor are shown to gain no visibility of the Proposed Development due to landform screening, and there will be no change on these areas.

Significance of the Effect

- 6.7.105 The effect of the Proposed Development on the landscape character of *rugged mountain massif* LCT – Ben More/Ben Hee will vary. The effect on the great majority of the receptor will be not significant due to the factors considered in the maximum low magnitude of change despite the high sensitivity of the receptor. However, the effect on the small part of the receptor that covers the southern slopes of Sron na Garbh Uidh, the lower east-facing slopes of Ben More Assynt, and Coire Ceann Loch, and lies between around 4.5 km and 7 km away from the nearest turbine in the Proposed Development (8.2 km in the case of Coire Ceann Loch) will be **significant** due to a combination of the factors considered in the high sensitivity of the receptor and the medium to medium-low magnitude of change upon it.
- 6.7.106 A combination of a medium-low magnitude of change and a high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect on the part of the receptor that has a medium-low magnitude of change is judged to be significant largely due to of the orientation of landform towards the Proposed Development and the contrast that the Proposed Development will have with the character of the receptor.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

- 6.7.107 The location of operational and consented wind farms within and around this receptor is described in the baseline description above. In addition to these wind farms, application-stage sites at Meall Buidhe and Strath Tirry lie at 20 km and 23 km respectively to the south-east. The scoping sites at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are 29 km and 28 km respectively to the south-east.
- 6.7.108 Other than Creag Riabhach, the relevant cumulative wind farms of all statuses lie to the south-east of this receptor, and are contained within a limited part of the setting to the receptor, as seen at Viewpoints 2 and 12. These south-eastern sites have limited and distant visibility from, and influence on, the receptor. gained largely from high points and upper south-east-facing slopes. The majority of the receptor will gain no influence of wind farms, including the Proposed Development. Creag Riabhach, which lies to the east, has a similar pattern of visibility.
- 6.7.109 There are four potential cumulative scenarios to which the Proposed Development may be added: operational/under-construction wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented and application-stage wind farms; and operational/under-construction plus consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms.
- 6.7.110 In the operational/under-construction cumulative scenario, the addition of the Proposed Development to operational and under-construction wind farms at Achany, Rosehall, Lairg and Creag Riabhach will have a will have a **low** cumulative magnitude of change. This arises from the introduction of the Proposed Development as an additional, closer, wind farm influence on the receptor, and is limited by the distant visibility of the operational/under-construction wind farms; their relatively restricted turbine size, and the very small proportion of the setting to the receptor that will be occupied by them; the small number of wind farms (with Achany and Rosehall appearing as a single wind farm) that may contribute to the cumulative effect; the similar landscape setting of all of the sites within or partly within *rounded hills* LCT; and the containment of the Proposed Development and cumulative wind farms within the southern/eastern aspect of the setting so that the Proposed Development will not introduce wind farm influence to an entirely new aspect of the receptor. This last point also ensures that the great majority of the setting remains without wind farm influence, including the dramatic and eye-catching mountainous NSA landscape that lies to the north and west of the receptor.

- 6.7.111 In the operational/under-construction plus consented-stage wind farms cumulative scenario, with Braemore and Lairg 2 also considered, the cumulative magnitude of change will increase to a **medium-low** level due to additional wind farm visibility and the larger scale of the Lairg 2 turbines. Wind farm influence is, however retained within the south-eastern aspect of the setting to the receptor, and this combines with the limited and distant cumulative wind farm influence to limit the increase in cumulative magnitude of change.
- 6.7.112 In the operational/under-construction plus consented and application-stage wind farms cumulative scenario, the application stage wind farms at Meall Buidhe and Strath Tirry are also considered. The additional consideration of either of these sites would not lead to any notable increase in the **medium-low** cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development due to their limited and distant influence and location in the south-eastern aspect of the setting, where they are grouped with other wind farms.
- 6.7.113 In the operational/under-construction plus consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms cumulative scenario, the scoping wind farms at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are also considered. These sites are given less weight than application-stage wind farms as there is no certainty as to the cut-off date that they will be submitted as applications. The additional consideration of Lairg 2 Resubmission would not lead to any notable increase in the **medium-low** cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development due to the minor increase in the visibility of turbines over that of the consented Lairg 2 turbines. Garvary would add a further wind farm to the scenario to which the Proposed Development would be added, but would be seen in conjunction with the group at Lairg and would not increase wind farm influence any further around the view. When Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development may increase slightly but would not increase over a **medium-low** level.
- 6.7.114 The cumulative effect on the landscape character of *rugged mountain massif* LCT – Ben More/Ben Hee will be **not significant** in any scenario. This is due to the factors that lead to the maximum medium-low cumulative magnitude despite the high sensitivity of the receptor.
- 6.7.115 A combination of a medium-low cumulative magnitude of change and a high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be not significant for a number of reasons, including the relatively distant visibility of all cumulative wind farms and their grouping together (along with the Proposed Development) within the southern/eastern aspect of the setting to the receptor; the resultant retention of the great majority of the setting without wind farm influence, including the dramatic mountainous NSA landscape that lies to the north and west; and the low elevation of the cumulative wind farms and the Proposed Development in relation to much of the landscape, which precludes prominent visibility and reduces vertical impact, ensuring that the turbines form a subservient external influence on landscape character.

Sweeping Moorland and Flows (LCT 134) - Crask/ Overscaig Unit

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.116 *Sweeping moorland and flows* LCT is a flat or gently undulating landscape that weaves around other LCTS – most often *rounded hills* LCT - in the study area. The transition between these two LCTs is generally subtle and gradual. The Crask/Overscaig unit of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT borders the northern edge of Loch Shin, covering the swathe of low-lying land that lies between the higher and more dramatic landform of the Loch Fiag and Loch Shin/Glen Cassley units of *rounded hills* LCT.
- 6.7.117 The Crask/Overscaig unit occupies the central western part of a very extensive and irregular area of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT that extends from the north coast down to Rogart. The A836 runs through the eastern part of this unit while the A838 passes along the south-western edge. The unit has been defined on the basis of its relationship to Loch Shin and the Loch Shin/Glen Cassley unit of

rounded hills LCT, which encloses it to the south and within which the site lies. Other areas of *sweeping moorland and flows* have less specific association with the Proposed Development in terms of location and landform orientation.

6.7.118 The key characteristics of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT are described in the 2019 dataset. These are largely relevant to the Crask/Overscaig unit, and these are quoted below.

- *“Gently sloping or undulating landform which lies generally below 350 metres.*
- *Occasional isolated hills of limited height form local landmark features.*
- *Lochs and mature, meandering rivers.*
- *Very distinct flora, dominated by sphagnum mosses, produced by the wetness and infertility of the flows.*
- *Areas of peat cuttings and haggling.*
- *Pockets of improved grazing, mainly within the outer fringes of sweeping moorland.*
- *Coniferous forest forming a dominant characteristic within some parts of this landscape character type.*
- *Ribbons of broadleaf woodland occasionally run along the water courses and loch edges.*
- *Very sparsely settled with dispersed crofts, farms and estate buildings largely found on the outer edges of this landscape or near a strath.*
- *Vehicular tracks within parts of the landscape.*
- *Wind farms, transmission lines, the A9 and a network of minor roads are key features within the more modified outer fringes within Caithness.*
- *Long, low and largely uninterrupted skylines offering extensive views across this landscape and result in a feeling of huge space.*
- *Consistent views to the distant Lone Mountains and Rugged Mountain Massif – Caithness & Sutherland.*
- *Great sense of exposure on areas of flat peatland on upland plateau.*
- *A strong sense of remoteness is associated within the largely uninhabited, inaccessible core flows and moorlands of this landscape.”*

6.7.119 The description also includes the following specific comments in relation to this unit.

- *“...Single track roads, such as the A836, cut through areas of sweeping moorland in the west.”*
- *“Views from the...A836 and from the A838 across the low-lying moorland of A’Mhoine to the distant mountains are particularly dramatic.”*

6.7.120 While these characteristics are broadly applicable to the unit, there are several factors that locally alter its character. The south-western periphery displays a greater level of development than other parts, due to residential development at Overscaig and West Shinness on the shore of Loch Shin as well as the A838 corridor and power lines. Coniferous forestry also affects the northern part of this edge. In the eastern part of the unit, the A836 in reduces the sense of remoteness and exposure due to the appearance and noise of traffic. This influence of human development affects not only the area immediately along the road but also more distant areas that may otherwise be perceived as very remote, such as Cnoc an Alaskie (Viewpoint 13). Extensive commercial forestry and deforestation operations also affect the perception of remoteness and inaccessibility of this landscape.

- 6.7.121 These factors ensure that the characteristic “*very sparsely settled with dispersed crofts, farms and estate buildings largely found on the outer edges of this landscape or near a strath*” does not apply to the south-western periphery, where there is more clustered and less sparse settlement. It is also the case that the characteristic “*a strong sense of remoteness is associated within the largely uninhabited, inaccessible core flows and moorlands of this landscape*” is not apparent on this periphery due to the level of development. The A836 corridor also affects this characteristic in the eastern part of the unit.
- 6.7.122 Viewpoints 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 17 and 18 lie within this receptor.
- 6.7.123 Operational, under construction and consented wind farms that were relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA include Creag Riabhach, which lies partly within the north-eastern corner of this unit of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT, with sites at Achany, Braemore, Lairg, Lairg 2 and Rosehall a minimum of 8.3 km, 10.5 km, 11 km, 11.5 km and 8 km away to the south and south-east. The more distant operational wind farm at Kilbraur and Extension is a minimum of approximately 24 km away to the east.
- 6.7.124 The Crask/Overscaig unit of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT has a medium value; it is not covered by any scenic designations and contains elements of development and human influence, although an area in the northern part lies within the Foinaven-Ben Hee WLA (although it should be noted that this is not a scenic designation). The landscape also has some scenic quality in its landscape characteristics and contrast with the surrounding hill landscapes. Recreational use of tracks and paths also contributes to the medium value.
- 6.7.125 The susceptibility of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT - Crask/Overscaig unit is medium-high. This is a distinctive, sometimes remote, landscape and the Proposed Development will contrast with this. Moreover, the south-western part of this landscape has a visual association with the site as landform is orientated across Loch Shin, towards the Proposed Development. However, the development that is found along the south-western periphery provides a baseline influence of development in this area and the large scale and simplicity of the landform prevents a higher susceptibility, as does the human influence of coniferous forestry.
- 6.7.126 The combination of a medium-high susceptibility to change of the landscape and the medium value of the landscape results in a **medium-high** sensitivity for sweeping moorland and flows – Crask/Overscaig.
- Magnitude of Change*
- 6.7.127 The turbines and majority of infrastructure of the Proposed Development lie outwith this receptor and effects will therefore almost all arise from changes to the way that the landscape character is perceived as a result of visibility of the Proposed Development rather than as direct physical effects on landscape character. There is, however, one short stretch of upgraded access track (approximately 900 m long) just within the western extremity of the unit, at the head of Loch Shin. This is the section of track that runs between the A838 in the east and a point around 100 m east of the Loch a’ Ghriama/Loch Shin bridge crossing in the west. Along this stretch of the upgraded track, there will be physical effects as well as perceived effects.
- 6.7.128 The Crask/Overscaig unit of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT gains theoretical hub height and blade tip visibility of the turbines in the Proposed Development from a minimum of around 2 km away to the north-east up to a maximum of around 16 km, also to the north-east. This visibility is irregular, arising at high points and where the gentle moorland slopes are facing towards the site.
- 6.7.129 Magnitude of change will vary widely across the Crask/Overscaig unit of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT due to the extensive nature of the LCT, its irregular landform and the resultant variable influence of the Proposed Development.

- 6.7.130 The highest magnitude of change will be on the area that is closest to the Proposed Development, on the northern side of Loch Shin opposite the site, where a pronounced slope rises from the lochside between around 2 km and 4-4.5 km away from the turbines. The maximum level of change on this area will be **medium-high** to **medium** although a large part of this slope is currently covered by coniferous forestry, and the effect on the character of these areas will be **negligible**. The A838 runs through this area, and the houses and hotel at Overscaig also lie within it.
- 6.7.131 Viewpoints 8 and 9 lie in this area and illustrate the type of visibility of the Proposed Development that may be gained.
- 6.7.132 The **medium-high** or **medium** magnitude of change arises from the following considerations.
- The Proposed Development will result in perceived effects on the baseline moorland character through the addition of the external influence of new, unfamiliar features, primarily the turbines, that provide a visible influence of uncharacteristic elements in terms of movement, materials, colour, and structures.
 - The landform of this part of the receptor is orientated towards the Proposed Development and this association will increase the external influence of the Proposed Development.
 - While the key characteristics that are important in the creation of the distinctive character of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT will not be notably affected by the Proposed Development, there is likely to be some effect on the key characteristic of “*Long, low and largely uninterrupted skylines offering extensive views across this landscape and result in a feeling of huge space*” as the Proposed Development will be seen in some views across the landscape. This effect will, however, be moderated by the location of the Proposed Development outwith this LCT and the peripheral location of this part of the LCT, which means that the Proposed Development will not be seen in long open views within and across the LCT.
 - The Proposed Development is also likely to have some effect on the key characteristic “*Consistent views to the distant Lone Mountains and Rugged Mountain Massif*” and the “*Great sense of exposure on areas of flat peatland on upland plateau*”, although again this effect will be moderated by the location of the Proposed Development outwith this LCT and the peripheral location of this part of the LCT.
 - The Proposed Development will appear in the open aspect of the setting to the receptor, and this will also increase its influence.
 - The short stretch of upgraded access track lies within this part of the receptor and there will therefore be a minor physical effect on this part of the landscape.
- 6.7.133 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a **medium-high** or **medium** level are as follows.
- There will be no direct physical effects on this receptor other than the minor effect of access track upgrading, and the great majority of effects are perceived only.
 - The key characteristics that are important in the creation of the distinctive character of *rounded hills* LCT will not be notably affected by the Proposed Development. Importantly, the key characteristic of “*Views from the...A838 across the low-lying moorland of A’Mhoine to the distant mountains are particularly dramatic*” will not be affected as the Proposed Development will not be seen in such views.
 - This part of *sweeping moorland and flows* does not display “*the strong sense of remoteness [that] is associated within the largely uninhabited, inaccessible core flows and moorlands of this landscape*” and this reduces its contrast with baseline landscape character and influences.

- The generally large, sweeping scale, simplicity and lack of enclosure that characterise the receptor prevent the occurrence of uncomfortable scale comparisons.
 - The Proposed Development will be seen across the waterbody of Loch Shin, which creates a sense of separation between the receptor and the turbines, thus avoiding a sense of encroachment.
- 6.7.134 At around 4.5-5 km away from the turbines, the slope that rises from the loch opposite the site flattens out before dropping to the valley of the Strath Duchally Burn, and there is a break in theoretical visibility. The landform of Glen Fiag also screens visibility. However, theoretical visibility continues to the south-east where the locally prominent landform of Cnoc an Ulbhaidh rises to the east of Glen Fiag, and the magnitude of change on the south-western shoulder of this landform will be **medium** due to its orientation towards the Proposed Development. This area extends up to around 6 km from the nearest turbine.
- 6.7.135 Around 4.5-5 km away from the Proposed Development (or 6 km in the case of Cnoc an Ulbhaidh), the magnitude of change will drop to a **medium-low, low** and then **negligible** level. This reduction in the level of change results from various factors including the change in landform orientation so that it no longer faces towards the site; the opening up of views, including panoramic views from high points, so that the proportion of the setting affected by the Proposed Development notably reduces; the increased distance between the Proposed Development and these parts of the receptor; the visual and perceived separation afforded by the waterbody of Loch Shin; and the relatively low elevation of the turbines, which ensures that they will not appear as prominent vertical features. Visibility also becomes intermittent and more limited, with screening of turbine towers by landform in some views. Viewpoints 7, 13, 14, 17 and 18 all demonstrate varying combinations of these factors.

Significance of the Effect

- 6.7.136 The effect of the Proposed Development on the landscape character of the Crask/Overscaig unit of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT will vary. The effect on the great majority of the receptor will be **not significant** due to a combination of the factors considered in the medium-high sensitivity of the receptor and the maximum medium-low magnitude of change. However, the effect on the landscape character of the part of the receptor that covers the northern side of Loch Shin, opposite the Proposed Development, will be **significant** due to a combination of the factors considered in the medium-high sensitivity of the receptor and the medium-high to medium magnitude of change upon it. This area covers the slope that drops to the loch, facing towards the site, and lies between around 2 km and 4.5-5 km away from the nearest turbine in the Proposed Development (6 km in the case of Cnoc an Ulbhaidh).
- 6.7.137 It should be noted that much of this slope is currently covered with coniferous forestry, and the effect on these areas will be **not significant**. This may change in future should the forestry be felled.
- 6.7.138 A combination of a medium-low magnitude of change and a medium-high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect on the part of the receptor that has a medium-low magnitude of change is judged to be not significant due to the lack of specific orientation of landform towards the Proposed Development; the peripheral setting of the Proposed Development in relation to the landscape; the other influences on landscape character that become more apparent as distance from the Proposed Development increases (particularly the *rugged mountain massif* LCT); and the separation afforded by Loch Shin.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

- 6.7.139 The location of operational and consented wind farms within and around this receptor is described in the baseline description above. In addition to these wind farms, application-stage sites at Meall

Buidhe, South Kilbraur and Strath Tirry lie at 18.4 km, 24 km and 1.6 km respectively to the south and south-east. The scoping sites at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are 12.5 km and 11.5 km respectively to the south-east.

- 6.7.140 Kilbraur and Extension, Kilbraur South and Meall Buidhe have been discounted from the assessment due to their very limited and distant theoretical visibility from the receptor.
- 6.7.141 Other than Creag Riabhach, the relevant cumulative wind farms of all statuses lie to the south and south-east of this receptor, and are contained within a limited part of the setting to the receptor, as seen at Viewpoints 13, 17 and 18. These southern and south-eastern sites generally have limited and distant visibility from, and influence on, the majority of the receptor, gained largely from high points and south/south-east-facing slopes. The majority of the receptor will gain no influence of wind farms, including the Proposed Development. Creag Riabhach, which lies to the north, has a different pattern of visibility, being seen largely from high points and north- and north-east-facing slopes.
- 6.7.142 There are four potential cumulative scenarios to which the Proposed Development may be added: operational/under-construction wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented and application-stage wind farms; and operational/under-construction plus consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms.
- 6.7.143 The cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development in any scenario will vary across the receptor. The highest cumulative magnitude of change in any scenario will arise on the central part of the receptor, around Cnoc an Alaskie (Viewpoint 13) and Cnoc an Fheoir Mhaol. These two landforms are local high points and have a distinctive rounded shape in the context of the more open and irregular *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT.
- 6.7.144 The relevance of these landforms is that they lie between the Proposed Development and Creag Riabhach, with both wind farms potentially seen at a proximity where they may influence landscape character, and are shown on the cumulative ZTVs to gain intermittent visibility of both the Proposed Development and Creag Riabhach, as well as distant and limited visibility of the group of sites that lies to the south/south-east. In these areas, the addition of the Proposed Development to the cumulative scenario will introduce wind farm influence to the south-western aspect of the setting, adding to the influence of Creag Riabhach to the north-east and the distant and limited influence of the other sites to the south and south-east.
- 6.7.145 In the operational/under-construction cumulative scenario, the addition of the Proposed Development to varying levels of influence from Achany, Creag Riabhach, Lairg and Rosehall will have a maximum **medium-low** cumulative magnitude of change on these parts of the receptor. This arises from visibility of the Proposed Development to the south-west while other wind farms are seen primarily to the north-east but also the south-east, and thus leads to a wind farm being theoretically visible on three sides of the receptor. It is limited to a medium-low level by the intermittent nature of the effect; the limited and distant visibility of the south-eastern cumulative wind farms from this part of the receptor; the restricted turbine size of Achany, Lairg and Rosehall, and the very small proportion of the view that they will occupy; the retention of the northern, western and south-eastern aspects of the receptor with no wind energy influence; and the similar landscape setting of Achany, part of Creag Riabhach, Lairg, Rosehall and the Proposed Development within *rounded hills* LCT. The not significant influence of the Proposed Development on this part of the receptor is also relevant.
- 6.7.146 In the operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms cumulative scenario, with Lairg 2 also considered, the cumulative magnitude of change on this central area of the receptor arising from the addition of the Proposed Development will increase slightly but will not rise above a **medium-low** level due to the distant influence of Lairg 2 (approximately 25 km away from this part of the receptor).

- 6.7.147 In the operational/under-construction plus application-stage wind farms cumulative scenario, with the application stage wind farm at Strath Tirry also considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development will increase slightly due to the addition of theoretical visibility of a further wind farm, but will again remain a maximum of **medium-low** due to the very limited and relatively distant visibility and influence of Strath Tirry on these areas of the receptor (as seen at Viewpoint 13).
- 6.7.148 In the operational/under-construction plus consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms cumulative scenario, the scoping wind farms at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are also considered. These sites are given less weight than application-stage wind farms as there is no certainty as to the cut-off date that they will be submitted as applications. The additional consideration of either or both of these sites would not lead to any notable increase in the **medium-low** cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development in the previous scenario due to their distance from this part of the receptor and the grouping together of turbines.
- 6.7.149 It is possible that a scenario may arise where the Proposed Development is added to one or both of the scoping sites, but the application-stage sites are no longer relevant. In this case, the consideration of Lairg 2 Resubmission and/or Garvary would not increase the cumulative magnitude of change over the **medium-low** level assessed in the operational/under-construction plus consented scenario.
- 6.7.150 Away from this specific part of the receptor at Cnoc an Alaskie and Cnoc an Fheoir Mhaol, the cumulative magnitude of change will be a maximum of **low** in any scenario. This is due to various combinations of lack of visibility of the Proposed Development and/or cumulative wind farms, and where there is visibility, the increasingly more limited, intermittent and distant visibility of the Proposed Development and cumulative wind farms.
- 6.7.151 The cumulative effect on the landscape character of the great majority of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT – Crask/Overscaig will be **not significant** in any scenario, due to a combination of the factors that lead to the maximum low cumulative magnitude and the medium-high sensitivity of the receptor.
- 6.7.152 There will, however, be a **significant** effect on one very localised and small area at the centre of the receptor, around Cnoc an Alaskie and Cnoc an Fheoir Mhaol, due to the medium-low cumulative magnitude of change in any scenario and the medium-high sensitivity of the receptor. A combination of a medium-low cumulative magnitude of change and a medium-high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be significant as a result of the addition of the Proposed Development to Creag Riabhach, so that there will be influential development to the north-east and south-west of this part of the receptor.

Assynt-Coigach NSA

- 6.7.153 The assessment of effects on the Assynt-Coigach NSA is based on the effect that the Proposed Development may have on the 'special landscape qualities' (SLQs) of the NSA.
- 6.7.154 Viewpoints 2, 3 and 22 are within the NSA.
- 6.7.155 This assessment follows guidance set out in NatureScot's Working Draft 11 entitled '*Guidance for Assessing the Effects on Special Landscape Qualities*' (SNH, November 2018). The guidance is aimed specifically at landscape professionals undertaking LVIA for developments or land use changes with potential to impact on the SLQs of NSAs or NPs.
- 6.7.156 The introduction to the Guidance notes that: "*In Scotland we have two national landscape designations, our National Parks (2), and National Scenic Areas (40). These areas are both highly valued and sensitive and represent the country's finest landscapes. Whilst some change in these landscapes is inevitable, it is recognised this should be managed carefully to ensure their special landscape qualities (SLQs) are safeguarded so that they can be enjoyed by future generations.*"

6.7.157 The draft guidance presents an approach that is intended to be “*proportionate to the scale and stage of the development...be clear and transparent so that the reasoning that informs judgements can be tracked and...convey the complexity of effects*” (paragraph 14). It sets out a four-step approach, presented in a supporting pro forma, under the following four headings:

- “*Step 1: The Proposal – Gain as full an understanding of the proposal as possible;*
- *Step 2: Definition of the Study Area and Scope of the Assessment - identifying the area likely to be affected;*
- *Step 3: The Analysis of Impacts and Effects on SLQs; and*
- *Step 4: Summary of Impacts on the SLQs, implications for the NSA/NP and possible future effects on SLQs and recommendations for mitigation.”*

6.7.158 The SLQs of the NSA are set out in NatureScot’s Commissioned Report No. 374 ‘*The special qualities of the National Scenic Areas*’ (SNH, 2010).

Step 1: The Proposal

6.7.159 The aim of Step 1 is to “*gain as full an understanding of the proposal as possible*” by setting out the key aspects of the Proposed Development that have potential to affect the SLQs.

6.7.160 The Proposed Development is located outwith the NSA, with the nearest turbine in the Proposed Development lying approximately 5.2 km to the east of the eastern NSA boundary. The part of the Proposed Development that lies at closest proximity to the NSA is a section of the existing surfaced track that currently provides vehicular access to the hydro-electric scheme infrastructure. This track is approximately a minimum of 1.9 km to the east of the eastern NSA boundary, and is to be upgraded as part of the Proposed Development.

6.7.161 A detailed description of the Proposed Development is provided in Chapter 4, and a detailed layout plan is shown in Figure 1.2. The key part of the Proposed Development that is relevant to the NSA is the nine proposed turbines (with a blade tip height of 149.9 m), although the infrastructure of the substation compound, access tracks, and hardstandings may also contribute to effects.

6.7.162 During construction and commissioning there will also be temporary works and plant including borrow pit extraction, a construction compound, and tall cranes.

6.7.163 No part of the Proposed Development is located within the NSA, and any effects on its SLQs can therefore only arise as a result of visibility of its components, and principally the wind turbines albeit some elements of ground level infrastructure may be seen from relatively elevated ground in the closer eastern part of the NSA, for example the landform of Coire Ceann Loch (within which Viewpoint 3 is located).

Step 2: Definition of the Study Area and Scope of the Assessment

6.7.164 Step 2 covers two aspects, “*firstly to identify the extent of the study area which will relate to the location and form of the proposal, and secondly the relationship of this study area to the wider NSA/NP*”.

6.7.165 The guidance goes on to note that “*the study area may include a part of the designated area, the whole of the designated area, or in some cases the study area may extend beyond the boundary of the designated area*” (paragraph 18).

6.7.166 The broad characteristics and features of the Assynt-Coigach NSA are described as follows in ‘*The special qualities of the National Scenic Areas*’ (SNH, 2010), which itself draws from *Scotland’s Scenic Heritage* (1978).

“Assynt and Coigach present a landscape unparalleled in Britain. Steep hills with idiosyncratic profiles rise from hummocky surroundings in some of the most rugged and spectacular scenery in Scotland.

The area contains seven well known mountains: Ben More Coigach, Stac Pollaidh, Cul Beag, Cul Mor, Suilven, Canisp and Quinag. They are famed for their strange spectacular shapes, which are thrown into relief, higher than their statistical height would indicate, by the comparatively uniform ground of moorland and loch out of which they rise. Some of them have knife-edged ridges of white quartz and grey scree slopes that contrast with the weathered red sandstone that forms the core of their structure.

The contrasting lowlands are a jumble of morainic hillocks and pink-grey rock, interspersed with lochans and peaty hollows. Of Suilven, perhaps the most famous of these peaks, Frank Fraser Darling has written: ‘There is only one Suilven and it is undoubtedly one of the most fantastic hills in Scotland. It rises 2,309 ft (731m) out of a rough sea of gneiss..... Probably the Dolomites would be the nearest place where such an extraordinary shape of hill could be seen.’

To the east Ben More Assynt, lying east of the Moine Thrust, has a different character deriving from its different geological history. Its vaster bulk and wild, rugged grandeur form the backdrop to the drama of the peaks of Assynt and Coigach, mirrored as they are in tranquil weather in the lochs as Assynt, Veyatie, Sionascaig and Lurgainn.

The coast of the area is as diverse as the interior. Badcall Bay has a scatter of islands which catch the constantly changing western light. The long narrow sea loch of Loch a’Chairn Bhain and its tributaries Loch Glendhu and Loch Glencoul are surrounded by towering peaks and bare rugged hills. The Summer Isles off Achiltibuie form a broken seaboard to contrast with the solid mass of Ben More Coigach...”

- 6.7.167 The turbines in the Proposed Development lie a minimum of approximately 5.2 km to the east of the eastern NSA boundary as shown on Figures 6.4a , 6.4b , 6.10a and 6.10b . The eastern boundary of the NSA is something of an anomaly as it does not follow landform or topography but is formed of two perpendicular straight lines that run from the A838 near Kinloch in the north-east to Ledmore in the south-west.
- 6.7.168 Figure 6.10 shows the blade tip ZTV for the Proposed Development in relation to the NSA. This shows that theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development is contained within the eastern ‘leg’ of the NSA and is very intermittent, coinciding with high points and, on the eastern edge of the NSA, the east-facing slopes that are orientated towards the site. The total extent of the NSA that gains any theoretical visibility of the turbines in the Proposed Development, as shown on the blade tip ZTV, is approximately 2.5 % of its overall area. The most distant theoretical visibility is gained from Sail Ghorm, the western part of Quinag, which is approximately 22.5 km away from the nearest turbine. Viewpoint 22 is located at the summit of Quinag, and illustrates the type of visibility of the Proposed Development that is gained from this distant high point.
- 6.7.169 Theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development from the NSA relates closely to landscape character. The majority of visibility arises on the east-facing slopes of the *rugged mountain massif* LCT, which covers the eastern part of the NSA. This LCT, which is described in detail previously in this section, comprises elevated mountains of massive scale with a rugged, irregular and complex form, including Ben More Assynt, Ben Leoid, and Beinn Uidhe. These mountains form a broad crescent around the head of Loch Shin and, with their elevated, dramatic form, almost completely prevent theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development from areas of the NSA that lie further to the west

and north-west. It should be noted that the *rugged mountain massif* LCT extends considerably beyond the NSA to the north, and the area that lies outwith the NSA is not included in this assessment of effects on the NSA. It is, however, considered in the assessment of effects on landscape character previously in this chapter.

- 6.7.170 While *rugged mountain massif* LCT covers the majority of the part of the NSA that gains theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development, two other LCTs are also shown on the ZTVs to gain some very limited visibility.
- 6.7.171 The first of these is a small area of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT that lies on the eastern periphery of the NSA and is closely related to the *rugged mountain massif* LCT that surrounds it to the north and west. This area of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT separates the lower eastern slopes of Ben More Assynt from the Loch Shin/Glen Cassley unit of *rounded hills* LCT within which the site lies, and is referred to in the assessment of effects on landscape character as the Fionn Loch Mor unit of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT. The intervening landform of *rounded hills* LCT ensures that theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development from the Fionn Loch Mor unit of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT is very limited, being intermittent, limited to a small number of turbines, and almost completely blade only.
- 6.7.172 The second additional LCT that gains very limited visibility is the small unit of *lone mountains* LCT that covers Quinag, which lies over 20 km from the nearest turbine. This unit lies to the west of the *rugged mountain massif* LCT and is separated from it by a band of relatively low-lying *rocky hills and moorland* LCT.
- 6.7.173 On the basis of a combination of this distinctive landscape characterisation; theoretical visibility as shown on the ZTVs, site visits; and the visualisations for the viewpoints that lie within the NSA (Viewpoint 2 – Ben More Assynt, Viewpoint 3 – Coire Ceann Loch, and Viewpoint 22 – Quinag), the study area has been based upon the LCTs, and is divided into two sub-areas:
- Area A (*rugged mountain massif* and *sweeping moorland and flows* - Fionn Loch Mor unit); and
 - Area B (*lone mountains* – Quinag unit).
- 6.7.174 These are the only parts of the NSA where there is potential for effects on SLQs to arise and these areas therefore form the basis for the study area that is evaluated in the detailed assessment in Steps 3 and 4. The study area, including the extent of Areas A and B, is shown on Figures 6.4b and 6.4c and in conjunction with the ZTV on Figures 6.10a and 6.10b .
- 6.7.175 It should be noted that parts of *rugged mountain massif* and *sweeping moorland and flows* - Fionn Loch Mor unit lie outwith the NSA, and these parts are not included in this assessment of effects on the NSA. NatureScot guidance notes that “*in some cases the study area may extend beyond the boundary of the designated area. This latter situation will happen where SLQs likely to be affected by the proposal are derived in part or wholly, from landscape features and landscape characteristics outwith the designated area, or alternatively where SLQs which are experienced from outside the designated area, may be affected*”. These specific conditions are not considered to apply to this assessment due to the nature of the SLQs, and the study area has therefore been drawn entirely within the NSA. Where the Proposed Development may be seen in the context of views towards the NSA from external receptors (e.g. the A838) this is considered in the assessment of effects from the relevant viewpoints and receptors.
- 6.7.176 The study area is used primarily by hillwalkers who are either walking up the mountains (primarily Ben More Assynt and Conival in Area A and Quinag in Area B) or, in Area A, walking more widely through the *rugged mountain massif* LCT.

- 6.7.177 Importantly, only one of the “seven well known mountains” within the NSA, as listed in the NSA citation (SNH, 2010), lies within the study area, with the remaining six all lying outwith the study area as they do not gain any visibility of the Proposed Development. The one mountain that lies within the study area is Quinag, which is in Area B of the study area.
- 6.7.178 The Cape Wrath Way/Scottish National Trail passes north-south through Area A, and is shown on the ZTV to gain no theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development. There are no settlements or publicly-accessible roads within the study area other than several very short stretches where the A837 and A894 run along the eastern boundary of Area A, where there is no visibility of the Proposed Development. There will therefore be no sequential views of the Proposed Development gained by people passing through the study area by road or on the Cape Wrath Way/Scottish National Trail.
- 6.7.179 There are no core paths in Area B and very few in Area A, with three core paths just extending into the western edge of the Area, none of which gain any theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development. There are a number of well-known and in some cases signed routes to mountains in Areas A and B, including Ben More Assynt and Quinag, although neither of these routes gains theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development until the summit or high ridge is reached. The path to the waterfall at Eas a Chual Aluinn gains theoretical visibility over a stretch of several hundred metres but there is no visibility from the waterfall itself.
- 6.7.180 Other than hillwalkers, users of the study area may include people who are stalking or mountain biking.
- 6.7.181 Prior to the assessment of effects in the subsequent steps, it is necessary to establish the sensitivity of the NSA to the Proposed Development. The Assynt-Coigach NSA has a high value due to its nationally important scenic designation. The landscape is also of high quality with a strong sense of place, sense of remoteness and notable scenic qualities, which have remained largely intact due to very limited internal development.
- 6.7.182 The susceptibility of the NSA is medium-high. This is a distinctive and undeveloped, remote upland landscape with no internal large-scale built or moving development, and the external influence of the Proposed Development will contrast with this. However, the Proposed Development will be seen in an aspect of the setting to the NSA that is affected by baseline human influences, including more distant wind farm development and the roads, buildings and forestry along Loch Shin, and this tempers susceptibility to a medium-high level as the Proposed Development will be seen in this context. It is also relevant that the NSA does not have a specific association with the site area, and is characterised primarily by its innate landscape elements and patterns.
- 6.7.183 The combination of the medium-high susceptibility to change of the NSA and its high value results in a high sensitivity for the Assynt-Coigach NSA.

Step 3: The Analysis of Impacts and Effects on SLQs

- 6.7.184 Step 3 sets out the assessment of effects that may arise on the study area as a result of the Proposed Development. There are four key components to this assessment:
1. identify those SLQs that have potential to be affected by the Proposed Development;
 2. establish the key landscape characteristics that underpin the relevant SLQs;
 3. assess the effects of the Proposed Development on the relevant SLQs; and
 4. consider the potential for mitigation and determine the level of effect.
- 6.7.185 The first stage of Step 3 is to identify those SLQs that have potential to be affected by the Proposed Development. NatureScot guidance (SNH, 2018) notes that “*The relevant special landscape qualities would be those that one can experience within the study area (throughout the study area or in a part*

of the study area) and which may be affected by the proposal. Some of the SLQs we experience are dependent upon landscape characteristics and features beyond the boundary of the designated area. This is especially the case with visual and sensory qualities e.g. panoramic views, specific views, dark skies etc”.

6.7.186 Table 6.6 lists the SLQs of the Assynt-Coigach NSA (as set out in the NSA citation (SNH, 2010)) and assesses whether or not the Proposed Development may affect each of them. Where there is potential for an effect to arise, the boxes in the table that relate to the SLQ are shown as shaded.

Table 6.6 – Special Landscape Qualities of the Assynt-Coigach NSA

Special Quality	Further Information	Potential for a Significant Effect to Arise
<p>Spectacular scenery of lone mountains</p> <p><i>This is a land where lone mountains rise dramatically above cnocan, moorland and loch, where rocky hills dominate the scenery and stay long in the memory.</i></p> <p><i>The peaks are afforded a platform, a broad stage from which they thrust upwards, often with striking, steep-sided profiles recognisable from many miles away.</i></p>	<p><i>The mountain of Suilven (731 m) perhaps most encapsulates the splendour and mystique of Assynt-Coigach. Other mountains areas in Scotland may offer greater elevation and concentration of hills, but few other areas can challenge their grandeur, distinctiveness and impact on the viewer.</i></p>	<p>The lone mountains of Canisp, Suilven and Quinag are found in the central part of the NSA.</p> <p>This SLQ is concerned with the appearance of the distinctive profiles and landform of these mountains (particularly Suilven) rising dramatically from their relatively low-lying setting.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will not be seen in the context of views towards these mountains from any part of the study area (or the wider NSA) due to its location to the east of the NSA, where the intervening rugged mountain massif landform prevents visibility of the turbines in conjunction with the lone mountains. Moreover, there is no visibility of the Proposed Development from any part of Suilven and Canisp, and while there is theoretical visibility from Quinag (Viewpoint 22), this visibility will not affect its appearance, setting and profile.</p> <p>The “Spectacular scenery of lone mountains” will not be affected by the Proposed Development.</p>
<p>Rocky topography of great variety</p> <p><i>Within the NSA, the lone mountains stand as the hallmark of the area, but there are also bluffs, sweeping moorlands, sea cliffs, lush grassy slopes with rocky outcrops, massive boulderfields and scree slopes, caves and shallow gorges, sink holes, jagged pinnacles and broad, powerful sweeping summits. Colours range from dark solid sandstone to</i></p>	<p><i>Whilst distinctive by the notable separation of the mountains, the scenery of Assynt-Coigach also offers great variety of topography, colour, water, vegetation cover, land use and recreational potential.</i></p> <p><i>There is a distinct transition in landform and elevation from the coastal fringe and peninsulas of low lying crofts. Smooth moorland and cnocan; through lone mountains of the central area; and upwards to the eastern extent</i></p>	<p>This SLQ is concerned with the wide variety and juxtaposition of the topography within the NSA.</p> <p>The Proposed Development lies outwith the designated area and will not affect the topography of the NSA or the transition between the various topographical components within the NSA.</p> <p>It will also not affect “the wider, open and less steep country of uninhabited rough cnocan and smooth moorland” that “emphasises the remoteness of</p>

Special Quality	Further Information	Potential for a Significant Effect to Arise
<p><i>extensive, dominant limestone greys.</i></p> <p><i>The landscape presents a stark but harmonious juxtaposition of rocky landscapes of mountain, moorland and coast.</i></p>	<p><i>of the NSA across the Ben More Assynt massif, stretching from the head of Loch Glendhu south to the Benmore Forest.</i></p> <p><i>The wider, open and less steep country of uninhabited rough cnocan and smooth moorland emphasises the remoteness of the mountains, offers a stage from which they are best admired and yet also presents a deceptively tough obstacle to their entry.</i></p> <p><i>Rock is a dominant feature of the landscape generally. The geological complexities of the area were gradually unravelled in the late 19th and early 20th centuries through extensive study around Inchnadamph, and helped establish the modern understanding of earth sciences.</i></p>	<p><i>the mountains, offers a stage from which they are best admired and yet also presents a deceptively tough obstacle to their entry".</i> This is because the Proposed Development lies to the east of the NSA and will not be seen in the context of views towards the mountains from the cnocan and smooth moorland, which form the western and central parts of the NSA (as noted in this SLQ).</p> <p>The "Rocky topography of great variety" will not be affected by the Proposed Development.</p>
<p>Settlements nestled within a wider landscape of mountain peaks, wild moorlands, and rocky seascapes</p> <p><i>Concentrations of pasture around small crofting settlements on the coast and inland around Elphin, offer an occasional contrast to the general dominance of mountains, moorland and rock. Here human activity is at its most obvious but still widely scattered and always dwarfed by the wider landscape of wild moor and dramatic peak.</i></p> <p><i>Along the coast, the bays are often framed in part by strings of small croft houses on the fringes of inbye land above the seashore. Lobster pots, fishing boats and netting reveal the importance of the sea to the remote crofting and fishing communities.</i></p>	<p><i>The low-rising and generally flat cnocan landscape of the peninsulas of Assynt and Coigach screen inland views from the small settlements which perch on the slopes down to the rocky shore or silvery beaches. From the shore the same cottages and crofts can appear perched and standing firm in the face of the prevailing elements.</i></p> <p><i>The presence of limestone at Elphin, and Inchnadamph along to Ardvrek, with the resultant richer soils, has encouraged human settlement inland. The Inchnadamph caves indicate settlement of this area since early prehistory, as does the chambered cairn at Ardvrek.</i></p> <p><i>Evidence of former settlement in now uninhabited areas is visible in many areas. For example, Loch Assynt with Ardvrek Castle and a church was once a centre of settlement, with former shielings common in suitable areas. Additionally, the Duke of Sutherland built a golf course here in the 19th Century.</i></p>	<p>This SLQ is concerned with the setting, location and patterns of settlement within the NSA.</p> <p>Settlement is, as noted in the SLQ, found primarily around the coast that forms the western part of the NSA, and there is no visibility of the Proposed Development from any specific settlement or crofting township within the NSA.</p> <p>"Settlements nestled within a wider landscape of mountain peaks, wild moorlands, and rocky seascapes" will not be affected by the Proposed Development.</p>
<p>Extensive cnocan landscapes</p> <p><i>The cnocan landscape has an unusual character. It is extensive, secretive and mysterious, but its</i></p>	<p><i>'Cnoc' (plural 'cnocan') is Gaelic for a hillock. As a geographical term, a cnocan landscape is one of small, rounded, rocky hillocks, as</i></p>	<p>This SLQ is concerned with the cnocan landscape that forms the western part of the NSA.</p>

Special Quality	Further Information	Potential for a Significant Effect to Arise
<p><i>extent is not appreciated until viewed from higher ground or the summits of the lone peaks.</i></p> <p><i>The road network is sinuous and rarely conspicuous in the scenery, apart from the striking Kylesku bridge. Small single track roads provide the road user with a very close and intimate experience of their surroundings.</i></p>	<p><i>typified when the bedrock is Lewisian gneiss. The term ‘cnocan and lochan’ landscape is often used, as the hollows between the cnocan are often water-filled.</i></p> <p><i>The ancient Lewisian gneiss appears deceptively flat, in comparison to its backdrop of high peaks, but it has a coarse, rough surface hiding many hollows and gullies making access difficult, once off the miles of single-track road.</i></p> <p><i>Locally, the Coigach area reflects a smoother moorland characteristic but the harshness of the Assynt cnocan is readily viewed from the coastal road and the area behind the settlements of Drumbeg and Clachtoll.</i></p>	<p>The Proposed Development will not physically affect the cnocan landscape within the NSA. It will also not affect views of the NSA cnocan landscape from “higher ground or the summits of the lone peaks” in the NSA due to its location to the east of the NSA, whereas the cnocan landscape lies in the western part of the NSA.</p> <p>The Proposed Development is not seen from any roads within the NSA.</p> <p>The “Extensive cnocan landscapes” will not be affected by the Proposed Development.</p>
<p>A coastline of endless drama</p> <p><i>The majesty of the mountains, steep, rocky, individual and dramatic, is framed not only by the flats of cnocan, moor and pasture, but also by the sea. At Badcall Bay, and in the south from Coigach to the Summer Isles, the profusion of islands and islets, bays and coves affords a sometimes confused mosaic, blurring the transition from land to sea.</i></p> <p><i>The meeting of sea and land is sometimes dramatic and abrupt. The Stoer Peninsula, crowned by its whitewashed lighthouse and adorned by its great sea stack, further emphasises remoteness. Here relentless north Atlantic waves and tides meet some of the oldest rocks on earth and the movement and noise this affords is in stark contrast to the quiet stillness of the area’s interior.</i></p> <p><i>However, the seascapes of Assynt-Coigach are not always fierce or dramatic. On occasion the weather affords still conditions and blue skies which reveal an idyllic coastal refuge of small bays and tight sandy coves, particularly on the Coigach peninsula.</i></p>	<p><i>From low elevations the islands can sometimes falsely suggest unbroken land far into the sea, or appear as monumental stepping-stones out from the shore.</i></p>	<p>This SLQ is concerned with the coastline that forms the western part of the NSA.</p> <p>The Proposed Development lies to the east of the NSA and will not affect the coastal area of the NSA.</p> <p>The “coastline of endless drama” will not be affected by the Proposed Development.</p>

Special Quality	Further Information	Potential for a Significant Effect to Arise
<p>An intricate multitude of lochs and lochans</p> <p><i>The long, narrow Loch Assynt and the twin sea lochs of Glencoul and Glendhu offer significant expanses of deep water in the shadows of Quinag and Glas Bhenn. The mountains here fall steeply through their moorland skirts to plunge to the water's edge, with little change in character, land use or vegetation along the way.</i></p> <p><i>Elsewhere, there is an intricate array of lochs and lochans in the cnocan and moorland interior and coastal fringe. The true extent of this water network is mostly apparent from the elevated vantage points of the lone mountains.</i></p>	<p><i>Only the linear, Loch Assynt and the twin sea lochs of Glencoul and Glendhu offer significant expanses of deep water.</i></p> <p><i>Extensive tracts of rough and rugged gorse, heather and peat bog contain significant networks of medium and small lochans and burns, with intricate irregular form, interlocking with the low land around them and creating a significant challenge to the cross-country walker.</i></p> <p><i>Most lochans suggest a relatively shallow depth surrounded by peatlands, which often show evidence of old peat diggings. Loch Lurgainn, Loch Sionascaig and Loch Veyatie in the heart of Coigach may appear to rival Loch Assynt in terms of their extent, but their shorelines are more complex and small isles more common.</i></p>	<p>This SLQ is concerned with the physical attributes and pattern of lochs and lochans that constitute a key component of the NSA.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will not directly affect the lochs and lochans within the NSA, or the topography around and including the lochs.</p> <p>It is also not visible from Loch Assynt, Loch Glencoul, Loch Glendhu, Loch Lurgainn, Loch Sionascaig, Loch Veyatie or other smaller lochs such as Gorm Loch Mor, Loch Fionn Mor, Loch Fionn Beag, Loch Bealach Bhurion, Loch nan Caorach, and Loch an Eircill.</p> <p>The “intricate multitude of lochs and lochans” will not be affected by the Proposed Development.</p>
<p>A landscape of vast open space and exposure</p> <p><i>The juxtaposition of cnocan, sweeping moorland and concentrated pockets of pasture emphasises the extreme openness of Assynt-Coigach.</i></p> <p><i>There are few trees and the skies are often expansive, particularly on the coastal fringe.</i></p>	<p><i>Although most of the NSA appears open and expansive, there are a few areas with a more enclosed feeling: the heart of the Coigach range around Beinn Mor Coigach, and the hidden steep sided folds of wooded valleys on the B869 Assynt coast road.</i></p>	<p>This SLQ is concerned with the openness of the NSA, with particular reference to the western and central coastal areas, cnocan, moorland and pasture. The few enclosed areas within the NSA are also considered.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will not affect the open space and exposure within the NSA or the topographical containment of the few more enclosed areas. Lack of visibility from the coast, cnocan and pasture areas ensures that it will have no effect on the perception of these areas.</p> <p>It may, however, affect the perception of openness and exposure in views outwards to the east of the NSA from the study area.</p>
<p>Significant tracts of wild land</p> <p><i>Most of the human settlement is concentrated around the coast, with much of the inland being uninhabited and possessing a wild character. Large areas possess no roads or tracks, with access inland only possible on foot.</i></p> <p><i>The absence of modern artefacts, or overt human activity, over</i></p>	<p><i>The feeling of remoteness is particularly notable between Inchnadamph and the Elphin area.</i></p> <p><i>The eastern highlands of Ben More Assynt, the high Coigach Massif and the western cnocan fringe, behind thecrofting settlements, have a wild land character. They are part of an SNH Wild Land Search Area.</i></p>	<p>This SLQ is concerned with the wild land character within the NSA.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will not affect the physical attributes of the NSA that contribute to the wild land character (including lack of settlement, inaccessibility and the presence of human artefacts or activity).</p>

Special Quality	Further Information	Potential for a Significant Effect to Arise
<p><i>much of the landscape emphasises the feelings of openness, remoteness and wildness.</i></p> <p><i>This can be reinforced by the sight of an eagle soaring over some remote cliff, or by the lonely call of a golden plover amongst the moors.</i></p>	<p><i>There has been a long history of land use in the area, and areas now uninhabited often show signs of former settlement or shielings.</i></p>	<p>The area between Inchnadamph and the Elphin area, the high Coigach massif, and the western cnocan fringe will not be affected by visibility of the Proposed Development.</p> <p>The wildness qualities of other parts of the NSA (including “the eastern highlands of Ben More Assynt”) may, however, be affected by the Proposed Development.</p>
<p>Unexpected and extensive tracts of native woodland</p> <p><i>Although many parts of the NSA are virtually treeless, the cnocan, especially that of Assynt, can hide the most unexpected and extensive tracts of seminatural woodland. Here the deep folds in the Lewisian gneiss, which generally run north-west to south-east, afford some shelter and sufficient soils for linear woodlands of birch and willow to flow along the landform.</i></p> <p><i>These stand in welcome relief and stark contrast to the openness and barrenness of the cnocan.</i></p>	<p><i>Trees are scarce in the NSA with many eastern parts virtually treeless. Although the term ‘forest’ is applied to areas such as Inverpolly, Drumrunie and Inchnadamph, these refer to the open deer forest rather than woodland.</i></p>	<p>This SLQ is concerned with native woodland within the NSA.</p> <p>The Proposed Development lies outwith the designated area and will not affect woodland within the NSA.</p> <p>The “Unexpected and extensive tracts of native woodland” will not be affected by the Proposed Development.</p>
<p>A still, quiet landscape under a constantly changing sky</p> <p><i>Assynt-Coigach is a landscape where human movement tends to be minimal, although on the coast small inshore craft slowly working the bays of the peninsula do offer occasional movement. In contrast, the skyscape, governed by the north Atlantic weather systems, provides almost constant change, often characterised by heavy cloud scudding across the landscape, in turn obscuring the higher peaks and providing a more horizontal emphasis to the scene. At other times this movement reveals, sometimes fleetingly, the same peaks.</i></p> <p><i>The extensive waters of the NSA offer a constant, if subtle, sense of movement and change, fuelled by the relentless march of the ocean’s weather systems.</i></p>	<p><i>Often the lack of human activity is apparent rather than real, with, for example, the land being used for deer stalking, angling or sheep grazing.</i></p>	<p>This SLQ is concerned with the stillness and quietness of the NSA, with particular reference to coastal areas and waterbodies. Reference is also made to the movement of the sky.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will not affect the sky above the NSA. It will not affect the movement of water in the NSA, or the extent of tree cover and roads in the landscape. It will also not affect the level of apparent or real human activity in the NSA.</p> <p>The Proposed Development may, however, affect the perception of stillness within parts of the study area due to the introduction of moving turbines as an external influence.</p>

Special Quality	Further Information	Potential for a Significant Effect to Arise
<i>The absence of significant tree cover in the landscape, as well as the openness, remoteness and rarity of roads, also contribute to this being a very 'still' landscape.</i>		

6.7.187 This preliminary assessment indicates that seven of the 10 SLQs will not be affected by the Proposed Development, due largely to the fact that the Proposed Development will be located outwith the NSA boundary and so will not affect those SLQs that are based on physical attributes of the NSA and are therefore not susceptible to indirect, perceived effects. The Proposed Development will also not affect those SLQs that are concerned with the western and central parts of the NSA as these areas will gain no visibility of the Proposed Development, and thus cannot be affected by it.

6.7.188 The remaining three of the 10 SLQs do have the potential to be affected by the external influence of the Proposed Development as it is perceived from a small number of locations within the NSA, and therefore require more detailed assessment. These three SLQs are:

- *“a landscape of vast open space and exposure;*
- *significant tracts of wild land; and*
- *a still, quiet landscape under a constantly changing sky”.*

6.7.189 The NatureScot guidance notes that *“SLQs can be considered individually or grouped. Where the SLQs interact with each other (contributing to the experience in the study area) they are best presented and considered together as a group”.*

6.7.190 In this case, the SLQs have been assessed separately as they may be affected in different ways by the Proposed Development. It is also relevant that there are no recognised national long distance walking routes or roads that will gain visibility of the Proposed Development, and it will therefore not sequentially affect the SLQs as they are experienced by people following these routes through the NSA.

6.7.191 The second, third and fourth stages of Step 3 are incorporated into the assessment of effects on the relevant SLQs of the NSA, which is presented in Table 6.7 below, in accordance with NatureScot guidance (SNH, 2018).

6.7.192 The NatureScot methodology (SNH, 2018) indicates the inclusion of a column entitled *“Proposed Mitigation and Timescales”* into the table. This column has not been incorporated into Table 6.7 as this assessment takes into account the embedded mitigation that has been implemented through the design iteration process for the Proposed Development. Effects on the NSA have been given a high priority throughout the design process, as described in Chapter 3 and the Design and Access Statement.

Table 6.7 – Detailed Assessment of the Effects of the Proposed Development on the SLQs of the Assynt-Coigach NSA

Detailed SLQ Descriptions / Underpinning Landscape Characteristics	Impacts of the Proposed Development on Key Characteristics and Effects on SLQs	Risk of Damage/ Loss to SLQ
<p>Area A (<i>rugged mountain massif and sweeping moorland and flows - Fionn Loch Mor unit</i>)</p> <p>The turbines in the Proposed Development are theoretically visible at a minimum of 5.2 km away to the east and south-east of this Area of the NSA. The closest infrastructure (upgraded access track) lies a minimum of approximately 1.9 km away, also to the east.</p>		

Detailed SLQ Descriptions / Underpinning Landscape Characteristics	Impacts of the Proposed Development on Key Characteristics and Effects on SLQs	Risk of Damage/ Loss to SLQ
<p>The ZTVs show very intermittent theoretical visibility, so the parts of the landscape where the Proposed Development may have an effect are very limited. Extensive areas of visibility from the Fionn Loch Mor unit are blade only, with no hubs visible. The great majority of Area A will remain unaffected by the Proposed Development.</p>		
<p>SLQ: A landscape of vast open space and exposure</p>		
<p>Area A is covered by two LCTs; primarily <i>rugged mountain massif</i> with a smaller area of <i>sweeping moorland and flows</i>. The LCT description for <i>rugged mountain massif</i> notes the following relevant key characteristic <i>“Extensive views of the surrounding landscape and an exhilarating experience of openness and exposure from mountain ridges and summits.”</i></p> <p>This is exemplified in Viewpoint 2 (Ben More Assynt), which lies within Area A, where there is <i>“an exhilarating experience of openness and exposure”</i> and sense of <i>“vast open space and exposure”</i> in all directions around the viewpoint.</p> <p>The outlook from Viewpoint 3, also in Area A, is less open and exposed due to enclosure by landform, and the <i>“vast open space and exposure”</i> of the SLQ is considerably less apparent.</p> <p>The LCT description for <i>sweeping moorland and flows</i> notes <i>“Long, low and largely uninterrupted skylines offering extensive views across this landscape and result in a feeling of huge space...Great sense of exposure on areas of flat peatland on upland plateau.”</i> However, this unit of <i>sweeping moorland and flows</i> does not conform to these general characteristics; it is notably smaller than other areas (1 km wide at its narrowest point) and is completely enclosed by <i>rugged mountain massif</i> and <i>rounded hills</i> LCTs. The small extent and enclosed nature of this unit ensure that the characteristics described above are considerably less apparent here than in other, larger, areas of <i>sweeping moorland and flows</i> LCT.</p> <p>The NSA citation notes the following in relation to this SLQ:</p> <p><i>“The juxtaposition of cnocan, sweeping moorland and concentrated pockets of pasture emphasises the extreme openness of Assynt-Coigach.</i></p> <p><i>There are few trees and the skies are often expansive, particularly on the coastal fringe”.</i></p>	<p>The relevant question is <i>‘will the appearance of the Proposed Development from Area A affect the perception of the NSA as a “landscape of vast open space and exposure”’?</i></p> <p>The Proposed Development will be seen in some views to the south and east from Area A, as seen in Viewpoints 2 and 3, and the introduction of turbines into these views may have some effect on the perception of openness and exposure. However, this effect will be limited by the following factors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The key open and exposed views across the NSA from Area A are to the north and west, and will not be affected by the Proposed Development as it lies to the east/south-east, where it will be seen only in the context of views towards areas that lie outwith the NSA. The eye-catching northern and western views will therefore retain their vast open space and exposure. • The Proposed Development is visible from upper slopes and high points/ridges in Area A (Viewpoints 2 and 3). The relatively low-lying position of the turbines and their enclosure by the <i>rounded hills</i> LCT landform ensures that they are unlikely to be seen on the skyline and will lie against landform, subservient in relation to the NSA. This prevents vertical impact and a prominent appearance, and avoids the creation of an ‘obstacle’ to views that would affect the openness and exposure of the NSA landscape. • The southern/south-eastern views from Area A that may be affected by the Proposed Development are of a vast and open scale, and lack the complexity and ruggedness of landform that is seen in other aspects of the views (see Viewpoint 2). The introduction of the turbines into this southern/ south-eastern aspect will have less of a contrast with the large, simple landform that it would with other more complex aspects of the view. 	<p>Low risk of damage/ loss to this SLQ. The Proposed Development may have some effect on the perception of the NSA as a <i>“landscape of vast open space and exposure”</i> as perceived from Area A, but this will be limited to a low level by the factors described in the previous column.</p>

Detailed SLQ Descriptions / Underpinning Landscape Characteristics	Impacts of the Proposed Development on Key Characteristics and Effects on SLQs	Risk of Damage/ Loss to SLQ
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The key areas that are referred to in the citation in relation to this SLQ lie in the central and western parts of the NSA, and views to, from and across these landscapes will not be affected as the Proposed Development lies east of the NSA. • Effects on the perception of the vast open space and exposure of Area A will be restricted by the very intermittent and limited visibility of the Proposed Development from this area, and the distance of the nearest turbine (5.2 km away), which ensures that the Proposed Development will affect a limited proportion of the vast open views available. 	
SLQ: Significant tracts of wild land		
<p>Area A is covered by two LCTs; primarily <i>rugged mountain massif</i> with a smaller area of <i>sweeping moorland and flows</i>.</p> <p>The LCT description for <i>rugged mountain massif</i> notes the following relevant key characteristic “<i>Natural unmodified character of the high mountains, with their remoteness, ruggedness, and difficulty of access, creating a strong wild character</i>”.</p> <p>The LCT description for <i>sweeping moorland and flows</i> notes the relevant key characteristic “<i>A strong sense of remoteness is associated within the largely uninhabited, inaccessible core flows and moorlands of this landscape.</i>”</p> <p>These characteristics apply to the part of these LCTs that lie within Area A.</p> <p>The northern and western (and to a lesser degree, the southern) aspects of the outlook seen in Viewpoint 2 displays the wildness characteristics that are found in the interior of the NSA, in the <i>rugged mountain massif</i>. The eastern aspect displays the more developed character and human influence that is found around Loch Shin, affecting the perception of wildness characteristics in Area A.</p> <p>Viewpoint 3 has its main aspect to the south-east, outwith the NSA, where the development around Loch Shin affects the perception of wildness characteristics in Area A.</p>	<p>The relevant question is ‘<i>will the appearance of the Proposed Development from Area A affect the perception of the NSA as having “significant tracts of wild land”</i>’?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Proposed Development will be seen in some views to the south and east from Area A (see Viewpoints 2 and 3) and the introduction of turbines into these views may have some effect on the perception of wildness characteristics within Area A. However, this effect will be limited by the following factors. • The Proposed Development will not affect the physical attributes of the NSA that contribute to the wild land character within Area A (including lack of settlement, inaccessibility and the presence of human artefacts or activity). All effects are therefore perceived. • The views that display the wildness characteristics of the NSA to greatest effect are to the north and west of Area A, and these will not be affected by the Proposed Development as it lies to the east/south-east. The northern and western views, which lead to the most notable perception of wildness on Area A, will therefore retain their wildness characteristics. • The parts of Area A that may be affected by visibility of the Proposed Development are already affected by the external influence of development and human activity along Loch Shin, and 	<p>Low-medium risk of damage/ loss to this SLQ. The Proposed Development may have some effect on the perception of “<i>Significant tracts of wild land</i>” within the NSA as perceived from Area A, but this will be limited to a low/medium level by the factors described in the previous column.</p>

Detailed SLQ Descriptions / Underpinning Landscape Characteristics	Impacts of the Proposed Development on Key Characteristics and Effects on SLQs	Risk of Damage/ Loss to SLQ
	<p>thus lack the high degree of wildness with which the Proposed Development would have the greatest contrast.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Proposed Development will also be seen in the same southern/ south-eastern aspect of views from Area A that are already affected by development along Loch Shin, including forestry, roads and traffic, houses and, further away, other wind farms. This ensures that the Proposed Development will not introduce a perception of development to aspects of Area A that have high baseline wildness. • Effects on the wildness characteristics of Area A will be restricted by the very intermittent and limited visibility of the Proposed Development from this area, and the distance of the nearest turbine (5.2 km away), which ensures that the Proposed Development will affect limited parts and a limited proportion of the setting to Area A. • In addition to the turbines, infrastructure may also be visible from some parts of Area A, with potential effects on the perception of wildness. However, the presence of the existing hydro-electric roads and other infrastructure in the vicinity of the Proposed Development will mitigate these effects. 	
SLQ: A still, quiet landscape under a constantly changing sky		
<p>Area A is covered by two LCTs; primarily <i>rugged mountain massif</i> with a smaller area of <i>sweeping moorland and flows</i>. The descriptions of these LCTs do not make specific reference to the stillness or quietness of the landscapes, or the sky. The <i>sweeping moorland and flows</i> LCT description does, however, note the relevant key characteristic “<i>Views are long with largely uninterrupted skylines. Rapidly changing light and weather conditions are reflected in the smooth vegetation cover and loch systems</i>”.</p> <p>The NSA citation (2010) states that: <i>“The...rarity of roads, also contribute to this being a very ‘still’ landscape.”</i></p> <p>It should be noted that the A838 runs relatively close to Area A, and introduces an external influence of noise and movement into the NSA. This is also noted</p>	<p>The relevant question is ‘<i>will the appearance of the Proposed Development from Area A affect the perception of the NSA as “A still, quiet landscape under a constantly changing sky”</i>’?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Proposed Development will be seen in some views to the south and east from Area A (see Viewpoints 2 and 3) and the introduction of moving turbines into these views may have some effect on the perception within Area A of a still, quiet landscape. However, this effect will be limited by the following factors. • The Proposed Development will be seen in an aspect of these views that is already influenced by human features, including some movement (e.g. traffic on the A838 and other, more distant, wind farms). 	<p>Low-medium risk of damage/ loss to this SLQ. The Proposed Development may have some effect on the perception of “<i>A still, quiet landscape under a constantly changing sky</i>” within the NSA as perceived from Area A, but this will be limited to a low/medium level by the factors described in the previous column.</p>

Detailed SLQ Descriptions / Underpinning Landscape Characteristics	Impacts of the Proposed Development on Key Characteristics and Effects on SLQs	Risk of Damage/ Loss to SLQ
<p>in the LCT citation for <i>rugged moorland massif</i>, which notes that:</p> <p><i>“...The small number of settlements and roads which do exist tend to be located at the edges of this character type and at the intersection of a strath or loch.”</i></p> <p>Forestry felling operations in the vicinity of Loch Shin can also introduce movement and noise into Area A.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other aspects of Area A – to the north, west and south - will not be affected by the movement of the Proposed Development and will retain their baseline stillness and quietness. • The Proposed Development will not affect the factors described in the NSA citation in relation to this SLQ; the sky above the NSA, the movement of water in the NSA, or the extent of tree cover and roads in the landscape. It will also not affect the level of apparent or real human activity within the NSA. • In addition to the turbines, construction and infrastructure may also be visible from some parts of Area A, with potential effects on stillness and quietness. However, the presence of the existing hydro-electric roads/ traffic and other infrastructure in the vicinity of the Proposed Development will mitigate these effects. • Effects on the perception of stillness and quietness in Area A will be restricted by the very intermittent and limited visibility of the Proposed Development from this area, and the distance of the nearest turbine (5.2 km away). 	
<p>Area B (<i>lone mountains</i> – Quinag unit)</p> <p>The turbines in the Proposed Development are theoretically visible at a minimum of 20.5 km away to the south-east of this Area of the NSA. The closest infrastructure (upgraded access track) lies a minimum of approximately 15.8 km away, also to the south-east.</p> <p>The ZTVs show very intermittent theoretical visibility, parts of it blade only, so the parts of the landscape where the Proposed Development may have an effect are very limited. The great majority of Area B will remain unaffected by the Proposed Development.</p>		
<p>SLQ: A landscape of vast open space and exposure</p>		
<p>Area B is covered by the <i>lone mountains</i> LCT. The LCT description notes the following relevant key characteristics <i>“Individual mountains forming landmarks seen widely and at considerable distance across expansive lower-lying Sweeping Moorland and Flows and Cnocan”</i>; <i>“Peaks offer extensive views of the surrounding area including the distinctive watery landscapes of the Flows”</i>; and <i>“The height of these mountains varies, the definition of Lone Mountains being more closely linked to their isolation within open surroundings and their dominant focus rather than their elevation. These hills form a focus for walkers, their solitary</i></p>	<p>The relevant question is ‘<i>will the appearance of the Proposed Development from Area B affect the perception of the NSA as a “landscape of vast open space and exposure”</i>’?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Proposed Development will be seen in some views to the south-east from Area B, as seen in Viewpoint 22. The introduction of turbines into these views is unlikely to have a discernible effect on the perception of openness and exposure, due largely to the very distant and limited visibility of the Proposed Development, which ensures that only a very small part of the panoramic outlook will be affected. The 	<p>Negligible risk of damage/ loss to this SLQ. The Proposed Development is unlikely to have a discernible effect on the perception of the NSA as a <i>“landscape of vast open space and exposure”</i> as perceived from Area B.</p>

Detailed SLQ Descriptions / Underpinning Landscape Characteristics	Impacts of the Proposed Development on Key Characteristics and Effects on SLQs	Risk of Damage/ Loss to SLQ
<p><i>position offering extensive panoramic views across Caithness and Sutherland”.</i></p> <p>These points are exemplified in Viewpoint 22 (Quinag), which forms the high points of Area B, from where there are “<i>extensive panoramic views across...Sutherland</i>” and the “<i>vast open space and exposure</i>” of the landscape can be appreciated.</p>	<p>containment of the Proposed Development below the skyline avoids the creation of an ‘obstacle’ to views that would affect the openness and exposure of the NSA landscape in Area B.</p>	
<p>SLQ: Significant tracts of wild land</p>		
<p>Area B is covered by the <i>lone mountains</i> LCT. The LCT description notes the following relevant key characteristics “<i>Largely uninhabited, creating a distinct sense of remoteness, although some of its peaks attract significant numbers of hill walkers, especially during the summer months</i>”.</p> <p>As is noted in this description, the use of Area B by hillwalkers affects the wildness characteristics of Area B to some degree, and particularly in terms of accessibility. It does, however, retain strong wildness characteristics due to its inherent landform, topography and perceptual responses.</p> <p>This is exemplified in Viewpoint 22 (Quinag), which displays the wildness characteristics of the landscape around the viewpoint.</p>	<p>The relevant question is ‘<i>will the appearance of the Proposed Development from Area B affect the perception of the NSA as having “significant tracts of wild land”</i>’?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Proposed Development is theoretically visible in some views to the south-east from Area B, as seen in Viewpoint 22. The introduction of turbines into these views is unlikely to have a readily discernible effect on the perception of wildness due largely to the very distant and limited visibility of the Proposed Development, which ensures that the turbines are a very minor feature in the view, and only a very small part of the panoramic outlook will be affected. 	<p>Negligible-low risk of damage/ loss to this SLQ. The Proposed Development is unlikely to have a readily discernible effect on the perception of “<i>Significant tracts of wild land</i>” within the NSA as perceived from Area B.</p>
<p>SLQ: A still, quiet landscape under a constantly changing sky</p>		
<p>Area B is covered by the <i>lone mountains</i> LCT. The LCT description notes the following relevant key characteristics “<i>Largely uninhabited, creating a distinct sense of remoteness, although some of its peaks attract significant numbers of hill walkers, especially during the summer months</i>”.</p> <p>As is noted in this description, the use of Area B by hillwalkers affects the stillness and quietness of Area B at some times of year as large numbers of people can be seen moving up and down the mountain, to and from the car park that is provided. The SLQ comment that “<i>Assynt-Coigach is a landscape where human movement tends to be minimal...</i>” is therefore not fully applicable to this Area.</p> <p>It is also notable that the A894 runs a minimum of around 700 m to the east of Area B (as noted in the LCT description) and the noise and movement of traffic on</p>	<p>The relevant question is ‘<i>will the appearance of the Proposed Development from Area B affect the perception of the NSA as “A still, quiet landscape under a constantly changing sky”</i>’?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Proposed Development is theoretically visible in some views to the south-east from Area B, as seen in Viewpoint 22. The introduction of turbines into these views is unlikely to have a readily discernible effect on the stillness and quietness of the landscape. This is due largely to the very distant and limited visibility of the Proposed Development, which ensures that the turbines are a very minor feature in the view, and their movement is unlikely to be clearly visible. The baseline movement and noise that is apparent in this Area is also a consideration, as is the fact that the Proposed Development will not affect the factors 	<p>Negligible-low risk of damage/ loss to this SLQ. The Proposed Development is unlikely to have a readily discernible effect on the on the perception of “<i>A still, quiet landscape under a constantly changing sky</i>” within the NSA as perceived from Area B.</p>

Detailed SLQ Descriptions / Underpinning Landscape Characteristics	Impacts of the Proposed Development on Key Characteristics and Effects on SLQs	Risk of Damage/Loss to SLQ
the road affects the stillness and quietness of parts of the landscape. This contrasts with the SLQ comment that <i>“The...rarity of roads, also contribute to this being a very ‘still’ landscape.”</i>	described in the NSA citation in relation to this SLQ; the sky above the NSA, the movement of water in the NSA, or the extent of tree cover and roads in the landscape. It will also not affect the level of apparent or real human activity within the NSA.	

Step 4 Consider the Potential for Mitigation and Determine the Level of Effect

- 6.7.193 The assessment undertaken in Tables 6.6 and 6.7 above has indicated that the Proposed Development may affect two parts of the NSA; Area A (which covers the *rugged mountain massif and sweeping moorland and flows* LCTs on the eastern edge of the NSA) and Area B (which covers the *Quinag* unit of the *lone mountains* LCT). Any effects on these areas will be perceived only, as the Proposed Development lies outwith the NSA, with the nearest turbine lying 5.2 km away, and there will be no direct effects on the physical attributes of the NSA. The remainder of the NSA gains no visibility of the Proposed Development and will therefore undergo no effects.
- 6.7.194 The assessment has indicated that of the ten SLQs of the Assynt-Coigach NSA, three have potential to be significantly affected by the Proposed Development. These are:
- *“a landscape of vast open space and exposure;*
 - *significant tracts of wild land; and*
 - *a still, quiet landscape under a constantly changing sky”.*
- 6.7.195 The assessment concludes that in Area B, there is no potential for significant effects to arise on the special qualities of the NSA. This is due to the **negligible** or **negligible-low** *“risk of damage/loss”* that the Proposed Development will have on the three relevant SLQs in Area B.
- 6.7.196 In Area A, which covers the part of the NSA that lies in closest proximity to the Proposed Development, there is potential for a significant effect to arise on two of the three relevant SLQs These two SLQs are:
- *significant tracts of wild land; and*
 - *a still, quiet landscape under a constantly changing sky.*
- 6.7.197 Both of these SLQs are assessed in Table 6.7 to have a **low-medium** *“risk of damage/loss”* as a result of the Proposed Development. When combined with the high sensitivity of the NSA, this can give rise to an effect on the SLQ that is either significant or not significant. In this instance, the effect is judged to be **significant**, due to the high level of sensitivity of the NSA; the significant effects on views identified at Viewpoints 2 and 3; and the orientation of parts of the landform within Area A towards the Proposed Development, which ensures that while the turbines are an external influence, there is likely to be some focus on the Proposed Development from these slopes. The significant effect will, however, be highly localised, and is unlikely to extend to the more distant areas of theoretical visibility found in Area A, which lie up to approximately 16 km away from the nearest turbine. The effect on the SLQs in the western periphery of Area A, beyond approximately 10-12 km from the nearest turbine, is therefore likely to be **not significant**.
- 6.7.198 The third SLQ – *“a landscape of vast open space and exposure”* – is assessed to have a **low** *“risk of damage/loss”* as a result of the Proposed Development, and the effect on this SLQ in Area A will be **not significant**.

6.7.199 Whilst localised significant effects have been assessed to arise on two SLQs in parts of Area A, this effect is not considered to significantly adversely affect the overall ‘integrity’ of the NSA as a scenic designation. The term ‘integrity’ is referred to in NatureScot’s Commissioned Report No. 374 (SNH, 2010), which notes the following in a checklist of potential qualities of NSAs:

“Authenticity and integrity expressed, for example, as areas of distinctiveness, sense of place, unspoilt character or historic environment.”

6.7.200 In this assessment, ‘integrity’ refers to the degree to which perceptions such as *“distinctiveness, sense of place, unspoilt character or historic environment”* are expressed, intact, across the NSA as a whole through its SLQs, reflecting the purpose of its designation.

6.7.201 ‘Integrity’ is also referred to in NPF4 Policy 4c, which states that:

“c) Development proposals that will affect a National Park, National Scenic Area, Site of Special Scientific Interest or a National Nature Reserve will only be supported where:

- i. The objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the areas will not be compromised; or*
- ii. Any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of national importance.”*

6.7.202 In these terms, it is considered that the *“objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the area will not be compromised”* by the Proposed Development, for the reasons described below.

- The Proposed Development lies outwith the NSA, and will have no direct effects on its physical attributes, so that all effects will be perceived only. This ensures that the SLQs that are dependent upon physical attributes of the NSA will not be affected by the Proposed Development.
- The nearest turbine in the Proposed Development lies approximately 5.2 km from the eastern edge of the NSA, at which distance the perceived influence of the turbines will be tempered by the other human influences, land management activity and attributes of the landscape. Moreover, theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development is limited to a localised part of the eastern NSA, and is intermittent and often restricted to blades only. The remote, wild interior of the NSA, where the SLQs are expressed to the most notable degree, will not be affected by the Proposed Development. These factors limit the effect of the Proposed Development on the SLQs which are concerned with experiential or perceived aspects of the NSA.
- These first two points ensure that seven of the ten SLQs of the NSA do not have potential to be significantly affected by the Proposed Development.
- Where the Proposed Development is seen from the NSA, this visibility is almost always gained from upper slopes and high points or ridges. The relatively low-lying position of the turbines and their enclosure below the ridgeline of rounded hills landform that separates the site from the NSA ensures that they are unlikely to be seen on the skyline, and will instead be seen against landform. This ensures that they will always appear subservient in relation to the NSA, without skyline prominence and with very limited vertical impact. This in turn avoids the creation of a moving obstacle that would affect the SLQs that are concerned with openness, wildness, and stillness.
- The Proposed Development lies to the east of the NSA, in an aspect of its setting that is affected by external baseline influences of human development, activity and movement. This ensures that the Proposed Development will not introduce an entirely new feature that would have an increased effect on the SLQs that are concerned with openness, wildness, and stillness.

- The Proposed Development has been specifically designed to have a compact, well-balanced, regular and even composition in key views from the NSA. This ensures that it relates well to its landform setting and avoids eye-catching effects of gapping and clustering or overlapping that could increase its influence.
- Infrastructure in the Proposed Development may also be visible from some parts of the NSA, with potential effects on wildness qualities and stillness and quietness. However, the baseline presence of the hydro-electric roads/traffic and other infrastructure in the vicinity of the Proposed Development ensures that these elements of the Proposed Development are not an entirely new influence in the landscape. The use of upgraded existing access tracks to the site also helps to limit the effects of infrastructure. This is exemplified in Viewpoints 2 and 3, where existing tracks are clearly visible in the baseline views.
- The highest “*risk of damage/loss to SLQ*” as assessed in Table 6.7 above is low-medium, which, when combined with a high sensitivity, can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. While in this case the low-medium level of “*risk of damage/loss to SLQ*” has been assessed to lead to a localised significant effect on two of the SLQs, it does indicate that the identified significant effects are of the lowest order of significance and arise from a limited level of change.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

6.7.203 The following wind farms (shown on Figures 6.13a and 6.13b) are relevant in the assessment of cumulative effects on the Assynt-Coigach NSA:

- operational wind farms at Achany, Lairg and Rosehall;
- under-construction wind farm at Creag Riabhach;
- consented wind farms at Braemore and Lairg 2;
- application-stage sites at Meall Buidhe and Strath Tirry; and
- scoping sites at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission.

6.7.204 The main assessment of effects on the SLQs takes into account the relevant operational and under-construction wind farms, and the effects arising from the addition of the Proposed Development to these wind farms are therefore considered in the main assessment of effects on the SLQs. A separate cumulative assessment is therefore not carried out for the addition of the Proposed Development to operational and under-construction wind farms.

6.7.205 When various combinations of consented, application-stage and scoping cumulative wind farms are also considered, the addition of the Proposed Development to the two relevant SLQs (“*significant tracts of wild land*” and “*a still, quiet landscape under a constantly changing sky*”) is likely to result in an increased cumulative effect due to the greater wind farm influence that would be apparent in the setting to the NSA. However, the cumulative effect on the SLQs in any scenario would remain limited for the following reasons.

- The cumulative wind farms lie a minimum of just over 15.5 km from the NSA (the closest wind farm is the operational site at Achany), at which distance the influence of all sites on the SLQs is negligible/limited, distant and intermittent.
- The cumulative wind farms of all statuses are grouped to the east and south-east of the NSA and, as a result, this part of the NSA has the greatest existing and potential future wind farm influence. The Proposed Development also lies to the east, between the baseline influences of Creag Riabhach and Achany, where it will follow the pattern of development that relates to this aspect of the setting to the NSA. This is beneficial as it will not lie in a part of the setting to the

NSA that is otherwise unaffected by wind energy development, and its location is not out of keeping with the existing character of the landscape.

- The location of the Proposed Development to the east also ensures that wind farm influence on the NSA will continue to arise solely from the east and south-east. As a result, wind energy development will be seen in the same aspect of the setting of the NSA (the east and south-east). This focus within one aspect both reduces the additional influence of the Proposed Development as it will be seen in the context of other wind energy development, and ensures that the great majority of the setting to the NSA will remain unaffected, including, most importantly, the spectacular and dramatic landscape to the north and west.
- The Proposed Development itself is assessed to have a not significant effect on the NSA as a whole, and its effect on the two relevant SLQs is also limited (with a low-medium “*risk of damage/loss*” on the SLQs). It also lies outwith the NSA and can therefore only have a perceived effect on the SLQs of the NSA.

6.7.206 The combination of these factors ensures that the cumulative effect on the Assynt-Coigach NSA will be not significant in any scenario, when the relevant cumulative sites are considered.

Assessment of Effects on Wild Land

6.7.207 A wild land assessment has been carried out for the Reay-Cassley WLA (WLA 34) as the Proposed Development lies largely within this WLA. The assessment follows guidance set out in Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Technical Guidance (NatureScot, September 2020, Revised August 2023 to reflect NPF4) with reference to the Description of Wild Land Areas (SNH, 2017).

6.7.208 This assessment is set out in two broad sections:

- Approach to the Assessment, which describes the background to ‘wild land’, and the guidance and methodology used; and
- Assessment of Effects on Reay-Cassley WLA (WLA 34).

Approach to the Assessment

Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Technical Guidance (NatureScot, 2020/2023)

6.7.209 The NatureScot technical guidance (2020/2023) sets out the suggested approach to the assessment of effects on wild land. As noted in paragraph 4 of the guidance, the assessment methodology broadly follows that of GLVIA3, and is based around the following five stages (as described in Table 1 of NatureScot guidance):

- “*Step 1 - Define the study area and scope of the assessment;*
- *Step 2 – Verify the WLA baseline;*
- *Step 3 – Assess the sensitivity of the qualities;*
- *Step 4 – Assess the magnitude of the effects; and*
- *Step 5 – Judge the significance of effects”*

6.7.210 While the wild land assessment methodology broadly follows that set out in GLVIA3, there are several points that are beneficially explained prior to the assessment itself, as discussed below.

Physical Attributes and Perceptual Responses

6.7.211 Paragraph 11 of NatureScot technical guidance (2020/2023) outlines the basis of the ‘physical attributes’ and ‘perceptual responses’ that form the basis of WLAs as follows:

“...there is a high level of commonality in appreciation [of wildness] that allows a set of physical attributes that evoke certain perceptual responses to be identified. These can be assessed if presented in a systematic, transparent and consistent way, namely...

WLAs have the following physical attributes:

- *a high degree of perceived naturalness;*
- *a lack of modern human artefacts or structures;*
- *little evidence of contemporary land uses;*
- *landform which is rugged, or otherwise physically challenging; and*
- *remoteness and / or inaccessibility.*

6.7.212 The perceptual responses evoked by these physical attributes include:

- *a sense of sanctuary or solitude;*
- *risk or, for some visitors, a sense of awe or anxiety;*
- *perceptions that the landscape has arresting or inspiring qualities; and*
- *fulfilment from the physical challenge required to penetrate into these places.”*

6.7.213 Paragraph 12 goes on to say:

“These physical attributes and perceptual responses come together as wild land qualities – reflecting that it is a combination of factors that contributes to the value and appreciation of wildness. Each of the WLA descriptions set out their particular wild land qualities, with the physical attributes and perceptual responses contributing to it identified. These descriptions should form the starting point for an assessment of impacts on a WLA.”

6.7.214 Definitions of these physical attributes and perceptual responses are provided in Annex 1 of the technical guidance. Three of the physical attributes - *a high degree of perceived naturalness; landform which is rugged, or otherwise physically challenging; and remoteness and/or inaccessibility* – relate specifically to physical conditions within the WLA, as noted in the Annex 1 definitions and the wild land descriptions. In this assessment, OPEN has therefore considered these three attributes in relation to their presence within the WLAs, and considers the Proposed Development in relation to the direct physical effects that it may have on these attributes.

6.7.215 The remaining two physical attributes - *a lack of modern human artefacts or structures and little evidence of contemporary land uses* – are less specific with regard to location, and both the Annex 1 definitions and the wild land descriptions make reference to development within and outwith the WLA in terms of these two attributes. This is because visibility of modern human artefacts or structures and contemporary land uses outwith the WLA can affect perception within the WLA. OPEN has therefore considered these two attributes in relation to their presence within and outwith the WLAs, with the caveat that unless the Proposed Development lies within the WLA, they will not be directly physically impacted by the Proposed Development but the effect will instead be a visual, perceived effect that arises from visibility of the Proposed Development.

The Status of WLAs

6.7.216 The status of WLAs is clearly set out in paragraph 8 of NatureScot guidance (2020/2023); *“WLAs have not been identified on scenic grounds and are not a statutory designation.”*

6.7.217 There is also an acceptance (paragraph 9) that WLAs are not ‘wilderness’ and that human influences can and do form part of the baseline character of WLAs:

“...Whilst the WLA map identifies areas where wildness is most strongly expressed, these are not ‘wilderness’, empty of any human activities or influence. They reflect Scotland’s long history of past occupation and current use and management, albeit that evidence of such is often light and limited in extent.”

The Need for a Wild Land Assessment

6.7.218 The need for a WLA assessment is discussed in Policy 4 of NPF4, which notes that:

“All such proposals [within WLAs] must be accompanied by a wild land impact assessment which sets out how design, siting, or other mitigation measures have been and will be used to minimise significant impacts on the qualities of the wild land, as well as any management and monitoring arrangements where appropriate. Buffer zones around wild land will not be applied, and effects of development outwith wild land areas will not be a significant consideration.”

6.7.219 Paragraph 5 of the NatureScot guidance also discusses the need for a WLA assessment:

“This guidance should only be applied to proposals whose nature, siting, scale or design are likely to result in a significant effect on the qualities of a WLA. Given this, assessments are more likely for proposals within a WLA, and are less likely for proposals outwith the WLA.”

6.7.220 It is important to note that, according to NatureScot guidance, effects on WLAs can only be experienced within WLAs and not from the area surrounding them. Paragraph 3 of the guidance notes that *“This guidance sets out a methodology and general principles for assessing the impact of development and other proposals on WLAs, as they are experienced from within the WLA, not from outwith.”*

Cumulative Effects

6.7.221 NatureScot guidance notes the following in relation to cumulative effects on WLAs.

“The potential for cumulative effects. Other proposals (either of the same or different type) which are likely to contribute to significant cumulative effects should be identified in discussion with the decision maker. The principles within our guidance document “Assessing the cumulative impact of onshore wind energy developments” can be applied to other development and should aid this assessment.” (paragraph 16)

6.7.222 And *“In judging significance, the following factors should be considered...The nature and extent of any likely cumulative effects.”* (paragraph 33).

6.7.223 As with the other aspects of this LVIA, the cumulative assessment is carried out on the basis of the cumulative wind farm scenario as it was at the time of the April 2021 LVIA. Several operational wind farms – Achany, Rosehall and Lairg – could affect the WLA, as shown on Figure 6.11d (2024). It is relevant to note that these wind farms were operational at the time of the NatureScot site assessment of this WLA that was carried out in September 2013 to inform the description. Creag Riabhach wind farm is also relevant, and is also shown on Figure 6.11d (2024). Consented wind farm sites at Braemore and Lairg 2, and application-stage wind farms at Meall Buidhe and Strath Tirry are considered, as are the scoping stage sites at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission. These wind farms can be seen on Figure 6.13a and 6.13b .

Methodology for Assessing Effects on Wild Land Areas

6.7.224 As noted in NatureScot guidance, the wild land assessment methodology broadly follows that of GLVIA3 and is based around the five stages described in Table 1 of the guidance. Steps 1 and 2 do not require detailed explanation of methodology, and are therefore not described here. The methodology for Steps 3, 4 and 5 is described below.

Step 3: Assess the Sensitivity of WLA Qualities

6.7.225 NatureScot guidance summarises this step as follows:

“Through detailed field assessment within the study area, assess the sensitivity of the wild land qualities scoped in (including their physical attributes and perceptual responses), to the type and scale of change proposed”.

6.7.226 In applying GLVIA3 to the assessment, and as noted by NatureScot, it is necessary to attribute a value to the receptor (classified as high, medium or low, or interim levels, as described in Appendix 6.1). The value attributed to nationally important designations, including NPs and NSAs is normally found to be at the upper end of the scale, or high. WLAs are not an environmental designation and are not statutorily protected in the way that NPs and NSAs are for their scenic qualities.

6.7.227 In order to apply objectivity to the attribution of value in WLAs, it is helpful to reference the publication Spatial Planning for Onshore Wind Turbines – Natural Heritage Considerations, Guidance (SNH, June 2015). Annex 1 to this guidance provides advice on the potential objectives that may be applicable in different landscapes within Scotland in terms of their ability to accommodate wind farms, suggesting that some landscapes should be subject to a higher level of protection than others. Annex 1 places WLAs in the middle category, where some landscape ‘accommodation’ of wind farms may be considered appropriate, noting that:

“Within local landscape designations and Wild land Areas, the degree of landscape protection will be less than for National Scenic Areas. In these areas, an appropriate objective may be to accommodate windfarms, rather than seek landscape protection.”

6.7.228 WLAs are therefore considered to have a distinctly different baseline value, in landscape terms, than nationally designated landscapes. In the terms of GLVIA3 and OPEN’s methodology, it is reasonable to attribute a theoretical medium-high value to WLAs. However, parts of some WLAs fall within NSAs and these parts of the WLAs are considered to have a high value due to their NSA status.

6.7.229 The levels of value are combined with individual assessments of susceptibility to inform the overall assessment of sensitivity within the WLA. Susceptibility relates to the nature of the landscape receptor and how susceptible it is to the potential effects of the Proposed Development, as described in GLVIA3. Susceptibility varies across the WLA depending on the nature and strength of the WLOs and their physical attributes and perceptual responses.

6.7.230 OPEN’s methodology assesses the susceptibility of landscape character receptors through a series of three criteria (set out in Appendix 6.1), of which two are relevant to the susceptibility of WLOs.

- The specific nature of the Proposed Development: the susceptibility of landscape receptors is specific to the change arising from the particular development that is proposed, including its individual components and features, and its size, scale, location, context and characteristics.
- Landscape character: the key characteristics of the existing landscape character of the receptor are considered in the evaluation of susceptibility as they determine the degree to which the receptor may accommodate the influence of the Proposed Development (in the wild land

assessment this criterion relates to the documented WLQs and their associated physical attributes and perceptual responses).

6.7.231 The third criterion, 'landscape association', is not identified as a separate factor in the judgement of susceptibility within WLAs; this is because the WLQs anyway make specific mention of landscape association where it is a relevant factor, and it is therefore not necessary to include it again when considering susceptibility.

6.7.232 A useful tool in the assessment of the levels of susceptibility across the WLA is NatureScot's analysis of the data that was gathered in order to inform the identification of WLAs (SNH, 2014). NatureScot gathered data for each of the 'physical attributes' of wild land and used these to create a 'relative wildness map'. The 'Jenks Natural Breaks Optimisation method' was then used to identify the natural breaks in the distribution of the relative wildness data in order that levels of wildness could be identified and mapped. As a result, eight classes of wildness were identified, with 8 being the highest and 1 being the lowest. These are shown on Figure 6.5c (2024), with operational and under-construction wind farms also shown in order that the levels of wildness at these locations can be seen.

Step 4: Assess the Effects

6.7.233 NatureScot guidance notes this step as follows in Table 1:

"Assess the effects on individual and/or combinations of qualities, drawing out which physical attributes and perceptual responses will be affected, how and to what degree. This should reflect the size or scale of change, its extent and duration."

6.7.234 OPEN's methodology for assessing magnitude of change on landscape character receptors is carried out through the application of a set of criteria as set out in Appendix 6.1. Broadly, the magnitude of change that the Proposed Development will have on landscape receptors is assessed in terms of the size or scale of the change, the geographical extent of the area influenced and its duration and reversibility. The key elements of the Proposed Development that will influence the level of change on landscape character are the turbines, although infrastructure is also considered.

Step 5: Judgement of the Significance of Effects

6.7.235 NatureScot guidance summaries this step as follows in Table 1:

"Conclude on the overall significance (taking into account any mitigation), in terms of the study area and where relevant the wider WLA."

6.7.236 On the basis that the NatureScot guidance is based on the principles of GLVIA3, OPEN's methodology for the assessment of the significance of effects (as described in Appendix 6.1) has been used for the assessment of effects on WLAs. OPEN's methodology describes the significance of effects as follows.

"A significant effect occurs where the Proposed Development will provide a defining influence on a landscape element, landscape character receptor or view. A not significant effect occurs where the effect of the Proposed Development is not material, and the baseline characteristics of the landscape element, landscape character receptor, view or visual receptor continue to provide the definitive influence. In this instance the Proposed Development may have an influence but this influence will not be definitive."

6.7.237 NatureScot guidance (paragraph 33) states that:

"In judging significance, the following factors should be considered.

- *The sensitivity and magnitude of change on the qualities of the WLA.*
- *The contribution of areas affected to the wider WLA.*

- *The nature and extent of any likely cumulative effects.*
- *Whether the impacts are adverse or beneficial, and their longevity.”*

6.7.238 The following section assesses the effects of the Proposed Development on Reay-Cassley (WLA 34) following the five steps as described by NatureScot.

Assessment of Effect on Reay-Cassley (WLA 34)

6.7.239 The turbines and some of the infrastructure in the Proposed Development lie within the edge of the south-eastern leg of the Reay-Cassley (WLA 34), as shown on Figures 6.5a (2024) and 6.5b (2024). The WLA description (SNH, 2017) for Reay-Cassley (WLA 34) provides a useful brief overview of this WLA:

“This large Wild Land Area (WLA) extends 560 km² across north west Sutherland from Scourie in the north to Rosehall in the south. In the north the WLA mainly comprises cnocan moorland, with a high and irregular mountain range within the central section, and simpler peatland slopes in the south.”

6.7.240 The WLA description lists four key attributes/qualities (which have been numbered 1 to 4 for the purpose of this assessment) for Reay-Cassley (WLA 34):

1. *“A range of large, irregular, rocky mountains with steep, arresting slopes and a variety of lochs and lochans, possessing a strong sense of naturalness, remoteness and sanctuary.*
2. *An awe-inspiring, broad scale expanse of cnocan in which there is a complex pattern of features at a local level that contribute to the sense of naturalness and sanctuary.*
3. *A variety of spaces created by irregular landforms in which there is perceived naturalness, as well as a strong sense of sanctuary and solitude.*
4. *Extensive, elevated peatland slopes whose simplicity and openness contribute to a perception of awe, whilst highlighting the qualities of adjacent mountains.”*

6.7.241 These key attributes/qualities (hereafter referred to as Wild Land Qualities, or WLQs) form the basis of the wild land assessment as they express the distinctive and specific wildness qualities that are found in this WLA. The WLA description provides further information on each of these WLQs as an explanation of how the various aspects of the landscape contribute to the WLQ.

Step 1: Define the Study Area and Scope of the Assessment

6.7.242 NatureScot guidance summarises this step as follows:

“Identify a study area appropriate to the scale of the proposal and extent of likely significant effects on the WLA.”

6.7.243 Paragraph 16 of the guidance notes that:

“The rationale for the selection of the study area and scope of the assessment should be clearly stated and consider the following.

- *The extent of visibility and recognised routes/movement through the WLA. The scale of the proposal may not equate to the extent of effects...*
- *The wild land qualities likely to be significantly affected. The focus of the assessment should be on the qualities likely to be affected rather than where the proposal is located.*
- *The potential for cumulative effects...”*

- 6.7.244 The ZTVs (Figures 6.11a (2024) and 6.11b (2024)) show localised and intermittent theoretical visibility, gained largely from the south-eastern leg of the WLA, on the eastern edge of which the site lies; the northern and central part of the south-western leg; and the south-eastern part of the mountainous central area of the WLA. This is partly blade visibility only, with extensive parts of the south-eastern and south-western legs and lower slopes in the mountainous areas gaining no theoretical visibility of turbine hubs. Theoretical visibility is gained up to a maximum of around 16 km away, around the ridges of Glas Bheinn.
- 6.7.245 In relation to the first consideration in the identification of the study area, the WLA description mentions several “*recognised routes/movement through the WLA*”. These are listed below along with a description of the theoretical visibility that may be gained from them:
- **Ben More Assynt and Conival:** visibility from the summit of Ben More Assynt as seen in Viewpoint 2 (8.46 km away); no visibility from the summit of Conival; no visibility from the principal route to these Munros (which comes in from Inchnadamph, in the west);
 - The three Corbetts (**Ben Leoid, Breabag and Glas Bheinn**): visibility from Ben Leoid (11.9 km); very limited blade only visibility from Glas Bheinn (15.8 km away), no visibility from Breabag;
 - **Lochs Gleann Dubh and Glencoul:** no visibility;
 - **Eas a’ Chùal Aluinn waterfall:** no visibility at the waterfall; a very short stretch of theoretical visibility (approximately 900 m long) from over 15 km away on the principal path to the waterfall;
 - the **Bone Caves** near Inchnadamph: no visibility from the caves or the principal, waymarked circuit route to them; and
 - **Cape Wrath Trail/Scottish National Trail:** very limited theoretical visibility from one short stretch over 35 km away, which lies outwith the WLA.
- 6.7.246 This indicates that of the notable routes and locations that people may visit within the WLA, the great majority will gain no visibility of the Proposed Development, as shown on the ZTVs. Where there is visibility, this is gained from a minimum of 8.46 km away; this is at Ben More Assynt, where the Proposed Development is assessed to have a significant effect on the view. Other than Ben More Assynt, visibility from the listed *recognised routes/movement through the WLA* is limited to theoretical visibility from two of the Corbetts and a very short stretch of the path to Eas a’ Chùal Aluinn waterfall, although not from the viewpoint at the waterfall itself.
- 6.7.247 The second point noted in NatureScot guidance as being relevant in the “*rationale for the selection of the study area and scope of the assessment*” is consideration of the “*wild land qualities likely to be significantly affected*”. This WLA has four WLQs. These are described below along with a judgement as to whether or not they may be significantly affected by the Proposed Development.
- WLQ 1 “A range of large, irregular, rocky mountains with steep, arresting slopes and a variety of lochs and lochans, possessing a strong sense of naturalness, remoteness and sanctuary.”**
- 6.7.248 This WLQ applies primarily to the central, mountainous part of the WLA, within which Viewpoints 2 (Ben More Assynt) and 3 (Coire Ceann Loch) lie. Fieldwork has indicated that Maovally forms something of a cusp between this mountainous landscape and the considerably more gentle, low-lying peatland slopes that cover the south-eastern and south-western legs of the WLA although this is of course not a clear-cut boundary. The contrast between the peatlands and the mountainous landscape can be seen in the photograph for Viewpoint 2, while the peatlands can be seen stretching away south-eastwards from Viewpoint 3, which is on the southern edge of the mountains.

6.7.249 The “*recognised routes/movement through the WLA*” listed in the WLA description are all geographically associated with this WLQ and, as described above, will almost all gain no or limited and distant visibility of the Proposed Development. However, the ZTVs show that there is intermittent visibility of the Proposed Development from the south-eastern part of the area of the WLA that has the most notable association with this WLQ (the central mountainous area). There is therefore potential for the Proposed Development to have some effect on this WLQ.

WLQ2 “An awe-inspiring, broad scale expanse of cnocan in which there is a complex pattern of features at a local level that contribute to the sense of naturalness and sanctuary.”

6.7.250 As noted in the WLA description, this WLQ is found in the northern part of the WLA, which is shown on the ZTV to gain no visibility of the Proposed Development. The Proposed Development will therefore not affect the attributes/responses that comprise this WLQ. It is also relevant to note that because the Proposed Development will not affect this WLQ, it will not affect the contribution that this WLQ makes to the WLA as a whole. This WLQ will not be affected by the Proposed Development and has not been considered any further.

WLQ3 “A variety of spaces created by irregular landforms in which there is perceived naturalness, as well as a strong sense of sanctuary and solitude.”

6.7.251 This WLQ expresses how the varying landform combines to contribute to the WLA as a whole and demonstrates how the varied landforms can lead to perceptual responses. This WLQ is chiefly concerned with the irregular landform mountains and cnocan and their associated glens, lochans, and enclosed corries, which are found in the northern and central parts of the WLA. In contrast, the peatland slopes are generally smooth and regular in form and have a more exposed character with less variation in spatial experience. The Proposed Development may affect the perceptual responses that arise from the irregularity of landform and the way that it is experienced in the WLA. There is therefore potential for the Proposed Development to have some effect on this WLQ.

WLQ4 “Extensive, elevated peatland slopes whose simplicity and openness contribute to a perception of awe, whilst highlighting the qualities of adjacent mountains.”

6.7.252 The peatland slopes that comprise this WLQ are found “*To the east and south of Ben More Assynt [where] there is an extensive area of elevated peatland slopes that form relatively low, broad ridges extending from either side of Glen Cassley*”, and this WLQ applies primarily to the south-eastern and south-western legs of the WLA that lie on either side of Glen Cassley, within which the Proposed Development is located. Viewpoint 1 (track near Maovally) lies within this area while Viewpoint 3 (Coire Ceann Loch) and Viewpoint 4 (Arascaig track) lie on its northern periphery. There is potential for the Proposed Development to have an effect on this WLQ due to its location within the area that has the greatest geographical association with the WLQ.

6.7.253 The third point noted in NatureScot guidance as being relevant in the “*rationale for the selection of the study area and scope of the assessment*” is consideration of the “*The potential for cumulative effects*”. The cumulative wind farm developments that were, as of the April 2021 LVIA, most relevant to the Proposed Development and this WLA - Achany, Rosehall, Lairg, Braemore, Lairg 2, and Creag Riabhach – are concentrated around the south-eastern leg of the WLA. This WLQ is therefore also relevant in the assessment of effects of the Proposed Development in relation to the potential for cumulative effects to arise.

6.7.254 The considerations described above indicate that the study area for the assessment of effects on this WLA should cover the peatland slopes and the mountainous central parts of the WLA, as these are the areas that have greatest potential to be affected by the Proposed Development. The Proposed Development lies within the peatland slopes and will be seen from the slopes as well as from some south-eastern parts of the mountainous central area. The study area is shown on Figures 6.5a (2024) and 6.5b (2024).

6.7.255 The northern part of the WLA, covered by the cnochan that have a geographical association with WLQ 2, will not be affected physically or perceptually by the Proposed Development. The contribution that this area makes to the WLA as a whole will also not be affected by the Proposed Development. The northern part of the WLA is therefore not included within the study area.

Step 2: Establish the Baseline

6.7.256 NatureScot guidance summarises this step as follows in Table 1:

“Confirm the wild land qualities (set out in the WLA description) relevant to the study area, describing any major changes that have occurred since the description was prepared and the nature of their contribution to the WLA.”

6.7.257 The baseline study is informed by the WLA description, the mapping of the eight classes of wildness (SNH, 2014), OPEN’s site visits, and LVIA Viewpoints 1, 2, 3 and 4, which illustrate the outlook towards the Proposed Development from the study area. It is important to note that while these viewpoints provide a useful illustration of views that can be gained from within the study area, the assessment of effects on viewpoints and WLAs is carried out separately and according to specific methodologies. The assessment of visual effects at the viewpoints should therefore not be considered in relation to the assessment of effects on wild land, and the viewpoints have been referenced simply to provide an illustration of views within the study area.

6.7.258 This step involves a review of the strength of attributes and responses and their contribution to the identified WLQs of the area. These are verified against the WLA description, noting that the strength to which the WLQs are expressed will vary in different parts of the WLA. In this case, it has been ascertained in Step 1 that the Proposed Development has potential to significantly affect three of the WLQs (WLQs 1, 3 and 4) and this baseline section therefore focusses on the WLQs 1, 3 and 4 of Reay-Cassley (WLA 34). These are:

1. *“A range of large, irregular, rocky mountains with steep, arresting slopes and a variety of lochs and lochans, possessing a strong sense of naturalness, remoteness and sanctuary.*
3. *A variety of spaces created by irregular landforms in which there is perceived naturalness, as well as a strong sense of sanctuary and solitude.*
4. *Extensive, elevated peatland slopes whose simplicity and openness contribute to a perception of awe, whilst highlighting the qualities of adjacent mountains.”*

6.7.259 Table 6.8 below lists the physical attributes and perceptual responses of the study area and their contribution to WLQs 1, 3 and 4.

Table 6.8 –Physical Attributes and Perceptual Responses of WLQs

Physical Attribute/ Perceptual Response	Strength of Physical Attribute/Perceptual Response and Contribution to Wild Land Quality (as described in WLA description)	OPEN Comment/ Subsequent Change to Baseline
Physical Attribute		
High degree of perceived naturalness (defined in NatureScot guidance as “Within WLAs vegetation cover is primarily composed	Referred to in the WLA description as follows: WLQ1 • ...an awe-inspiring range of high mountains, ridges and plateaux...In combination with...exposed rock and distinct geological features, this	WLQ1 This physical attribute contributes notably to WLQ1 and is expressed to a high level in the central mountainous part of the WLA, with which this WLQ is associated.

Physical Attribute/ Perceptual Response	Strength of Physical Attribute/Perceptual Response and Contribution to Wild Land Quality (as described in WLA description)	OPEN Comment/ Subsequent Change to Baseline
<p><i>of natural or semi-natural habitats... Catchment systems and other geomorphological processes are largely unmodified")</i></p>	<p><i>contributes to a strong perception of naturalness.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• Within some parts of the WLA, the mountain slopes and cliffs harbour native woodland that increases shelter and contributes to the sense of naturalness</i> <p>WLQ3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• This irregularity adds to the ruggedness of the area, as well as its perceived naturalness</i> <p>WLQ4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• The seemingly random pattern of these elements [lochans, bogs, peat hags, burns and rock outcrops] also contributes to the sense of naturalness...</i> 	<p>WLQ3</p> <p>This physical attribute contributes to WLQ3, particularly in those areas of more irregular landform (primarily the central mountainous area and northern cnocan, where it is expressed to a high level – the peatland slopes are relatively regular and smooth and here it is expressed to a moderate-high level).</p> <p>WLQ4</p> <p>This physical attribute makes a moderate-high contribution to WLQ4; the elements mentioned in the WLA description do contribute to a degree of perceived naturalness. However, there are elements of cultivated vegetation in the peatlands that are associated with this WLQ, including woodland and forestry as well as cropping of grass.</p>
<p>The lack of modern human artefacts or structures</p> <p>and</p> <p>Little evidence of contemporary land uses</p> <p>NB These two attributes have been described together as they are closely aligned and have a high level of crossover in the WLA description.</p> <p>(defined in NatureScot guidance as “There is no or very limited evidence of contemporary buildings, structures or engineering works within WLAs although their presence outwith may be discerned. Older artefacts (for example, shielings and cleared settlements) and small scale features (for example, fences and stalkers paths) may be evident” and</p>	<p>Referred to in the WLA description as follows:</p> <p>WLQ1 and WLQ3</p> <p>No specific reference.</p> <p>WLQ4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• From the peatland slopes within the south of the WLA, human artefacts and contemporary land use can be clearly seen extending around the south east, south and south western edges. [These] include extensive estate buildings, conifer plantations, roads, a hydro- electric scheme (with above surface pipes) and wind farms outside the WLA and telecom mast and grazing within the area. These elements tend to be visible over long distances due to the openness and simplicity of the peatland.</i> <i>• Around the slopes to the south west, south and south east, there are...some wind farms upon elevated peatland...Although located outside the WLA, their extensive size and/or cumulative effects appear to encroach upon the wild land qualities...</i> <i>• Within the upper stretches of Glen Cassley that lie outside the WLA, human elements tend to have limited effects where they appear isolated, small scale, concentrated and low-key in siting and design. In contrast, they</i> 	<p>WLQ1 and WLQ3</p> <p>Whilst they are not referred to in the WLA description, these attributes contribute to WLQ1 and WLQ3 to a moderate-high extent. OPEN notes that while there is little evidence of human artefacts/structures and contemporary land uses <i>within</i> the central mountainous part and cnocan areas of the WLA, there are a number of features located outwith the WLA that exert an external influence on the areas associated with WLQs 1 and 3. These include wind farms, forestry, roads, houses/other buildings, transmission lines, hydro infrastructure, and the hydro drawdown marks on Loch Shin. There are also human elements within other parts of the WLA that influence WLQs 1 and 3, including most notably the hydro infrastructure on the slopes of Maovally (e.g. tarmac road, transmission lines, mast). These human influences/land uses are clearly seen at Viewpoint 2, including the hydro tracks within the peatland slopes. Almost all of these influences lie within the southern peatlands part of the WLA or in the Loch Shin area, outwith the south-eastern edge of the WLA.</p> <p>WLQ4</p> <p>OPEN considers that this description does not make sufficiently clear the level of human artefacts and</p>

Physical Attribute/ Perceptual Response	Strength of Physical Attribute/Perceptual Response and Contribution to Wild Land Quality (as described in WLA description)	OPEN Comment/ Subsequent Change to Baseline
<p><i>“Within WLAs no or very limited evidence of more intensive land use, but their presence outwith may be discerned. Extensive grazing and management for field sports may be evident (for example, muirburn, grazing pressure and use of ATVs)”.</i></p>	<p><i>seem more encroaching upon the wild land qualities where large in scale, extensive or are more numerous, and thus lead to cumulative effects, especially given the central position of the glen in relation to the WLA that extends to both the east and west of this.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• Duchally hydro-electric scheme, within the upper reaches of the glen, has a strong influence on surrounding wild land qualities...include prominent and incongruous pipelines that cross the upper glen slopes, as well as a long access road and powerlines extending over the elevated peatland slopes at Maovally...</i> 	<p>contemporary land use found within the part of the WLA that is associated with WLQ4. The description implies that hydro infrastructure lies outwith the WLA, while in fact there is infrastructure within the study area, including masts and tarmacked routes.</p> <p>It is also notable that while the WLA description refers to infrastructure outwith the WLA in Glen Cassley, it does not allude to the human artefacts and contemporary land uses along Loch Shin, to the east of the peatlands. This includes hydro infrastructure, a substation, extensive coniferous forestry, houses, an hotel, A-class roads, and a fish farm, which are in some cases less than 200 m away from the WLA. It is also relevant that subsequent to the production of the WLA description, consent has been granted for wind farms at Braemore, Lairg 2 and Creag Riabhach, all within approx. 10 km of the WLA.</p> <p>This attribute is expressed to a moderate degree in the area associated with WLQ4.</p>
<p>Landform which is rugged, or otherwise physically challenging (defined in NatureScot guidance as <i>“Within WLAs, land that has extensive rough terrain or extensive boglands, which is difficult to traverse.”</i>)</p>	<p>Referred to in the WLA description as follows:</p> <p>WLQ1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• This WLA includes an awe-inspiring range of high mountains, ridges and plateaux. These are very irregular and rugged in form, with crags, tops and corries jumbled together in a sporadic manner.</i> <i>• It is physically challenging to ascend or traverse the mountains because of their great ruggedness and elevation...</i> <p>WLQ3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• Highly irregular landforms occur throughout the WLA...This irregularity adds to the ruggedness of the area.</i> <p>WLQ4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• Although the peatland slopes are not very high in elevation and are simple at a broad scale, they are rugged at a local level due to a mix of lochans, bogs, peat hags, burns and rock outcrops.</i> 	<p>WLQ1</p> <p>This physical attribute contributes notably to WLQ1 and is expressed to a high level in the central mountainous area, with which this WLQ is associated.</p> <p>WLQ3</p> <p>This attribute contributes to WLQ3, particularly in areas of more irregular landform (central mountainous area/northern cnochan, where it is expressed to a high level – the peatland slopes are relatively regular and smooth and it is expressed to a moderate-high level).</p> <p>WLQ4</p> <p>While the peatland slopes in the study area are considered to have some ruggedness, this is localised, as acknowledged in the WLA description, and this reduces the strength of this physical attribute in relation to WLQ4 to a moderate-high level.</p>

Physical Attribute/ Perceptual Response	Strength of Physical Attribute/Perceptual Response and Contribution to Wild Land Quality (as described in WLA description)	OPEN Comment/ Subsequent Change to Baseline
<p>Remoteness and/or inaccessibility</p> <p>(defined in NatureScot guidance as “<i>Within WLAs, land that is distant from public motorised access (the nearest public road, ferry landing or railway station), taking account of the distance, barriers to travel (for example, lochs, rivers and cliffs), and ease of travel on foot / bicycle.</i>”)</p>	<p>Referred to in the WLA description as follows:</p> <p>WLQ1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The open, horizontal waters of these waterbodies...can act as a physical barrier to walking that increases remoteness.</i> <p>WLQ3 and WLQ4</p> <p>No specific reference</p>	<p>WLQ1</p> <p>This attribute contributes notably to WLQ1 and is expressed to a moderate-high level in the mountainous area, with which this WLQ is associated. There are a number of paths in the central mountains that reduce remoteness and increase accessibility, as noted in the WLA description.</p> <p>WLQ3</p> <p>This physical attribute contributes to WLQ3, particularly in the central mountainous area and northern cnocan – the peatland slopes lack remoteness and are accessible in places. This attribute is expressed to a high level in the mountains and cnocan and a moderate level in the peatlands.</p> <p>WLQ4</p> <p>The tracks that give access to the peatland area that is associated with WLQ4 reduce the attribute of remoteness or inaccessibility to a moderate level.</p>
Perceptual Response		
<p>A sense of sanctuary or solitude</p> <p>(defined in NatureScot guidance as “<i>The perception of separation from the ‘modern world’, isolation or distance from disturbance, that engenders feelings of respite or tranquillity, that enables a focus on the natural / semi-natural setting.</i>”)</p>	<p>Referred to in the WLA description as follows:</p> <p>WLQ1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Although many people visit these [the network of paths through the hills] and other parts of the WLA at certain times, they are typically dispersed within such a large area that a strong sense of sanctuary and solitude prevails.</i> <p>WLQ3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Within the corries, basins or shelves, the surrounding shielding landform often leads to a sense of being hidden, contributing to a strong sense of seclusion and sanctuary...Perceived seclusion and few visitors to these areas, may also lead to a strong sense of solitude.</i> <p>WLQ4</p> <p>No specific reference</p>	<p>WLQ1</p> <p>This response contributes to WLQ1 and is expressed to a high level in the central mountainous part of the WLA, with which this WLQ is associated. The external influence of development as described above in relation to physical attributes does have some influence, especially on the fringes of the mountains, but the overall level is high.</p> <p>WLQ3</p> <p>This response contributes notably to WLQ3 and is most strongly expressed in the enclosed areas of the central mountainous part of the WLA where “<i>corries, basins or shelves...surrounding shielding landform</i>” are most prevalent. This response is expressed to a high level in the mountains and a moderate level elsewhere.</p> <p>WLQ4</p> <p>The relatively narrow extent of the peatland ‘legs’, the open, exposed nature of the landscape and the presence of tracks and other internal/</p>

Physical Attribute/ Perceptual Response	Strength of Physical Attribute/Perceptual Response and Contribution to Wild Land Quality (as described in WLA description)	OPEN Comment/ Subsequent Change to Baseline
		external human influences result in a limited sense of sanctuary or solitude. This attribute is expressed to a moderate level in the peatlands.
<p>Risk or, for some visitors, a sense of awe or anxiety</p> <p>(defined in NatureScot guidance as “<i>The perception of hazard that arises from being self-reliant in remote settings of large scale, whose rugged natural character and isolation from assistance (if required) engenders respect.</i>”)</p>	<p>Referred to in the WLA description as follows:</p> <p>WLQ1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>This WLA includes an awe-inspiring range of high mountains, ridges and plateaux...The massive proportions of the mountain range are very imposing and convey a strong sense of awe.</i> <i>It is physically challenging to ascend or traverse the mountains...and this can contribute to a perception of high risk.</i> <i>The open, horizontal waters of these waterbodies emphasise the vertical and rugged forms of the adjacent mountain slopes, contributing to the sense of awe.</i> <p>WLQ3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Where surrounded by high, steep and towering slopes, there is also a strong sense of awe.</i> <p>WLQ4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The...openness and high exposure of the area heightens the sense of risk.</i> <i>...these simple slopes highlight the contrasting and distinctive aspects of complex and high mountains to the north and west, emphasising the awe-inspiring qualities of these.</i> 	<p>WLQ1</p> <p>This perceptual response contributes notably to WLQ1 and is expressed to a high level in the central mountainous part of the WLA, with which this WLQ is associated.</p> <p>WLQ3</p> <p>This response contributes notably to WLQ3 and is most strongly expressed in the central mountainous part of the WLA where enclosure by “<i>high, steep and towering slopes</i>” is most prevalent. This response is expressed to a high level in the mountains and a moderate level elsewhere.</p> <p>WLQ4</p> <p>This response contributes to WLQ4, although the relatively narrow extent of the peatland slope ‘legs’ of the southern part of the WLA; the open and unenclosed/unshielded nature of the landscape; and the presence of tracks and other internal/external human influences result in a reduction in the “<i>risk or...sense of awe or anxiety</i>”. As noted in the WLA description, the contrast between the peatland slopes and the mountains serves to emphasise the awe-inspiring qualities of the latter rather than invoking this perceptual response within the peatland slopes. This response is expressed to a moderate-high level.</p>
<p>Perceptions that the landscape has arresting or inspiring qualities</p> <p>(defined in NatureScot guidance as “<i>An aesthetic reaction to the natural/semi-natural setting, often associated with the ‘classic’ high, steep and jagged mountains juxtaposed with deep lochs or</i></p>	<p>Referred to in the WLA description as follows:</p> <p>WLQ1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The towering vertical dimensions of some rock faces and glen slopes are also arresting, emphasised further by high waterfalls and steep scree slopes.</i> <p>WLQ3</p> <p>No specific reference</p> <p>WLQ4</p>	<p>WLQ1</p> <p>This perceptual response contributes notably to WLQ1 and is expressed to a high level in the central mountainous area, with which this WLQ is associated.</p> <p>WLQ3</p> <p>This perceptual response contributes to WLQ3 and is most strongly expressed in the enclosed areas of the central mountainous part of the WLA (as described in relation to WLQ1). This response is expressed to a high level in the mountains and a moderate-high level elsewhere.</p>

Physical Attribute/ Perceptual Response	Strength of Physical Attribute/Perceptual Response and Contribution to Wild Land Quality (as described in WLA description)	OPEN Comment/ Subsequent Change to Baseline
<i>seas, but can also be prompted by other superlative compositions such as the large scale simplicity of rounded massif, or the seemingly infinite expanse of open peatland or seas.”)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The vast scale of these simple peatland slopes, in combination with a strong sense of openness and exposure, appears arresting.</i> 	<p>WLQ4</p> <p>This response contributes to WLQ4 although in OPEN’s view, the peatland slopes with which this WLQ is associated do not display notably arresting qualities, particularly in relation to the mountainous central area/northern cnocan. This response is expressed to a moderate-high level.</p>
<p>Fulfilment from the physical challenge required to penetrate into these places</p> <p>(defined in NatureScot guidance as “<i>The satisfaction and sense of accomplishment that arises from the physical effort required to traverse these settings, tackling their scale, topography, ground and weather conditions.</i>”)</p>	<p>Referred to in the WLA description as follows:</p> <p>WLQ1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>It is physically challenging to ascend or traverse the mountains because of their great ruggedness and elevation, as well as the difficulty of crossing rocky ground.</i> <p>WLQ3</p> <p>No specific reference</p> <p>WLQ4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>...the peatland slopes...are rugged at a local level...that make the slopes physically challenging to cross.</i> 	<p>WLQ1</p> <p>This perceptual response contributes notably to WLQ1 and is expressed in the mountains with which this WLQ is associated. While there are a number of paths that reduce the physical challenge involved in penetrating some areas, the sense of fulfilment remains high due to the effort that is required, even when utilising a path. This response is expressed to a high level.</p> <p>WLQ3</p> <p>This response contributes to WLQ3 and is most strongly expressed in the more remote parts of the central mountains of the WLA. This response is expressed to a high level in the mountains and a moderate level elsewhere.</p> <p>WLQ4</p> <p>While parts of the peatland slopes are challenging to access, the level of access provided by roads, tracks and paths reduces the strength of this perceptual response. While the peatland itself can be challenging to cross, the satisfaction and sense of accomplishment that arises from the physical effort required to traverse the slopes is limited by the generally relatively low-level and undramatic nature of the landform. This response is expressed to a moderate level.</p>

6.7.260 The review in Table 6.8 identifies the following points in relation to the WLQs, physical attributes and perceptual responses of the study area.

- Physical attributes and perceptual responses are most strongly expressed in the central mountains of the WLA (which are associated primarily with WLQ1 but also relevant to WLQ3). In the mountains, two physical attributes and all of the perceptual responses are expressed to a high degree. The other three physical attributes are displayed to a moderate-high degree.

The main aspects of existing or consented development that reduce the strength of these attributes and responses are firstly the paths and tracks within some localised areas of the

mountains and secondly development outwith the mountains (either within the peatlands part of the WLA or outwith the WLA, largely to the south-east) that affects the attributes and responses within the mountains.

- The physical attributes and perceptual responses are generally displayed to a lower level in the peatland slopes, which are associated primarily with WLQ4 but also relevant to WLQ3. Three of the physical attributes and two perceptual responses are expressed to a moderate degree, while the other attributes and perceptual responses are displayed to a moderate-high level.

In the peatlands, the attributes and responses are all affected to some extent by development that precludes the consistent high representation that is seen in other parts of the WLA (most notably in the mountains). The main aspects of development that reduce their strength are firstly the development and level of accessibility within the peatland slopes, including a road as well as paths and tracks, planted and managed vegetation, and hydro-electric infrastructure, and secondly, development (including operational/consented windfarms) that lies outwith the WLA, largely along and around Loch Shin, that affects the attributes and responses within the peatlands.

- The WLQs are generally geographical as, other than WLQ3, they relate closely to specific parts of the WLA. This means that the strength of attributes and responses found in relation to the WLQs also reflects those found in the various geographical parts of the study area.
- WLQ3 (*“A variety of spaces created by irregular landforms in which there is perceived naturalness, as well as a strong sense of sanctuary and solitude”*) relates to the WLA as a whole. The strength of the attributes and responses of this WLQ varies across the study area, with the strongest expression found in the central mountains while the peatland slopes display lower attributes and responses of the WLQ.
- OPEN’s review of the study area, including field work, has indicated that the WLQ attributes and responses of the peatland slopes have been overstated to some degree in the WLA description. A number of human artefacts and contemporary land uses are found within and in close proximity to the peatland area, and these ensure that none of the attributes and responses are expressed to a high level in this area.

6.7.261 In relation to the baseline strength of attributes and responses within the study area, it is relevant to note the Jenks classification of wild land, as shown on Figure 6.5c (2024). This indicates that the peatlands have notably lower Jenks classes than the other parts of the WLA and particularly the high-ranking central mountain area, where wild land attributes and responses are well-displayed with extensive areas of level 7 wildness and notable areas of level 8 (the highest level of wildness).

6.7.262 In the peatlands, there is a distinction between the eastern and western legs, with the western leg showing higher levels of wildness. This is to be expected, given the level of development within and around the eastern leg and the relatively limited development associated with the western leg. The eastern leg shows several very small patches of level 8 wildness; some very limited and intermittent areas of level 7; larger but still very intermittent areas of level 6; extensive areas of level 5; and limited fringes of level 4 and 3 around the edges of the study area and along the Maovally and Loch Sgeireach tracks. This classification indicates that the eastern leg of peatlands is considered to have moderate and relatively limited wildness attributes, even prior to the additional consideration of influence from consented/under-construction wind farms at Braemore, Lairg 2 and Creag Riabhach.

6.7.263 The Proposed Development site is almost completely covered by level 5 wildness, with just short stretches of new and upgraded access tracks lying within areas of level 3 and 4.

Step 3 – Assess the Sensitivity of the WLA Qualities

- 6.7.264 Sensitivity is assessed by combining the value of the WLA and its susceptibility to the Proposed Development. NatureScot guidance summarises this step as follows in Table 1.

“Through detailed field assessment within the study area, assess the sensitivity of the wild land qualities scoped in (including their physical attributes and perceptual responses), to the type and scale of change proposed”.

- 6.7.265 The value of the WLA has been established previously as medium-high other than the area that is also covered by the Assynt-Coigach NSA, which has a high value. The study area lies partly outwith and partly within the NSA, and therefore has two different levels of value; high and medium-high. The high value applies broadly to the part of the study area that is covered by the central mountains of the WLA, which is within the NSA, while the medium-high value applies to the part of the study area that is covered by peatland slopes, which lies outwith the NSA.
- 6.7.266 It has been ascertained in Step 1 that the Proposed Development has potential to significantly affect three WLQs (WLQ1, WLQ3 and WLQ4) and the assessment of the susceptibility and sensitivity therefore focusses on these WLQs.

Susceptibility and Sensitivity of WLQ1

- 6.7.267 The Proposed Development lies outwith the area that is associated with this WLQ (the central mountains). This means that three of the physical attributes of this WLQ have no susceptibility to the Proposed Development as they cannot be physically affected by the Proposed Development. The remaining two physical attributes - *the lack of modern human artefacts or structures* and *little evidence of contemporary land uses* – can be perceptually affected by visibility of development outwith the WLA and are therefore susceptible to the Proposed Development.
- 6.7.268 The baseline presence and strength of the physical attributes and perceptual responses that contribute to WLQ1, discussed in Step 2, above, are of relevance to susceptibility. Step 2 concluded that the two physical attributes of the central mountains that can be affected by the Proposed Development - *the lack of modern human artefacts or structures* and *little evidence of contemporary land uses* - are both expressed to a moderate-high degree. The reduction in the strength of these attributes from a high level is due to the influences of human artefacts and contemporary land uses within and outwith the WLA. This reduction in the expression of the attributes leads in turn to a reduction in their susceptibility to the Proposed Development.
- 6.7.269 All four perceptual responses (all of which may be affected by the Proposed Development as it can exert an external influence on perceptual responses despite lying outwith the central mountains) are expressed to a high degree in the mountainous area that is associated with WLQ1.
- 6.7.270 The combination of the location of the Proposed Development outwith the area associated with WLQ1; the strength of the attributes/responses, including some high but also some moderate-high; and the lack of susceptibility of three of the attributes to the Proposed Development results in a medium-high susceptibility to the Proposed Development. When combined with the high value of this area, this leads to a **high** sensitivity for the central mountains part of the study area that is associated with WLQ1.

Susceptibility and Sensitivity of WLQ3

- 6.7.271 This WLQ is not specifically associated with a geographical part of the WLA, but arises from a combination of the landform throughout the WLA. This means that the Proposed Development may theoretically affect the physical attributes and perceptual responses of this WLQ and therefore they are all susceptible to the Proposed Development.

- 6.7.272 The baseline presence and strength of the physical attributes and perceptual responses that contribute to WLQ3 are of relevance to susceptibility, and are discussed in Step 2, above. This concluded that three of the five physical attributes that contribute to WLQ3 are expressed to a varying degree across the WLA, ranging from high in the central mountain and cnocan areas to moderate in the peatland slopes. The remaining two attributes of WLQ3 are expressed to a moderate-high level throughout the WLA. All of the four perceptual responses that contribute to WLQ3 are expressed to a high degree in the central mountainous area and to a moderate or moderate-high level elsewhere in the WLA.
- 6.7.273 In some cases, the reduction in the strength of the WLQ3 attributes and responses is due to the visibility and influence of human artefacts and contemporary land uses within and outwith the WLA. These influences are particularly apparent in the peatland slopes, within the WLA, and around Loch Shin, outwith the WLA. Elsewhere, the reduction in the strength of the WLQ3 attributes and responses is due to the less rugged and more open, accessible nature of landform and topography found outwith the mountain area. The network of roads, tracks and paths found around and within the WLA is also a consideration.
- 6.7.274 The reduction in the expression of the attributes and responses that are relevant to WLQ3 leads in turn to a reduction in their susceptibility to the Proposed Development in some parts of the study area. The highest susceptibility is found in the central mountainous area where the attributes and responses of WLQ3 are expressed at their strongest level. The susceptibility of the peatland slopes is lower, as here the attributes and responses of WLQ3 are generally expressed to a moderate level.
- 6.7.275 When looking at overall susceptibility, the strength of expression of WLQ3 is tempered by the location of the Proposed Development in relation to WLQ3. The attributes and responses of WLQ3 are most strongly expressed in the central mountainous area but this area will not be physically affected by the Proposed Development, and this means that there is not potential for the Proposed Development to affect three of the five physical attributes. Conversely, the Proposed Development is located in the peatland slopes and may therefore affect all of the five physical attributes, but here the attributes and responses of WLQ3 are expressed to a lower level. These considerations combine to give WLQ3 a medium-high susceptibility to the Proposed Development.
- 6.7.276 Value also varies across the study area; the central mountainous area has a high value as it lies within the NSA while the peatlands, which are outwith the NSA, have a medium-high value. When the high value of the central mountainous area is combined with the medium-high susceptibility of WLQ3, this leads to a **high** sensitivity. In the peatland slopes, the combination of the medium-high value and medium-high susceptibility of WLQ3 leads to a **medium-high** sensitivity.

Susceptibility and Sensitivity of WLQ4

- 6.7.277 The Proposed Development lies within the area that is associated with this WLQ (the peatland slopes). This means that the Proposed Development may theoretically affect all of the physical attributes and perceptual responses of this WLQ and they are all susceptible to the Proposed Development.
- 6.7.278 The baseline presence and strength of the physical attributes and perceptual responses that contribute to WLQ4, as discussed in Step 2, is of relevance to susceptibility. This concluded that in the peatland slopes that are associated with WLQ4, three of the five physical attributes are expressed to a moderate degree while the remaining two attributes are expressed to a moderate-high level. Of the four perceptual responses that contribute to WLQ4, two are expressed to a moderate degree and the two to a moderate-high degree.
- 6.7.279 In some cases, the reduction in the strength of the WLQ4 attributes and responses is due to the visibility and influence of human artefacts and contemporary land uses within and outwith the WLA. These influences are particularly apparent in the peatland slopes, within the WLA, and around Loch

Shin, outwith the WLA. In other cases, the reduction in the strength of the WLQ4 attributes and responses is due to the less rugged and more open, accessible nature of landform and topography found in the peatlands. The network of roads, tracks and paths found around and within this part of the WLA is also a consideration.

- 6.7.280 When looking at overall susceptibility, the moderate strength of expression of the majority of attributes and responses of WLQ4 is tempered by the location of the Proposed Development within the area associated with WLQ4 – the peatland slopes - where it may affect all of the five physical attributes as well as all of the responses. These considerations combine to give WLQ4 a medium-high susceptibility to the Proposed Development. When the medium-high value of the area associated with WLQ4, the peatland slopes, is combined with the medium-high susceptibility of WLQ4, this leads to a **medium-high** sensitivity.

Assess the Magnitude of the Effects

- 6.7.281 NatureScot guidance summarises this step as follows in Table 1:

“Assess the effects on individual and/or combinations of qualities, drawing out which physical attributes and perceptual responses will be affected, how and to what degree. This should reflect the size or scale of change, its extent and duration.”

- 6.7.282 It has been ascertained in previous steps that the Proposed Development has potential to significantly affect three of the four WLQs of this WLA (WLQ1, WLQ3 and WLQ4) and this part of the assessment therefore focusses on these WLQs. The following three tables describe the effect that the Proposed Development may have on the physical attributes and perceptual responses of each of the three WLQs, concluding with an assessment of the magnitude of change that will arise on each WLQ.

Table 6.9 - Effects on WLQ1

WLQ1 A range of large, irregular, rocky mountains with steep, arresting slopes and a variety of lochs and lochans, possessing a strong sense of naturalness, remoteness and sanctuary.
Physical Attribute: high degree of perceived naturalness (expressed to a high degree – see Table 6.8)
The Proposed Development lies outwith the part of the WLA that is associated with this WLQ (the central mountains) and will therefore have no effect on this physical attribute, which relates to conditions within the relevant area. <i>The strength of this attribute will remain high.</i>
Physical Attribute: the lack of modern human artefacts or structures/Little evidence of contemporary land uses (expressed to a moderate-high degree – see Table 6.8)
These attributes are not referenced in the WLA description for WLQ1. The Proposed Development will not introduce human artefacts/ contemporary land uses into the area associated with WLQ1, and these attributes will therefore not be directly affected. However, these attributes can relate to elements that lie outwith the relevant part of the WLA, and the Proposed Development may therefore affect them through its external influence. This effect will be limited as the Proposed Development will be seen in an aspect of the setting to the central mountains that is already notably affected by external human influence, including wind farms and other infrastructure (as seen at LVIA Viewpoints 2 and 3), while the key influential ‘wild’ aspects to the north and west of the mountains will remain unaffected by the Proposed Development. This reduces the level of the effect, as does the lack of specific reference to these attributes in the WLQ1 description, as this indicates that these attributes are not of specific relevance in the formulation of WLQ1. <i>On the south-eastern fringe of the mountains, the strength of these attributes will reduce to a moderate level. In interior areas the diminishing external influence of the Proposed Development ensures that the strength of the attributes will remain moderate-high.</i>

<p>WLQ1 A range of large, irregular, rocky mountains with steep, arresting slopes and a variety of lochs and lochans, possessing a strong sense of naturalness, remoteness and sanctuary.</p>
<p>Physical Attribute: landform which is rugged, or otherwise physically challenging (expressed to a high degree – see Table 6.8)</p>
<p>The Proposed Development lies outwith the part of the WLA that is associated with this WLQ (the central mountains) and will therefore have no effect on this physical attribute, which relates to conditions within the relevant area.</p> <p><i>The strength of this attribute will remain high.</i></p>
<p>Physical Attribute: remoteness and/or inaccessibility (expressed to a moderate-high degree – see Table 6.8)</p>
<p>The Proposed Development lies outwith the part of the WLA that is associated with this WLQ (the central mountains) and will therefore have no effect on this physical attribute, which relates to conditions within the relevant area.</p> <p><i>The strength of this attribute will remain moderate-high.</i></p>
<p>Perceptual Response: a sense of sanctuary or solitude (expressed to a high degree – see Table 6.8)</p>
<p>The WLA description refers to this response in WLQ1 as follows: <i>“Although many people visit these [the network of paths through the hills] and other parts of the WLA at certain times, they are typically dispersed within such a large area that a strong sense of sanctuary and solitude prevails”.</i></p> <p>The external influence of the Proposed Development will not affect the number of people who visit the mountains and use the paths, or their dispersal throughout the area, and will therefore not affect this aspect of the perceptual response that is specifically referenced in the description.</p> <p>However, the external influence of the Proposed Development may have some effect on the wider definition of this response, which is the <i>“perception of separation from the ‘modern world’, isolation or distance from disturbance...”</i> (NatureScot, 2020/2023). This effect would be limited as perceived and actual separation will remain between the mountains and the sense of the <i>“modern world”</i> or <i>“disturbance”</i> of the Proposed Development due to its location outwith the mountains. The Proposed Development will also be seen in the context of notable baseline external human influence, including wind farms and other infrastructure, while the attributes that lead to sanctuary and solitude that lie to the north and west will remain unaffected by the Proposed Development.</p> <p><i>On the south-eastern fringe of the mountains, the strength of this response will reduce to a moderate-high level. In interior areas the diminishing external influence of the Proposed Development and the innate strength of physical attributes/ perceptual responses within the mountains ensure that the response will remain high.</i></p>
<p>Perceptual Response: risk or, for some visitors, a sense of awe or anxiety (expressed to a high degree – see Table 6.8)</p>
<p>The WLA description refers to this response in WLQ1 as follows: <i>“The massive proportions of the mountain range are very imposing and convey a strong sense of awe...It is physically challenging to ascend or traverse the mountains...and this can contribute to a perception of high risk...The open, horizontal waters of these waterbodies emphasise the vertical and rugged forms of the adjacent mountain slopes, contributing to the sense of awe.”</i></p> <p>The external influence of the Proposed Development will not affect the aspects of the mountains that are referred to in this description (the <i>“massive proportions of the mountain range”</i>, the physical challenge required to ascend or traverse the mountains, or the <i>“open, horizontal waters of these waterbodies”</i>) and will therefore not affect these aspects of the perceptual response that are specifically referenced.</p> <p>However, the external influence of the Proposed Development may have some effect on the wider definition of this response, which is the <i>“perception of hazard that arises from being self-reliant in remote settings of large scale, whose rugged natural character and isolation from assistance (if required) engenders respect”</i> (NatureScot, 2020). This effect would be limited as the Proposed Development is unlikely to engender a sense of <i>“assistance”</i> due to its location outwith and separation from the mountains. Moreover,</p>

<p>WLQ1 A range of large, irregular, rocky mountains with steep, arresting slopes and a variety of lochs and lochans, possessing a strong sense of naturalness, remoteness and sanctuary.</p>
<p>the Proposed Development will not physically affect the “remote settings of large scale” or “rugged natural character” that leads to this perceptual response.</p> <p>On the south-eastern fringe of the mountains, the strength of this response will reduce to a moderate-high level. In interior areas the diminishing external influence of the Proposed Development and the innate strength of physical attributes/ perceptual responses within the mountains ensure that the response will remain high.</p>
<p>Perceptual Response: perceptions that the landscape has arresting or inspiring qualities (expressed to a high degree – see Table 6.8)</p>
<p>The WLA description refers to this response in WLQ1 as follows: “the towering vertical dimensions of some rock faces and glen slopes are also arresting, emphasised further by high waterfalls and steep scree slopes”.</p> <p>The external influence of the Proposed Development will not affect “the towering vertical dimensions of some rock faces and glen slopes” or “high waterfalls and steep scree slopes”. It will also not affect the wider definition of this response, which is the “aesthetic reaction to the natural/semi-natural setting” that is engendered by these topographical features. (NatureScot, 2020/2023).</p> <p>The strength of this response will remain high.</p>
<p>Perceptual Response: fulfilment from the physical challenge required to penetrate into these places (expressed to a high degree – see Table 6.8)</p>
<p>The WLA description refers to this response in WLQ1 as follows: “It is physically challenging to ascend or traverse the mountains because of their great ruggedness and elevation, as well as the difficulty of crossing rocky ground”.</p> <p>The external influence of the Proposed Development will not affect the physical challenge that results from the “great ruggedness and elevation... rocky ground” of the mountains, and will therefore not affect this aspect of the perceptual response that is specifically referenced.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will also not affect the wider definition of this response, which is “The satisfaction and sense of accomplishment that arises from the physical effort required to traverse these settings, tackling their scale, topography, ground and weather conditions” (NatureScot, 2020/2023) as it will not alter the physically challenging topography within the mountains.</p> <p>The strength of this response will remain high.</p>

6.7.283 The magnitude of change on WLQ1 will vary across the area of central mountains that comprises this WLQ. The maximum magnitude of change will be **medium-low**, which will arise on the south-eastern fringe of the mountainous area, where it abuts the peatland slopes. This arises from the following considerations.

- There will be no direct physical effects on this WLQ, and effects are perceived only. This means that there will be no effect on three of the five physical attributes of the WLQ, and these three attributes will continue to be displayed at their baseline high or moderate-high levels.
- The effect of the Proposed Development on the remaining two physical attributes of this WLQ - *the lack of modern human artefacts or structures* and *little evidence of contemporary land uses* – will be limited and perceived only, with the strength of these attributes being locally reduced from moderate-high to moderate as a result of the external influence of the Proposed Development.
- The WLA description for WLQ1 does not make any specific reference to the two physical attributes that will be affected by the Proposed Development, as noted above. This indicates that these attributes are not of specific relevance in the formulation of WLQ1.

- Two of the four perceptual responses of WLQ1 - *perceptions that the landscape has arresting or inspiring qualities* and *fulfilment from the physical challenge required to penetrate into these places* - will not be affected by the Proposed Development, and will continue to be displayed at their baseline high level.
- The effect of the Proposed Development on the remaining two perceptual responses of this WLQ will be limited, with the strength of these responses being locally reduced from high to moderate-high as a result of the external influence of the Proposed Development.
- The key factors in the limited effects on these physical attributes and perceptual responses of WLQ1 are the location of the Proposed Development outwith the part of the WLA that is associated with this WLQ (the central mountains); the location of the Proposed Development in a part of the setting to the mountains that is already affected by development; the location of the Proposed Development in a part of the WLA that is directly affected by development; and the limited, and often distant, visibility and influence of the Proposed Development from the area associated with WLQ1.

6.7.284 The medium-low magnitude of change will be localised in the south-eastern fringe of the central mountains, where the external influence of the Proposed Development is greatest. Beyond this area, the magnitude of change will diminish as distance from the Proposed Development increases, dropping to a low and then negligible level. This reduction in the level of change results from the reduction in the effects on the attributes and responses of WLQ1, as described in Table 6.9 above.

Table 6.10 - Effects on WLQ3

<p>WLQ3 A variety of spaces created by irregular landforms in which there is perceived naturalness, as well as a strong sense of sanctuary and solitude</p>
<p>WLQ3 - Physical Attribute: high degree of perceived naturalness (expressed to a high degree in the central mountains and cnocan and a moderate-high degree in the peatland slopes – see Table 6.8)</p>
<p>The WLA description refers to this attribute in WLQ3 as follows: <i>“This irregularity [of landform] adds to the ruggedness of the area, as well as its perceived naturalness”</i>. The Proposed Development will not affect the irregularity of landform and will therefore not affect this aspect of the attribute that is specifically referenced in the description.</p> <p>The wider definition of this attribute is <i>“Within WLAs vegetation cover is primarily composed of natural or semi-natural habitats...Catchment systems and other geomorphological processes are largely unmodified”</i> (NatureScot, 2020/2023). The Proposed Development will result in the physical loss of a very small area of moorland/rough grassland that lies within the WLA, on the site area itself, and will have no notable effect on <i>“Catchment systems and other geomorphological processes”</i>.</p> <p>Any effect on this attribute will be very limited due to the very small area of moorland that is affected and the lack of effect on the specific aspect of the attribute that is mentioned in the WLQ3 description.</p> <p><i>The strength of this attribute will remain high in the central mountains and cnocan and moderate-high in the peatland slopes.</i></p>
<p>WLQ3 - Physical Attribute: the lack of modern human artefacts or structures/Little evidence of contemporary land uses (expressed to a moderate-high degree – see Table 6.8)</p>
<p>These attributes are not referenced in the WLA description for WLQ3.</p> <p>The wider definition of these attributes is <i>“There is no or very limited evidence of contemporary buildings, structures or engineering works within WLAs although their presence outwith may be discerned...”</i> and <i>“Within WLAs no or very limited evidence of more intensive land use, but their presence outwith may be discerned”</i>.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will introduce large-scale structures and other infrastructure, including contemporary land use, into the WLA, and will therefore affect these physical attributes. This effect will be mitigated by the location of the Proposed Development in a part of the WLA that is already directly</p>

physically affected by development including a tarmacked road, hydro-electric infrastructure, and a mast, and has notable external influence of other human artefacts, including wind farms.

This mitigation will limit the effect on these attributes, as will the lack of effect on the specific aspect of the attribute that is mentioned in the WLQ3 description, as this indicates that these attributes are not of specific relevance in the formulation of WLQ3.

On the site area, in the eastern fringe of the peatland slopes, the strength of these attributes will reduce to a moderate-low level. In other areas the lack of any direct physical effect, the diminishing external influence of the Proposed Development, and the lack of specific relevance of these attributes to WLQ3 ensures that the strength of the attributes will remain moderate-high.

WLQ3 - Physical Attribute: landform which is rugged, or otherwise physically challenging (expressed to a high degree in the central mountains/cnocan and a moderate-high degree in the peatland slopes – see Table 6.8)

The WLA description refers to this attribute in WLQ3 as follows: “*Highly irregular landforms occur throughout the WLA...This irregularity adds to the ruggedness of the area.*”. The Proposed Development will not affect the irregularity of landform and will therefore not affect this aspect of the attribute that is specifically referenced in the WLQ3 description.

The wider definition of this attribute is “*Within WLAs, land that has extensive rough terrain or extensive boglands, which is difficult to traverse*” (NatureScot, 2020/2023). The site is not particularly characterised by “*extensive rough terrain or...boglands*” and is not notably difficult to cross, particularly in relation to the mountainous and cnocan parts of the WLA.

Any effect on this attribute will be very limited due to the minor effect that the Proposed Development will have on the landform of the site, and the wider WLA as a whole, and the lack of effect on the specific aspect of the attribute that is mentioned in the WLQ3 description. There will be no effect on landform within the mountain and cnocan areas.

The strength of this attribute will remain high in the central mountains and cnocan and moderate-high in the peatland slopes.

WLQ3 - Physical Attribute: remoteness and/or inaccessibility (expressed to a high degree in the central mountains/cnocan and a moderate degree in the peatland slopes – see Table 6.8)

This attribute is not referenced in the WLA description for WLQ3.

The wider definition of this attribute is “*Within WLAs, land that is distant from public motorised access (the nearest public road, ferry landing or railway station), taking account of the distance, barriers to travel (for example, lochs, rivers and cliffs), and ease of travel on foot/bicycle*” (NatureScot, 2020/2023). The peatlands area of the WLA displays this attribute to a moderate level, and the eastern edge of the peatlands, within which the site is located, is specifically easily accessed on foot/bicycle and by car from the tarmac road that accesses off the A838 and runs around Maovally. The track that runs along the southern edge of Loch Shin (on which Viewpoint 4 is located) provides relatively easy access within the peatlands area of the WLA by 4WD/ foot/ bicycle. The public road that runs up Glen Cassley, between the legs of the WLA, also provides easy access into the WLA, as do the A837, A838 and A839 roads, which pass around the peatlands and allow access at some points.

In this context, the sections of new tracks that will access the Proposed Development (parts of the access tracks are upgraded existing road/ tracks) will ease access within the small part of the peatlands that is covered by the site, but will not introduce access into areas that are currently highly inaccessible or reduce the distance of this part of the WLA from public roads. There will be no effect on access or remoteness within the mountain and cnocan areas.

The effect on this attribute will be negligible due to the lack of specific reference to this attribute in the WLQ3 description, as this indicates that this attribute is not of specific relevance in the formulation of WLQ3. The minor effect that the Proposed Development will have on the baseline level of access into the WLA is also relevant.

The strength of this attribute will remain high in the central mountains and cnocan and moderate in the peatland slopes.

WLQ3 - Perceptual Response: a sense of sanctuary or solitude (expressed to a high degree in the central mountains and a moderate degree elsewhere – see Table 6.8)

The WLA description refers to this response in WLQ3 as follows: “*Within the corries, basins or shelves, the surrounding shielding landform often leads to a sense of being hidden, contributing to a strong sense of seclusion and sanctuary...Perceived seclusion and few visitors to these areas, may also lead to a strong sense of solitude.*”.

The Proposed Development is unlikely to be visible from any parts of the WLA that have “*surrounding shielding landform*” as this landform will screen views outwards as well as leading to “*a sense of being hidden*”. Moreover, the areas of the WLA that lie in closest proximity to the Proposed Development – the peatlands – are characterised by massive exposed slopes from which long, open views are available, and not by “*corries, basins or shelves...surrounding shielding landform*”. The Proposed Development will not affect the number of people who visit these areas. The Proposed Development will therefore not affect the aspect of the perceptual response that is specifically referenced in the description.

The Proposed Development will also not affect the wider definition of this response, which is “*perception of separation from the ‘modern world’, isolation or distance from disturbance...*” (NatureScot, 2020/2023). Where it is visible, the Proposed Development will be seen in the context of the most developed part of the WLA, and with notable baseline external human influence, including wind farms and other infrastructure.

The strength of this response will remain high in the central mountains and moderate elsewhere.

WLQ3 - Perceptual Response: risk or, for some visitors, a sense of awe or anxiety (expressed to a high degree in the central mountains and a moderate-high degree elsewhere– see Table 6.8)

The WLA description refers to this response in WLQ3 as follows “*Where surrounded by high, steep and towering slopes, there is also a strong sense of awe*”.

The Proposed Development is unlikely to be visible from any parts of the WLA that are “*surrounded by high, steep and towering slopes*”, as this landform will screen views outwards. Moreover, the areas of the WLA that lie in closest proximity to the Proposed Development – the peatlands – are characterised by exposed slopes, and not by “*high, steep and towering slopes*”. The Proposed Development will therefore not affect the aspect of the perceptual response that is specifically referenced in the description.

The Proposed Development will also not affect the wider definition of this response, which is “*perception of hazard that arises from being self-reliant in remote settings of large scale, whose rugged natural character and isolation from assistance (if required) engenders respect*” (NatureScot, 2020). The Proposed Development is unlikely to engender a sense of “*assistance*”; where it is visible, it will be seen in the context of the most developed part of the WLA and with notable baseline external human influence, and the baseline sense of risk is therefore already limited. Moreover, the Proposed Development will not physically affect the “*remote settings of large scale...rugged natural character*” that leads to this perceptual response.

The strength of this response will remain high in the central mountains and moderate-high elsewhere.

WLQ3 - Perceptual Response: perceptions that the landscape has arresting or inspiring qualities (expressed to a high degree in the central mountains and a moderate-high degree elsewhere– see Table 6.8)

This response is not referenced in the WLA description for WLQ3.

The wider definition of this response is “*An aesthetic reaction to the natural/semi-natural setting, often associated with the ‘classic’ high, steep and jagged mountains juxtaposed with deep lochs or seas, but can also be prompted by other superlative compositions such as the large scale simplicity of rounded massif, or the seemingly infinite expanse of open peatland or seas*” (NatureScot, 2020/2023).

The peatlands area of the WLA displays this response to a moderate-high level due to the massive open scale of this landscape. The Proposed Development may have some effect on the “*superlative composition [of] the seemingly infinite expanse of open peatland*” as it will introduce vertical structures that could be perceived as interrupting the “*infinite expanse of open peatland*”. This effect will, however, be limited by the location of the Proposed Development on the periphery of the peatlands, where the “*infinite expanse*” of landscape is already interrupted by Loch Shin (and the development that is associated with it) as well as the *sweeping moorland and flows* that rises on the other side of the loch. The low elevation of the Proposed Development also reduces its potential to interrupt the peatlands, as it will not appear prominent in views along and across the peatlands (as seen in Viewpoints 1 and 4).

The effect on this response will be limited by the minor effect that the Proposed Development will have on it and by the lack of specific reference to it in the WLQ3 description, as this indicates that this response is not of specific relevance in the formulation of WLQ3.

The strength of this attribute will remain high in the central mountains, moderate-high in the cnocan, and reduce to a moderate level in the peatland slopes.

WLQ3 - Perceptual Response: fulfilment from the physical challenge required to penetrate into these places (expressed to a high degree in the central mountains and a moderate degree elsewhere – see Table 6.8)

This response is not referenced in the WLA description for WLQ3.

The wider definition of this response is *“The satisfaction and sense of accomplishment that arises from the physical effort required to traverse these settings, tackling their scale, topography, ground and weather conditions.”* (NatureScot, 2020/2023).

As noted above in relation to physical attributes, the sections of new tracks that will access the Proposed Development will ease access within the small part of the peatlands that is covered by the site, but will not notably affect the *“fulfilment from the physical challenge required to penetrate into these places”*. The Proposed Development lies on the periphery of the WLA, close to an area that is already relatively easily accessible by tarmacked road, and access into areas that are currently highly inaccessible will not be increased. There will be no effect on access or remoteness within the mountain and cnocan areas.

The effect on this response will be negligible due to the very minor effect that the Proposed Development will have on the baseline level of physical challenge arising from accessing this part of the WLA and the resultant limited effect on the associated level of fulfilment. The lack of specific reference to this attribute in the WLQ3 description also indicates that this attribute is not of specific relevance in the formulation of WLQ3.

The strength of this response will remain high in the central mountains and moderate elsewhere.

6.7.285 The magnitude of change on WLQ3 will vary across the study area. The maximum magnitude of change will be **medium-low**, which will arise on the physical attributes and perceptual responses of WLQ3 in relation to the site area and the peatland slopes. This arises from the following considerations.

- Direct physical effects on this WLQ are restricted to two of the five physical attributes - *the lack of modern human artefacts or structures* and *little evidence of contemporary land uses*. The effect on these two attributes will be limited, with their strength being locally reduced on the site itself from moderate-high to moderate-low as a result of the direct physical influence of the Proposed Development.
- There will be no effect on the other three of the five physical attributes of WLQ3, and these three attributes will continue to be displayed at their baseline high, moderate-high or moderate levels.
- Three of the four perceptual responses of WLQ3 - *a sense of sanctuary or solitude; risk or, for some visitors, a sense of awe or anxiety*; and *fulfilment from the physical challenge required to penetrate into these places* - will not be affected by the Proposed Development, and will continue to be displayed at their baseline level (high in the central mountains and moderate-high or moderate elsewhere).
- The effect of the Proposed Development on the fourth perceptual response of this WLQ - *perceptions that the landscape has arresting or inspiring qualities* – will be limited, with the strength of this response being locally reduced from moderate-high to moderate as a result of the Proposed Development. This reduction in strength will apply only to the peatland slopes, with the central mountains and cnocan areas continuing to display high and moderate-high strength respectively.
- It is notable that the WLA description for WLQ3 does not make any specific reference to the perceptual response that will be affected by the Proposed Development, indicating that this response is not of specific relevance in the formulation of WLQ3.

6.7.286 The medium-low magnitude of change will be localised in the peatland slopes, and more specifically, the site area, where the direct and external influence of the Proposed Development is greatest. Beyond this area the magnitude of change will diminish as the influence of the Proposed Development decreases, dropping to a low and then negligible level.

Table 6.11 - Effects on WLQ4

<p>WLQ4 Extensive, elevated peatland slopes whose simplicity and openness contribute to a perception of awe, whilst highlighting the qualities of adjacent mountains</p>
<p>WLQ4 - Physical Attribute: high degree of perceived naturalness (expressed to a moderate-high degree – see Table 6.8)</p>
<p>The WLA description refers to this attribute in WLQ4 as follows: <i>“The seemingly random pattern of these elements [lochans, bogs, peat hags, burns and rock outcrops] also contributes to the sense of naturalness...”</i>. The Proposed Development has been specifically designed to minimise impacts on topographical features and will not affect the random pattern of these elements throughout the peatlands. It will therefore not notably affect this aspect of the attribute that is specifically referenced in the description.</p> <p>The wider definition of this attribute is <i>“Within WLAs vegetation cover is primarily composed of natural or semi-natural habitats...Catchment systems and other geomorphological processes are largely unmodified”</i> (NatureScot, 2020/2023). The Proposed Development will result in the physical loss of a small area of moorland/rough grassland that lies within the WLA, on the site area itself, but will have no notable effect on <i>“Catchment systems and other geomorphological processes”</i>.</p> <p><i>On the site area, the strength of this attribute will reduce to a moderate level due to the direct influence of the Proposed Development on vegetation. Elsewhere, the strength of the attribute will remain moderate-high.</i></p>
<p>WLQ4- Physical Attributes: the lack of modern human artefacts or structures/Little evidence of contemporary land uses (expressed to a moderate degree – see Table 6.8)</p>
<p>These attributes are referenced at length in the WLA description for WLQ4, as quoted in Table 6.8. In summary: <i>“From the peatland slopes within the south of the WLA, human artefacts and contemporary land use can be clearly seen extending around the south east, south and south western edges...These elements tend to be visible over long distances due to the openness and simplicity of the peatland. Around the slopes to the south west, south and south east, there are...some wind farms upon elevated peatland...Although h located outside the WLA, their extensive size and/or cumulative effects appear to encroach upon the wild land qualities...”</i></p> <p><i>Within the upper stretches of Glen Cassley that lie outside the WLA, human elements...seem more encroaching upon the wild land qualities where large in scale, extensive or are more numerous, and thus lead to cumulative effects...Duchally hydro-electric scheme, within the upper reaches of the glen, has a strong influence on surrounding wild land qualities...include prominent and incongruous pipelines that cross the upper glen slopes, as well as a long access road and powerlines extending over the elevated peatland slopes at Maovally...”</i></p> <p>The Proposed Development will introduce large-scale structures and other infrastructure, including contemporary land use, directly into the peatlands, and will therefore affect these physical attributes. This effect will be mitigated by the location of the Proposed Development in a part of the WLA that is already directly physically affected by development including a tarmacked road, hydro-electric infrastructure, and a mast, and has notable external influence of other human artefacts, including wind farms. When the Proposed Development is seen from the peatlands that lie beyond the site boundary, it will generally be seen in the context of the development that is described in the WLA description, and will not introduce an entirely new influence.</p> <p><i>On the site area, the strength of these attributes will reduce to a low level due to the direct influence of the Proposed Development. In the wider area of the eastern leg of the WLA, the strength of these attributes will reduce to a moderate-low level due to indirect influence of the Proposed Development. Elsewhere, the strength of these attributes will remain moderate.</i></p>

<p>WLQ4 - Physical Attribute: landform which is rugged, or otherwise physically challenging (expressed to a moderate-high degree - see Table 6.8)</p>
<p>The WLA description refers to this attribute in WLQ4 as follows: <i>“Although the peatland slopes are not very high in elevation and are simple at a broad scale, they are rugged at a local level due to a mix of lochans, bogs, peat hags, burns and rock outcrops”</i>. While the Proposed Development may have a minor effect on the local ruggedness of landform due to the groundworks required and the creation of access tracks, the site is not particularly characterised by <i>“a mix of lochans, bogs, peat hags, burns and rock outcrops”</i> (and where such features are found on site, the Proposed Development has been specifically designed to minimise impacts upon them). The Proposed Development will therefore not notably affect the aspect of the attribute that is specifically referenced in the WLQ4 description.</p> <p>The wider definition of this attribute is <i>“Within WLAs, land that has extensive rough terrain or extensive boglands, which is difficult to traverse”</i> (NatureScot, 2020/2023). The site is not particularly characterised by <i>“extensive rough terrain or...boglands”</i> and is not notably difficult to cross.</p> <p><i>On the site area, the strength of this attribute will reduce to a moderate level due to the direct influence of the Proposed Development on landform. Elsewhere, the strength of the attribute will remain moderate-high.</i></p>
<p>WLQ4 - Physical Attribute: remoteness and/or inaccessibility (expressed to a moderate degree – see Table 6.8)</p>
<p>This attribute is not referenced in the WLA description for WLQ4.</p> <p>The wider definition of this attribute is <i>“Within WLAs, land that is distant from public motorised access (the nearest public road, ferry landing or railway station), taking account of the distance, barriers to travel (for example, lochs, rivers and cliffs), and ease of travel on foot/bicycle”</i> (NatureScot, 2020/2023). The eastern edge of the peatlands, within which the site is located, is specifically easily accessed on foot/bicycle and by car from the tarmac road that accesses off the A838 and runs around Maovally. The track that runs along the southern edge of Loch Shin (on which Viewpoint 4 is located) provides relatively easy access within the peatlands by 4WD/foot/bicycle. The public road that runs up Glen Cassley, between the legs of the WLA, also provides easy access into the WLA, as do the A837, A838 and A839 roads, which pass around the peatlands and allow access at some points.</p> <p>In this context, the sections of new tracks that will access the Proposed Development (parts of the access tracks are upgraded existing road/ tracks) will ease access within the small area that is covered by the site, but will not introduce access into areas that are currently highly inaccessible or reduce the distance from public roads. The effect on this attribute will be negligible due to the lack of specific reference in the WLQ3 description, as this indicates that this attribute is not of specific relevance in the formulation of WLQ3. The minor effect that the Proposed Development will have on the baseline level of access into the area associated with WLQ3 is also relevant.</p> <p><i>The strength of this attribute will remain moderate.</i></p>
<p>WLQ4 - Perceptual Response: a sense of sanctuary or solitude (expressed to a moderate degree – see Table 6.8)</p>
<p>This attribute is not referenced in the WLA description for WLQ4.</p> <p>The wider definition of this attribute is <i>“perception of separation from the ‘modern world’, isolation or distance from disturbance...”</i> (NatureScot, 2020/2023). The Proposed Development will be seen in the context of the most developed part of the WLA, with further notable external human influence, including wind farms and other infrastructure. This ensures that the areas that will be influenced by the Proposed Development will anyway have a limited baseline <i>“perception of separation from the ‘modern world’, isolation or distance from disturbance...”</i> and the Proposed Development will have a very limited additional effect on this baseline. The lack of specific reference to this attribute in the WLQ4 description is also relevant as this indicates that this attribute is not of specific importance in the formulation of WLQ4.</p> <p><i>The strength of this response will remain moderate.</i></p>
<p>WLQ4 - Perceptual Response: risk or, for some visitors, a sense of awe or anxiety (expressed to a moderate-high degree – see Table 6.8)</p>

The WLA description refers to this response in WLQ4 as follows “*The...openness and high exposure of the area heightens the sense of risk [and]...these simple slopes highlight the contrasting and distinctive aspects of complex and high mountains to the north and west, emphasising the awe-inspiring qualities of these*”.

The relatively low elevation of the Proposed Development and its location on the periphery of the peatlands ensures that it will not notably interrupt the “*openness and high exposure of the area*”. Its low and peripheral position also ensures that it will very seldom be seen in the context of views towards the “*complex and high mountains to the north and west*” from elsewhere within the WLA, and the role of the peatland slopes in “*emphasising the awe-inspiring qualities of these [mountains]*” will therefore not be notably altered.

The wider definition of this response is “*perception of hazard that arises from being self-reliant in remote settings of large scale, whose rugged natural character and isolation from assistance (if required) engenders respect*” (NatureScot, 2020/2023). The Proposed Development is unlikely to engender a sense of “*assistance*”; where it is visible, it will be seen in the context of the most developed part of the WLA and with notable baseline external human influence, and the baseline sense of risk is therefore already limited.

The effect on this response will arise primarily on those areas of the peatlands where the Proposed Development is clearly visible at sufficient proximity, and with a sufficient level of influence, to be perceived as an interruption to the openness and simplicity of the slopes.

In the area of the eastern leg of the WLA, the strength of this response will reduce to a moderate level. Elsewhere, the strength of this response will remain moderate-high.

WLQ4 - Perceptual Response: perceptions that the landscape has arresting or inspiring qualities
(expressed to a moderate-high degree – see Table 6.8)

The WLA description refers to this response in WLQ4 as follows “*The vast scale of these simple peatland slopes, in combination with a strong sense of openness and exposure, appears arresting*”.

This relates closely to the wider definition of this response: “*An aesthetic reaction to the natural/semi-natural setting, often associated with the ‘classic’ high, steep and jagged mountains juxtaposed with deep lochs or seas, but can also be prompted by other superlative compositions such as the large scale simplicity of rounded massifs, or the seemingly infinite expanse of open peatland or seas*” (NatureScot, 2020/2023).

The peatlands display this response to a moderate-high level due to the massive open scale of this landscape. The Proposed Development may have some effect on the “*superlative composition [of] the seemingly infinite expanse of open peatland*” as it will introduce vertical structures that could be perceived as interrupting the “*infinite expanse of open peatland*”. This effect will, however, be limited by the location of the Proposed Development on the periphery of the peatlands, where the “*infinite expanse*” of landscape is already interrupted by Loch Shin (and the development that is associated with it) as well as the *sweeping moorland and flows* that rises on the other side of the loch. The low elevation of the Proposed Development also reduces its potential to interrupt the peatlands, as it will not appear prominent in views along and across the peatlands (as seen in Viewpoints 1 and 4).

The effect on this response will arise primarily on those areas of the peatlands where the Proposed Development is clearly visible at sufficient proximity, and with a sufficient level of influence, to be perceived as an interruption to the openness, exposure and expansiveness of the slopes.

In the area of the eastern leg of the WLA, the strength of this response will reduce to a moderate level. Elsewhere, the strength of this response will remain moderate-high.

WLQ4 - Perceptual Response: fulfilment from the physical challenge required to penetrate into these places
(expressed to a moderate degree – see Table 6.8)

The WLA description refers to this response in WLQ4 as follows “*the peatland slopes...are rugged at a local level...that make the slopes physically challenging to cross*”.

The wider definition of this response is “*The satisfaction and sense of accomplishment that arises from the physical effort required to traverse these settings, tackling their scale, topography, ground and weather conditions.*” (NatureScot, 2020/2023).

As noted above in relation to physical attributes, the sections of new tracks that access the Proposed Development will ease access within the small area that is covered by the site, but will not notably affect the “*fulfilment from the physical challenge required to penetrate into these places*”. The Proposed Development

lies on the periphery of the WLA, close to an area that is already relatively easily accessible by tarmacked road, and access into areas that are currently highly inaccessible will not be increased.

The effect on this response will be negligible due to the very minor effect that the Proposed Development will have on the baseline level of physical challenge arising from accessing the peatlands and the resultant very limited effect on the associated level of fulfilment.

The strength of this response will remain moderate.

6.7.287 The magnitude of change on WLQ4 will vary across the area that is associated with this WLQ – the peatland slopes. The maximum magnitude of change will be **medium**, which will arise principally in relation to the site area but also in some parts of the eastern leg of the peatland slopes. This arises from the following considerations.

- The Proposed Development will affect four of the five physical attributes of this WLQ - *high degree of perceived naturalness; landform which is rugged, or otherwise physically challenging; the lack of modern human artefacts or structures; and little evidence of contemporary land uses*. The effect of the Proposed Development on the first two of these two attributes will be limited, with the strength of the attributes being locally reduced on the site itself from moderate-high to moderate as a result of the direct physical influence of the Proposed Development. The effect on the third and fourth attributes will be greater, leading to a reduction from the baseline moderate strength to a low strength as a result of the direct physical effect of the Proposed Development.
- While the majority of the effects on physical attributes will affect the site area only, a less notable but more widespread effect will arise on two attributes - *the lack of modern human artefacts or structures; and little evidence of contemporary land uses*. The effects on these attributes will extend intermittently across the eastern leg of the peatland slopes due to visibility of the Proposed Development from the wider area.
- There will be no effect on the fifth physical attribute of WLQ3 - *remoteness and/or inaccessibility* - and this attribute will continue to be displayed at its baseline moderate strength.
- Two of the four perceptual responses of WLQ3 - *risk or, for some visitors, a sense of awe or anxiety and perceptions that the landscape has arresting or inspiring qualities* - will be affected by the Proposed Development, being locally reduced from moderate-high to moderate as a result of the Proposed Development. This reduction in strength will apply only to the eastern leg of the peatland slopes.
- The other two perceptual responses of WLQ3 - *a sense of sanctuary or solitude and fulfilment from the physical challenge required to penetrate into these places* - will not be affected by the Proposed Development, and will continue to be displayed at their baseline moderate level.

6.7.288 The medium magnitude of change will be localised on the site area, where the direct influence of the Proposed Development is greatest, but will also intermittently affect the eastern leg of the peatland slopes. Beyond this area the magnitude of change will diminish as the influence of the Proposed Development decreases, dropping to a medium-low, low and negligible level.

Judge the Significance of the Effects

6.7.289 NatureScot guidance summarises this step as follows in Table 1: “*Conclude on the overall significance (taking into account any mitigation), in terms of the study area and where relevant the wider WLA.*”

6.7.290 The significance of the effect is assessed through a combination of the sensitivity of each WLQ and the magnitude of change that will arise as a result of the Proposed Development, with reference to their physical attributes and perceptual responses. The steps above indicate that the Proposed

Development has potential to have a significant effect on three of the four WLQs: WLQ1, WLQ3 and WLQ4. The significance of the effects on these WLQs is discussed below.

WLQ1 “A range of large, irregular, rocky mountains with steep, arresting slopes and a variety of lochs and lochans, possessing a strong sense of naturalness, remoteness and sanctuary.”

- 6.7.291 Steps 3 and 4 have ascertained that WLQ1 has a high sensitivity and that a maximum medium-low magnitude of change will arise on its attributes and responses as a result of the Proposed Development. This level of change will be localised, arising only on the south-eastern fringes of the mountainous area that is associated with WLQ1. Elsewhere, the magnitude of change will be low, negligible, or no effect.
- 6.7.292 A combination of the factors considered in the maximum medium-low magnitude of change and the medium-high sensitivity of WLQ1 will lead to a **not significant** effect on WLQ1. This effect will be long-term and reversible. In OPEN’s methodology, a combination of a medium-low magnitude of change and a high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect on WLQ1 is judged to be not significant primarily because the Proposed Development will affect only two physical attributes (and the effects on these will be perceived, visual effects rather than direct physical effects) and two perceptual responses of WLQ1, and in no case will the strength of the attributes and responses reduce more than one interim level from the baseline strength (e.g. the changes are from high to moderate-high and moderate-high to moderate). None of the physical attributes will reduce below a moderate level, and the perceptual responses will not reduce below a moderate-high level. It is also relevant that the WLA description for WLQ1 does not make any specific reference to the two physical attributes that will be perceptually affected by the Proposed Development, indicating that these attributes are not of specific relevance in the formulation of WLQ1.
- 6.7.293 These factors ensure that the attributes and responses that are fundamental to the expression and distinctiveness of WLQ1 will remain as defining characteristics of the WLA, and will not be materially redefined by the external influence of the Proposed Development.

WLQ3 “A variety of spaces created by irregular landforms in which there is perceived naturalness, as well as a strong sense of sanctuary and solitude.”

- 6.7.294 Steps 3 and 4 have ascertained that WLQ3 has a high sensitivity (where it is expressed in the central mountain area that is covered by the NSA) or medium-high sensitivity (where it is expressed in the areas that lie outwith the NSA) and that a maximum medium-low magnitude of change will arise as a result of the Proposed Development. This level of change will be localised, arising only where WLQ3 is expressed in the southern peatland area of the WLA. Elsewhere, the magnitude of change will be low, negligible, or no effect.
- 6.7.295 A combination of the factors considered in the maximum medium-low magnitude of change and the medium-high sensitivity of the relevant geographical area of WLQ3 will lead to a **not significant** effect on WLQ3. This effect will be long-term and reversible. In OPEN’s methodology, a combination of a medium-low magnitude of change and a medium-high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect on WLQ3 is judged to be not significant primarily because the Proposed Development will affect only one physical attribute and one perceptual response of WLQ3, and these effects will be localised to one specific geographical area where WLQ3 is expressed – the peatland slopes. It is also important that the WLA description for WLQ3 does not make any specific reference to either the physical attribute or the perceptual response that will be affected by the Proposed Development, indicating that this attribute and response are not of specific relevance in the formulation of WLQ3. This is demonstrated in the wording of the title of WLQ3; “A variety of spaces created by irregular landforms in which there is perceived naturalness, as well as a strong sense of sanctuary and solitude”. The assessment has indicated that the Proposed

Development will not notably affect the “irregular landforms”, “perceived naturalness”, or “strong sense of sanctuary and solitude” that are found in the WLA.

6.7.296 These factors ensure that the attributes and responses that are fundamental to the expression and distinctiveness of WLQ3 will remain as defining characteristics of the WLA, and will not be materially redefined by the external influence of the Proposed Development.

WLQ4 “Extensive, elevated peatland slopes whose simplicity and openness contribute to a perception of awe, whilst highlighting the qualities of adjacent mountains.”

6.7.297 Steps 3 and 4 have ascertained that WLQ4 has a medium-high sensitivity and that a maximum medium magnitude of change will arise on the attributes and responses of this WLQ as a result of the Proposed Development. A combination of the factors considered in the maximum medium magnitude of change and the medium-high sensitivity of WLQ4 will lead to a **significant** effect on WLQ4. This effect will be localised, arising only on the site itself and intermittently on the eastern leg of the peatland slopes that are associated with WLQ4. Elsewhere, the effect will be **not significant** due to the reduced magnitude of change. This effect will be long-term and reversible.

6.7.298 In OPEN’s methodology, a combination of a medium magnitude of change and a medium-high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect on WLQ4 is judged to be significant primarily because the Proposed Development will be located within the area that is associated with WLQ4 – the peatland slopes – and will therefore have a direct, physical effect upon this WLQ. This is reflected in the reduction in the strength of two of the physical attributes of WLQ4 - *the lack of modern human artefacts or structures* and *little evidence of contemporary land uses* – from a moderate to a low level on the site itself, while two further attributes will be reduced from a moderate-high to a moderate level on the site itself. Beyond the site itself, two physical attributes and two perceptual responses will also be affected in the wider expression of WLQ4, within the eastern leg of the peatland slopes.

6.7.299 Table 6.12 summarises the effects of the Proposed Development on the WLQs of the Reay-Cassley WLA (WLA 34).

Table 6.12 – Summary of Effects on WLQs of Reay-Cassley WLA (WLA 34)

Wild Land Quality (WLQ)	Sensitivity of WLQ	Magnitude of Change on WLQ	Significance of Effect on WLQ
WLQ1 <i>A range of large, irregular, rocky mountains with steep, arresting slopes and a variety of lochs and lochans, possessing a strong sense of naturalness, remoteness and sanctuary.</i>	High	Maximum medium-low	Not Significant
WLQ2 <i>An awe-inspiring, broad scale expanse of moorland in which there is a complex pattern of features at a local level that contribute to the sense of naturalness and sanctuary.</i>	No potential for a significant effect to arise		
WLQ3 <i>A variety of spaces created by irregular landforms in which there is perceived naturalness, as well as a strong sense of sanctuary and solitude.</i>	High or medium-high	Maximum medium-low	Not Significant
WLQ4 <i>Extensive, elevated peatland slopes whose simplicity and openness contribute to a perception of awe, whilst highlighting the qualities of adjacent mountains.</i>	Medium-high	Maximum medium	Significant effect on the site/south-eastern leg of the WLA

- 6.7.300 The assessment of effects on wild land indicates that the Proposed Development is likely to result in significant effects on WLQ4 where it is expressed in the peatland slopes (in the southern part of the WLA). This significant effect is most likely to arise on the site area and intermittently on the eastern leg of the peatland slopes, where the Proposed Development will affect the physical attributes and perceptual responses of WLQ4.
- 6.7.301 Elsewhere, the indirect influence of the Proposed Development, the baseline nature of the WLA, and the attributes and responses of the WLQs ensure that the effect of the Proposed Development will be not significant. This includes the central mountains, where the physical attributes and perceptual responses are most strongly expressed.
- 6.7.302 Notably, the Proposed Development will be located in a part of the WLA that is directly affected by baseline development (e.g. hydro-electric infrastructure), and it will also be perceived in the context of development that lies outwith the WLA (e.g. roads, houses, forestry, hydro-electric infrastructure, and wind farms). This ensures that the greatest effects of the Proposed Development will generally arise on those parts of the WLA that display a lower baseline strength of physical attributes and perceptual responses (e.g. the peatland slopes, and more specifically, the eastern edge of the eastern leg of the peatland slopes). Conversely, effects on the area where WLQs (and their attributes and responses) are expressed to a greater degree – the area of central mountains that is associated with WLQ1 - will undergo a considerably more limited effect from the Proposed Development.
- 6.7.303 The Jenks analysis in Figure 6.5c (2024) and 6.11c (2024) (where it is shown in conjunction with the ZTV for the Proposed Development) is helpful in confirming that the parts of the WLA that may experience significant effects do not coincide with the parts of the WLA where the attributes and responses of the WLQs are most strongly expressed. The blue, purple and orange shading that covers almost all of the area on and around the site and the wider eastern leg of the peatland slopes signifies a Jenks score of 4, 5 and 6, which sits below the categories of 7 and 8 that are needed to justify wild land, as set out in paragraph 26 of Mapping of Scotland’s Wildness and Wild Land: Non-technical Description of the Methodology (SNH, June 2014):
- “Comparison of the 2002 search areas for wild land with the Jenks 8 analysis identified that they all included significant areas with scores falling in the two highest wildness classes (classes 8 and 7). Possible wild land areas were therefore required, as a minimum, to include class 8 and/or class 7 cells.”*
- 6.7.304 In considering the Jenks analysis, it is important to note that the data analysis only included wind farms that were operational in 2014 (Paragraph 33 of the Methodology cited above). The Jenks analysis therefore does not reflect the presence of wind farms that have subsequently been constructed, are under-construction or which have been consented.
- 6.7.305 In conclusion, the Proposed Development will, in the main, affect those parts of the WLA where the wildness qualities are not expressed to their optimum and where other external influences have resulted in a diminution of their strength. Where there is theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development from areas where the WLQs are more strongly expressed, it will be seen in the context of other development, including wind farms, which ensures that it will not introduce an entirely new influence on attributes and responses.
- 6.7.306 Whilst removing all visibility from the WLA is not possible, the Proposed Development has been very specifically designed to mitigate and minimise its effect on the WLA as a whole. Mitigation (including mitigation by siting and design) is of key importance in the accommodation of the Proposed Development within the fringes of the WLA without an unacceptable effect on the overall integrity of the WLA.

6.7.307 Appropriate mitigation is discussed further in the guidance ‘Scottish Government Planning & Architecture Onshore Wind – Some questions answered’ (Scottish Government, 2014), which includes the following question and answer.

“Q: How would mitigation (of wind farm proposals) address impacts on wild land?”

A: Mitigation could include reducing the number of turbines, careful siting and design of the proposal. Limiting the visibility of the proposal through understanding of the geographical features of the area and through comments received during the design, scoping and engagement stages of wind farm development could also help to identify the scope for development.”

6.7.308 NatureScot guidance (paragraph 31) notes that:

“Having identified potential effects (through Steps 1 to 4), measures to reduce any anticipated adverse effects should be considered. Whilst it is recognised that there will be limited scope for successful mitigation of large scale developments within or partly within WLAs, some examples of approaches to mitigation measures that could be applied to other developments are included in Box 1. Once these measures have been considered, the residual significant effects should be clearly identified.”

6.7.309 Box 1 includes the following potential mitigation measures:

- *“Rationalise the spatial extent or scale of proposal or parts of the proposal removing or reducing the scale of components in more sensitive locations; identifying lighting options that minimise impacts; combining tracks and associated elements within a single working corridor; and revising construction access routes to avoid sensitive areas.*
- *Sensitive siting of components re-siting components where woodland can provide (or will provide in the future) some screening; and micro siting components to use landform to reduce their visual envelope.*
- *A high standard of design: burying components; and selecting sympathetic materials to improve landscape fit.*
- *A high standard of restoration: tracks can be removed or their running width reduced, following construction.”*

6.7.310 While NatureScot suggests that the mitigation measures described in Box 1 might not be appropriate for the mitigation of large scale developments, it is considered that these principles have been successfully applied to the Proposed Development.

6.7.311 The mitigation that has been considered in the layout iteration of the Proposed Development in relation to the WLA is described below.

- The number of turbines in the Proposed Development was reduced from 22 in the 2011 application for a wind farm in the same area to nine in the April 2021 and current applications. This reduction was due largely to the consideration of landscape and visual effects, especially those on the WLA and the NSA., and the smaller number of turbines has mitigated effects on the WLA to a considerable degree.
- The positioning of the turbines on the eastern fringe of the outer peatland slopes gives them a stronger association with the developed Loch Shin area (including the hydro infrastructure that lies within the WLA) than the interior of the WLA. This area also has the lowest Jenks classes found within the WLA.

- This peripheral location also limits that the potential effect of the turbines on the massive open expansiveness of the peatland slopes (which contributes to several perceptual responses) as they will not be seen in the centre of a wider area of peatland, where they could provide visual enclosure and reduce the openness of a considerably larger area.
- The low elevation of the turbines in relation to the majority of the WLA also minimises their potential for enclosure and interruption of the vast open peatlands, as they will not appear in a prominent skyline location from within the WLA.
- The layout of the turbines in a single row with similar base elevations ensures that the Proposed Development has a strong, simple and well-balanced appearance when seen from key locations within the WLA (e.g. Viewpoint 2, Ben More Assynt). This avoids eye-catching variations and scale comparisons between the turbines.
- The Proposed Development is designed to utilise existing road infrastructure within the WLA, thus reducing the need for additional new tracks. Other infrastructure – the substation compound - has been located outwith the WLA and in close proximity to the existing hydro power station on the shore of Loch Shin where its external effect on the WLA will be minimised.
- The turbines in the Proposed Development have purposely been specified at below 150 m tip height in order to avoid the need for aviation lighting, which could increase effects on the WLA.
- Extensive consultation with NatureScot and THC has been carried out throughout the layout design process for the April 2021 application, particularly in relation to potential effects on the WLA. It is considered that concerns raised by NatureScot and THC in the course of this process have been taken into consideration in the application layout.

6.7.312 It is considered that these factors have notably reduced the potential effects of the Proposed Development on the WLA and its WLQs, ensuring that “...any significant effects on the qualities of these areas” have been “substantially overcome by siting, design or other mitigation”.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

6.7.313 The following wind farms are relevant in the assessment of effects on the Reay-Cassley WLA:

- operational wind farms at Achany, Lairg and Rosehall;
- under-construction wind farm at Creag Riabhach;
- consented wind farms at Braemore and Lairg 2;
- application-stage sites at Meall Buidhe and Strath Tirry; and
- scoping sites at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission.

6.7.314 All of these cumulative wind farms are shown on Figures 6.13a and 6.13b . The operational and under-construction sites are shown on Figure 6.11d (2024), along with a cumulative ZTV that shows visibility of the Proposed Development in conjunction with visibility of operational/under-construction wind farms.

6.7.315 The main assessment of effects on the WLQs takes into account the relevant operational and under-construction wind farms, and the cumulative effects with these wind farms are considered in the assessment of the effects that the Proposed Development will have on the WLQs. A separate cumulative assessment is therefore not carried out for the addition of the Proposed Development to operational and under-construction wind farms.

6.7.316 When various combinations of consented, application-stage and scoping cumulative wind farms are also considered, the addition of the Proposed Development to WLQs 1, 3 and 4 is likely to result in an

increased cumulative effect due to the greater wind farm influence that would be apparent around the WLA. However, the cumulative effect on the WLQs in any scenario would remain limited for the following reasons.

- The consented, application and scoping cumulative wind farms lie at some distance from the Proposed Development (a minimum of around 14.5 km), which provides visual, geographical and perceived separation from the Proposed Development. This ensures that the influence of the Proposed Development and cumulative wind farms will not concurrently be sufficient to lead to a significant cumulative effect on the WLQs.
- The cumulative wind farms of all statuses are grouped around the eastern leg of the WLA and as a result, this part of the WLA has the greatest existing and potential future wind farm influence. The Proposed Development will follow the pattern of development that relates to this leg of the peatlands. This is beneficial as it will not notably affect a part of the WLA that is otherwise unaffected by wind energy development (as can be seen on the cumulative ZTV in Figure 6.11d (2024)), and thus while wind farm influence on this part of the WLA will be increased, its influence is not out of keeping with the existing character of the landscape.
- The location of the Proposed Development in the south-eastern area peatlands also ensures that wind farm influence on the WLA will continue to arise chiefly from the south-east and east of the WLA. As a result, from the great majority of the WLA, all wind energy development will be seen in the same aspect of the setting (the east and south-east). This focus within one aspect both reduces the additional influence of the Proposed Development as it will be seen in the context of other wind energy development, and ensures that the great majority of the setting to the WLA will remain unaffected, including, most importantly, the spectacular and dramatic landscape to the north and west (where extensive areas are covered by NSAs as well as WLAs).
- The part of the WLA that is most affected by the Proposed Development – the eastern peatlands leg – is affected to a notable degree by baseline human development, including wind farms, and this reduces the degree of cumulative effect arising from its addition as the relevant WLQ physical attributes and perceptual responses are already reduced in strength.

6.7.317 The combination of these factors ensures that the cumulative effect on WLA 34 will be **not significant** when consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms are considered.

Assessment of Effects on Views

Introduction

6.7.318 Effects on views are the changes to views that result from the introduction of the Proposed Development. The assessment of effects on views includes effects on the 23 viewpoints which represent visibility of the Proposed Development from around the study area and effects on principal visual receptors such as settlements and routes.

6.7.319 The viewpoint locations are shown in conjunction with the blade tip ZTV on Figures 6.7a to 6.7c and with the hub height ZTV on Figures 6.8a to 6.8c. Visualisations have been prepared to meet the requirements of both NatureScot (Visual Representation of Wind Farms Version 2.2, SNH, 2017) and THC (Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments, 2016), and the viewpoints are illustrated in two separate volumes, NatureScot Visualisations (Volume 3, Figures 6.15 to 6.37) and THC Visualisations (Volume 4, Figures 6.38 to 6.60).

6.7.320 All of the 23 viewpoints have been photographed during 2020/2021.

6.7.321 All of the viewpoints are assessed in detail. Section 6.5 of this chapter identifies the principal visual receptors that have the potential to undergo significant effects (including significant cumulative

effects) and therefore require further assessment. The effect on each of these principal visual receptors is assessed below. The other principal visual receptors were found through the initial filtering process to not have the potential to undergo a significant effect and have therefore not been assessed in any further detail.

Viewpoint 1 - Track near Maovally

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.322 This viewpoint is on the hydro road that skirts around the south-eastern shoulder of the distinctive dome-shaped hill of Maovally (511 m AOD) on its route between Glen Cassley in the south and the A838 in the north. Maovally lies at the head of Glen Cassley and is some 6 km to the east of Ben More Assynt, from which it is separated by a small band of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT. This viewpoint has been included as it provides an easily accessible (on foot or bicycle or, with permission, by vehicle) yet elevated location within the Reay-Cassley WLA.
- 6.7.323 Maovally lies at the northern end of the ridge of *rounded hills* LCT that encloses the southern side of Loch Shin. This viewpoint provides a useful illustration of the location of the Proposed Development on the lower northern shoulder of this smooth, rounded ridge, which can be seen in the south-eastern foreground of the viewpoint photograph. The transmission line that runs around the shoulder of Maovally can also be seen in the foreground of the view.
- 6.7.324 To the north-east of the ridge of *rounded hills* LCT, beyond Loch Shin (which is not seen in this view) is the extensive area of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT that lies to the north of Loch Shin, while to the south-east the partly-forested *rounded hills* upper slopes of the *strath* LCT of Glen Cassley can be seen. Ben Klibreck forms a distinctive focal point to the north-east, rising from the relatively unremarkable landscape of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT.
- 6.7.325 Operational, under construction and consented wind farms that were relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA include Achany/Rosehall, theoretically visible to the south-east of this viewpoint at a minimum distance of 18.6 km away. There is also theoretical visibility of Creag Riabhach, a minimum of 15.4 km away to the north-east.
- 6.7.326 This view has a medium value. It is not a marked or recognised viewpoint, facilities are not provided for the enjoyment of the view, and it is not within a scenic designation. It is, however, within the Reay-Cassley WLA (although it should be noted that the WLA is not a scenic designation) and overlooks, in the distance, the Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA. The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint is high as people who gain the view will generally be walkers or cyclists who are engaging in outdoor recreation and are likely to have a specific focus on the scenery and surrounding landscape.
- 6.7.327 The combination of the high susceptibility to change of the view and its medium value results in a **medium-high** sensitivity for this viewpoint.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.328 The nine turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen to the east of this viewpoint from a minimum of 2.21 km away with eight hubs but no turbine bases visible, and will extend across around 20° of the view. The turbines will be the only visible element of the Proposed Development, with infrastructure being screened by landform. Tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.
- 6.7.329 The magnitude of change on this view will be **high**, for the following reasons.
- The Proposed Development has a high level of visibility at reasonably close proximity in an aspect of the view that is currently unaffected by wind farm development.

- The Proposed Development is seen in the orientation of the view gained by northbound travellers on the track, and is seen in the open aspect of the view, to which the eye of the viewer is drawn.
- The Proposed Development will introduce movement and contrasting colour and texture into the moorland backdrop against which it is seen.
- The turbines are seen partly backclothed by landform and partly on the skyline, which can be eye-catching.

6.7.330 There are factors that mitigate the effect of the Proposed Development to some extent, although these are not sufficient to reduce the level of magnitude of change.

- The Proposed Development is seen in the context of a relatively unremarkable, large-scale and simple landform both in the foreground and in relation to the skyline backdrop, and this reduces the perceived scale of the turbines and avoids uncomfortable scale comparisons with the landscape setting.
- The screening of turbine towers by landform and the relatively low elevation of the Proposed Development in relation to the viewpoint and the wider setting notably reduce its vertical impact and prominence, as well as its overall visibility.
- The Proposed Development will not be seen in the context of Ben Klibreck, ensuring that it remains as a focal point in the view. Moreover, the turbines will not rise above the high point of the mountain, ensuring that they will not compete with or dominate the landform.
- The screening of turbine bases by landform avoids the perception of the turbines encroaching towards the viewpoint, thus giving a sense of separation.
- The Proposed Development will affect a limited proportion (around 20%) of the expansive open view that is available from this viewpoint, so that the great majority of the view will remain unaffected.
- The human development seen in the view (including the hydro road, transmission line, and forestry) ensures that it lacks the unspoilt, remote, wildness characteristics with which the Proposed Development would have the greatest contrast.
- The Proposed Development forms a compact group of turbines with a well-balanced composition, and the absence of visibility of infrastructure reduces the potential clutter associated with the Proposed Development.

Significance of the Effect

6.7.331 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **significant**. This is due to a combination of the factors that lead to the high magnitude of change on the view and the medium-high sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

6.7.332 Visibility of operational and under-construction wind farms is described in the baseline description above. There is also theoretical visibility of the application-stage wind farm at Meall Buidhe, 25 km to the south-east, south of Achany and Rosehall. There are therefore two potential cumulative scenarios to which the Proposed Development may be added; operational/under-construction wind farms, and operational/under-construction plus application-stage wind farms.

6.7.333 In the operational/under-construction cumulative scenario, the addition of the Proposed Development to Achany, Rosehall and Creag Riabhach will have a **low** cumulative magnitude of change. This is limited to this level by the distant visibility of the operational/under-construction wind

farms; their relatively restricted turbine size, and the very small proportion of the view that will be occupied by them; the limited level of visibility of Achany and Rosehall; the small number of wind farms (with Achany and Rosehall appearing as a single wind farm) that may contribute to the cumulative effect; the similar landscape setting of all of the sites within or partly within *rounded hills* LCT; and the containment of the Proposed Development and cumulative wind farms within a 95° aspect of the view, with the Proposed Development at the centre, so that it will not introduce wind farm influence to an entirely new aspect of the view.

- 6.7.334 In the operational/under-construction plus application-stage wind farms cumulative scenario, with the application stage wind farm at Meall Buidhe also considered, the cumulative magnitude of change will increase slightly but will remain **low** due to the limited and distant visibility of Meall Buidhe.
- 6.7.335 The cumulative effect in the scenarios of operational/under-construction wind farms and operational/under-construction plus application-stage wind farms will be **not significant** due to a combination of the factors that lead to the low cumulative magnitude of change in both scenarios and the medium-high sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Viewpoint 2 - Ben More Assynt

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.336 This viewpoint is located at the summit of Ben More Assynt, 998 m AOD, from where a spectacular panoramic view is gained across extensive areas of north-western Scotland, including the iconic Assynt mountains of Canisp, Cul Mor, Quinag and Suilven. The viewpoint is located at the southern end of an extensive area of rugged mountain massif LCT that extends as far north as Foinaven and this type dominates the view to the north. The uplands – lone mountains, rounded hills and rocky hills and moorland - also extend to the south, east and west of the viewpoint, interspersed by smaller areas of sweeping moorland and flows and strath.
- 6.7.337 The east-facing aspect of the view, in which the Proposed Development will be seen, is less rugged and mountainous than other parts of the outlook, displaying the relatively gentle and smooth landform of *rounded hills* LCT in the middle-ground. Marking the edge of *rounded hills*, Loch Shin is a striking linear feature across the centre of the eastern outlook as is the strath of Glen Cassley, which runs parallel to the loch. The domed landform of Maovally can be seen in the foreground to the east, with the distinctive hydro track (Viewpoint 1) that skirts around the hill clearly visible. In the middle distance, the pipeline associated with the Glen Cassley hydro infrastructure is readily discernible. Beyond Loch Shin, *sweeping moorland and flows* and *strath* cover the broad, shallow landform of Strath Tirry, rising again into *rounded hills* further to the east. The *lone mountains* of Ben Klibreck rises as a focal point in this relatively unremarkable eastern landscape.
- 6.7.338 Operational, under construction and consented wind farms that were relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA include Achany/Rosehall, which are discernible in clear conditions to the south-east while Creag Riabhach is theoretically visible to the north-east of this viewpoint, at a minimum distance of 22.3 km away and 21.4 km respectively. There is also theoretical visibility of Braemore and Lairg II, a minimum 27.9 km and 33 km respectively. All of these wind farms lie to the south-east of the viewpoint other than Creag Riabhach, which is to the north-east. A number of other operational and consented wind farms are also theoretically visible, as shown on the wirelines, but are seen from beyond their study areas and are thus outwith the distance at which they may contribute to a significant cumulative effect.
- 6.7.339 This view has a high value. It is a well-known hillwalking location within the Assynt-Coigach NSA and the Reay-Cassley WLA (although it should be noted that the WLA is not a scenic designation). The viewpoint also has value due to the Munro status of Ben More Assynt and the documentation of routes to this point. It also has notable scenic qualities and a strong sense of place. The susceptibility

to change at this viewpoint is high as people who gain the view will be walkers who are engaging in outdoor recreation and are likely to have a specific focus on the scenery and surrounding landscape.

- 6.7.340 The combination of the high susceptibility to change of the view and its high value results in a **high** sensitivity for this viewpoint.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.341 The nine turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen to the east of this viewpoint from a minimum of 8.46 km away with all hubs visible, and will extend across around 10° of the view. The turbines will be the principal visible element of the Proposed Development, with the great majority of infrastructure being screened by landform. Several short sections of access tracks and a hardstanding are, however, theoretically visible (as shown on the photomontage visualisations in Figure 6.16g and Figure 6.39), and tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.

- 6.7.342 The magnitude of change on this view will be **medium**, for the following reasons.

- The Proposed Development has a high level of visibility at moderate proximity in an aspect of the view that is currently unaffected by wind farm development.
- The Proposed Development will introduce movement and contrasting colour and texture into the moorland and loch backdrop against which it is seen.
- The turbines are seen partly backclothed by landform and partly by water, which can be eye-catching.

- 6.7.343 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a **medium** level are as follows:

- The Proposed Development is seen in the context of the large-scale and simple landform of the Loch Shin ridge of *rounded hills* LCT, which reduces the perceived scale of the turbines and avoids uncomfortable scale comparisons with the landscape setting.
- The low elevation of the Proposed Development in relation to the viewpoint and the wider setting notably reduces its vertical impact and prominence.
- The Proposed Development will be seen in the most developed aspect of the panoramic view gained from this viewpoint, where influences such as the hydro road, development along Loch Shin, forestry and, further away, wind farms, ensure that the outlook lacks the unspoilt, remote, wildness characteristics with which the Proposed Development would have the greatest contrast.
- The Proposed Development will not be seen in the context of the dramatic, remote mountainous landscape that lies to the north and west of the viewpoint. It will therefore not affect the spectacular views gained in these directions, where the special qualities of the NSA and wildness qualities of the WLA are most apparent, whereas the Proposed Development will be seen outwith the NSA. The Proposed Development will also not be seen in the context of Ben Klibreck, ensuring that it remains as a focal point in the north-eastern view.
- The Proposed Development will affect a limited proportion (around 10°) of the panoramic view that is available from this viewpoint, so that the great majority of the view will remain unaffected.
- The Proposed Development has a compact, well-balanced, regular and even composition that relates well to its landform setting and avoids eye-catching effects of gapping and clustering or overlapping.

- The very limited of visibility of infrastructure reduces the potential clutter associated with the Proposed Development.

Significance of the Effect

6.7.344 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **significant**. This is due to a combination of the factors that lead to the medium magnitude of change on the view and the high sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

6.7.345 Visibility of operational, under-construction and consented wind farms is described in the baseline description above. There is also theoretical visibility of the application-stage wind farms at Meall Buidhe and Strath Tirry, 26.4 km and 26.8 km to the south-east and east-south-east respectively, and scoping sites at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission, 33.7 km and 33 km away respectively. South Kilbraur is shown in the wirelines but is seen from outwith its study area. There are therefore four potential cumulative scenarios to which the Proposed Development may be added: operational/under-construction wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented and application-stage wind farms; and operational/under-construction plus consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms.

6.7.346 With the exception of Creag Riabhach, all of the cumulative wind farms lie to the south-east or east-south-east of the viewpoint and are contained within a 55° aspect of the view. When Creag Riabhach, which is to the north-east, is also considered, the cumulative wind farms are contained within a 90° aspect of the view. The sites around Lairg (Achany, Rosehall, Braemore, Lairg 2 and its Resubmission, and Garvary) are seen in one group that lies a minimum of 22.3 km away.

6.7.347 In the operational/under-construction cumulative scenario, the addition of the Proposed Development to operational and under-construction wind farms at Achany, Rosehall and Creag Riabhach will have a **low** cumulative magnitude of change. This is limited to this level by: the distant visibility of the operational/under-construction wind farms; their relatively restricted turbine size, and the very small proportion of the view that will be occupied by them; the small number of wind farms (with Achany and Rosehall appearing as a single wind farm) that may contribute to the cumulative effect; the similar landscape setting of all of the sites within or partly within *rounded hills* LCT; and the containment of the Proposed Development and cumulative wind farms within a 70° aspect of the view, with the Proposed Development at the centre, so that it will not introduce wind farm influence to an entirely new aspect of the view. This last point also ensures that the great majority of the view remains without wind farm influence, including the dramatic and eye-catching mountainous NSA landscape that lies to the north and west of the viewpoint. The relatively low elevation of the cumulative wind farms in relation to the viewpoint is also important, as this precludes any prominent visibility on the skyline and reduces vertical impact, ensuring that the turbines form a subservient component in the view.

6.7.348 In the operational/under-construction plus consented-stage wind farms cumulative scenario, with Braemore and Lairg 2 also considered, the cumulative magnitude of change will increase slightly due to additional wind farm visibility and the larger scale of the Lairg 2 turbines, but will remain **low** due to the distant visibility of both sites and their grouping together in the same part of the view along with Achany and Rosehall.

6.7.349 In the operational/under-construction plus consented and application-stage wind farms cumulative scenario, the application stage wind farms at Meall Buidhe and Strath Tirry are also considered. The additional consideration of Strath Tirry would not lead to any notable increase in the **low** cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development due to the very limited and distant visibility of Strath Tirry. Strath Tirry also lies within the aspect of the view that is affected by other

cumulative wind farms. Meall Buidhe also has distant and limited visibility, but would extend wind farm influence slightly further south around the view, thus increasing the wind farm influence to which the Proposed Development would be added. When Meall Buidhe is considered, with or without Strath Tirry, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development would therefore increase to a **medium-low** level.

- 6.7.350 In the operational/under-construction plus consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms cumulative scenario, the scoping wind farms at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are also considered. These sites are given less weight than application-stage wind farms as there is no certainty as to the cut-off date that they will be submitted as applications. The additional consideration of Lairg 2 Resubmission would not lead to any notable increase in the **medium-low** cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development due to the minor increase in the visibility of turbines over that of the consented Lairg 2 turbines. Garvary would add a further wind farm to the scenario to which the Proposed Development would be added, but would be seen in conjunction with the group at Lairg and would not increase wind farm influence any further around the view. When Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development may increase slightly but would not increase over a **medium-low** level.
- 6.7.351 It is possible that a scenario may arise where the Proposed Development is added to one or both of the scoping sites, but the application-stage sites are no longer relevant. In this case, the consideration of Lairg 2 Resubmission would not increase the cumulative magnitude of change over the **low** level assessed in the operational/under-construction plus consented scenario. If the Proposed Development was added to Garvary without consideration of the application-stage wind farms, the cumulative magnitude of change would also remain **low** due to the distant visibility of this wind farm, and its grouping with operational and consented wind farms.
- 6.7.352 The cumulative effect at this viewpoint in any scenario will be **not significant** due to the factors that lead to the maximum medium-low cumulative magnitude despite the high sensitivity of the viewpoint.
- 6.7.353 A combination of a medium-low cumulative magnitude of change and a high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be not significant for a number of reasons, including the relatively distant visibility of all cumulative wind farms and their grouping together (along with the Proposed Development) within a maximum 90° aspect of the view; the resultant retention of the great majority of the view without wind farm influence, including the dramatic mountainous NSA landscape that lies to the north and west; the location of the Proposed Development within an aspect of the view that is affected by baseline wind farm influence; and the low elevation of the cumulative wind farms and the Proposed Development in relation to the viewpoint, which precludes prominent visibility and reduces vertical impact, ensuring that the turbines form a subservient component in the view.

Viewpoint 3 - Coire Ceann Loch

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.354 This viewpoint is located on the upper western slopes of Coire Ceann Loch, some 650 m east of the high point of Sithean Liath (434 m AOD) and just to the south of the Allt Bealach a' Choire. The property at Corriekinloch, which can be seen in the viewpoint photograph, as can its clearly visible access track, lies approximately 2.3 km to the east. The viewpoint is reached by an intermittent and indistinct path that runs up the glen from Corriekinloch (as shown on the OS map) but is not easily accessible and requires the traversing of rough ground. This viewpoint has been included as it provides a relatively low-level but remote view from within the Reay-Cassley WLA and Assynt-Coigach NSA, and is relatively accessible in comparison to the high mountains of the NSA and WLA.

- 6.7.355 This viewpoint lies within the eastern fringe of the *rugged mountain massif* LCT where landform is less elevated and dramatic than that found in the interior of this LCT (e.g. Viewpoints 2, 11 and 12). The foreground of the view – which is formed by Coire Ceann Loch - does, however, display some of the rugged landscape of *rugged mountain massif* LCT, and this frames the view to the south-east, along Loch Shin. Beyond this, the smooth, rounded form of the ridge of *rounded hills* LCT that encloses the southern side of Loch Shin continues to channel the view in this direction. The north side of Loch Shin is more open, with the extensive plain of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT extending as far as the distant *rounded hills* and *lone mountains* LCTs that enclose it to the north and east.
- 6.7.356 No relevant operational, under-construction or consented wind farms were seen in this view at the time of the April 2021 LVIA, and those shown in the wireline view are seen from outwith their study areas.
- 6.7.357 This view has a medium-high value. It is not a marked or recognised viewpoint, facilities are not provided for the enjoyment of the view, and it is not a recognised or documented location for walkers or other recreational users. It is, however, within the Assynt-Coigach NSA and Reay-Cassley WLA (although it should be noted that the WLA is not a scenic designation) and has scenic qualities in its long, open outlook down Loch Shin from within the *rugged mountain massif* LCT. The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint is high as people who gain the view will be walkers who are engaging in outdoor recreation and are likely to have a specific focus on the scenery and surrounding landscape.
- 6.7.358 The combination of the high susceptibility to change of the view and its medium-high value results in a **high** sensitivity for this viewpoint.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.359 The nine turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen to the south-east of this viewpoint from a minimum of 8.14 km away with all hubs visible, and will extend across around 6° of the view. Elements of infrastructure will also be visible, including upgraded and new access tracks, hardstandings and the substation compound (as shown on the photomontage visualisation in Figure 6.17d and Figure 6.40). Tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.
- 6.7.360 The magnitude of change on this view will be **medium**, for the following reasons.
- The Proposed Development will be seen at moderate proximity in the most open aspect of the view, to which the eye of the viewer is drawn. This aspect of the view is also channelled by landform, which frames the focal point of Loch Shin, and the Proposed Development will be seen in the context of this framing landform.
 - The Proposed Development will introduce movement and contrasting colour and texture into the moorland backdrop against which it is seen.
 - The turbines are seen partly backclothed by landform and partly by sky, which can be eye-catching.
- 6.7.361 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a **medium** level are as follows:
- The Proposed Development is seen in the context of the large-scale and simple landform of the Loch Shin ridge of *rounded hills* LCT, which reduces the perceived scale of the turbines and avoids uncomfortable scale comparisons with the landscape setting. It is also relevant that the ridge rises higher than the turbines, providing enclosure and containment which ensures that the Proposed Development does not appear to compete with the landform but is subservient to it.

- The low elevation of the Proposed Development in relation to the viewpoint and this landscape setting notably reduces its vertical impact and prominence in the view.
- The Proposed Development will affect a limited proportion (around 6°) of the view from this viewpoint, so that the great majority of the view will remain unaffected.
- The Proposed Development forms a compact group of turbines that relates well to its landform setting.

Significance of the Effect

- 6.7.362 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **significant**. This is due to a combination of the factors that lead to the medium magnitude of change on the view and the high sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

- 6.7.363 No operational, under-construction or consented wind farms are seen in this view, as those shown in the wireline view are seen from outwith their study area. The application-stage site at Strath Tirry is theoretically visible from 26.1 km away, and the scoping site at Garvary has negligible theoretical visibility from 35.7 km away. Both of these wind farms have a very limited influence on the view, and the maximum cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development to an application-stage and/or scoping scenario will be **low**. The cumulative effect will be not significant due to a combination of the factors considered in the low cumulative magnitude of change and the medium-high sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Viewpoint 4 - Ariscaig track, Loch Shin

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.364 This viewpoint is located just to the east of the rough track that runs along part of the southern side of Loch Shin, near the disused cottage at Ariscaig. This viewpoint has been included as it provides a low-level and relatively accessible (on foot and, with permission, in a four-wheel-drive vehicle) location on the southern side of Loch Shin, where there are few visual receptors, and is also within the Reay-Cassley WLA.
- 6.7.365 This viewpoint lies on the north-eastern edge of the Loch Shin/Glen Cassley unit of *rounded hills* LCT and the smooth, domed ridge of the hills can be seen rising to the south and west of the viewpoint. As with Viewpoint 1, this viewpoint provides a useful illustration of the location of the Proposed Development on the lower northern slope of this smooth, rounded ridge.
- 6.7.366 To the north and east of the viewpoint is the extensive area of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT that lies to the north of Loch Shin, with the houses and improved grassland of Shinness seen directly across the loch. The low elevation of the viewpoint means that, unusually, the *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT does not appear as an extensive level plain, but is foreshortened by the landform that rises gently from the northern loch-shore. The low elevation also ensures that several landmark mountains are seen around the view, including Ben Hee, Beinn Leoid, Meallan a' Chuail, and Ben Klibreck (although this is largely obscured by foreground vegetation in this specific view).
- 6.7.367 The immediate foreground of the view shows a more managed landscape than is apparent elsewhere in this Loch Shin/Glen Cassley unit of *rounded hills*, with grass cutting, the disused cottage at Ariscaig, the track, deer fencing, and managed forestry and woodland.
- 6.7.368 The landform context of this viewpoint draws the eye of the viewer to the north-west and south-east, up and down Loch Shin, where the longest and most open aspects of the view are gained.

6.7.369 Operational, under construction and consented wind farms that were relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA include the operational wind farm at Lairg, which is theoretically visible to the south-east of this viewpoint at a minimum distance of 14.2 km away, with the adjacent consented Lairg 2 visible at 14.4 km away.

6.7.370 This view has a medium value. It is not a marked or recognised viewpoint, facilities are not provided for the enjoyment of the view, and it is not within a scenic designation. It is, however, within the Reay-Cassley WLA (although it should be noted that the WLA is not a scenic designation) and overlooks, distantly, a part of the Assynt-Coigach NSA. The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint is high as people who gain the view are likely to be walkers who are engaging in outdoor recreation and are likely to have a specific focus on the scenery and surrounding landscape.

6.7.371 The combination of the high susceptibility to change of the view and its medium value results in a **medium-high** sensitivity for this viewpoint.

Magnitude of Change

6.7.372 The nine turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen to the north-west of this viewpoint from a minimum of 9.12 km away with six hubs and one turbine base visible, and will extend across around 3° of the view. The two leftmost turbines (T8 and T9) are seen as blade tip extremities only. While the great majority of infrastructure will be screened by landform, part of the hardstanding of the easternmost turbine is theoretically visible (as shown on the photomontage visualisation in Figure 6.18f and Figure 6.41), although this is unlikely to be discernible at over 9 km away. Tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.

6.7.373 The magnitude of change on this view will be **medium-low**, for the following reasons.

- The Proposed Development will be seen at moderate proximity in the north-western open aspect of the view, up Loch Shin. This aspect of the view is gently channelled by the landform that encloses Loch Shin, and the Proposed Development will be seen in the context of this framing landform.
- The Proposed Development will introduce movement and contrasting colour and texture into the moorland context in which it is seen.
- The Proposed Development will be seen in a relatively undeveloped aspect of the outlook, where it will contrast with the remote, upland characteristics.
- The relatively low elevation of the viewpoint in relation to the Proposed Development increases the perceived vertical impact of the closer turbines (T1 and T2), which have greater visibility of towers.

6.7.374 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a **medium-low** level are as follows:

- Screening of turbines (towers and blades) by landform reduces the overall visibility of the Proposed Development, and the two blades (T8 and T9) that are theoretically visible are unlikely to be seen in reality, as they are over 12 km from the viewpoint. The screening of the Proposed Development also reduces the vertical impact of the turbines other than T1 and T2.
- The Proposed Development will affect a very limited proportion (around 3°) of the full open view from this viewpoint, so that the great majority of the view will remain unaffected.
- The Proposed Development is seen in the context of the large-scale and simple landform of the Loch Shin ridge of *rounded hills* LCT, which reduces the perceived scale of the turbines and avoids uncomfortable scale comparisons with the landscape setting. It is also relevant that in the foreground the ridge rises higher than the turbines, providing enclosure and containment

which ensures that the Proposed Development does not appear to compete with the landform but is subservient to it.

- The turbines are seen entirely against the sky, which prevents the eye-catching effect that can arise when the backdrop is variable.
- This viewpoint has a wide open outlook that extends across, up and down Loch Shin and does not have a specific direction of view. The Proposed Development will therefore not be seen in any specific direction of travel, but will be peripheral to the principal focus of views across the loch.
- The Proposed Development forms a very compact group of turbines that relates well to its landform setting and this, combined with the distance from the viewpoint, reduces its influence on the view.

Significance of the Effect

- 6.7.375 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **not significant**. This is due to a combination of the factors that lead to the medium-low magnitude of change on the view and the medium-high sensitivity of the viewpoint. A combination of a medium-low magnitude of change and a medium-high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be not significant because the very limited horizontal extent of the Proposed Development (approximately 3°), screening by landform, and distance from the viewpoint ensure that it will not provide a definitive influence on the view. The non-directional nature of the view from this location is also relevant.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

- 6.7.376 Visibility of operational and consented wind farms is described in the baseline description above. There is also theoretical visibility of the application-stage wind farm at Strath Tirry, 6.8 km to the east, and the scoping sites at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission, 15.4 km and 14.4 km away respectively to the south-east. Visibility of Strath Tirry is very limited, with just blade tips visible on the skyline.
- 6.7.377 There are therefore four potential cumulative scenarios to which the Proposed Development may be added; operational/under-construction wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented and application-stage wind farms; and operational/under-construction plus consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms.
- 6.7.378 In the operational/under-construction cumulative scenario, the addition of the Proposed Development to Lairg will have a **low** cumulative magnitude of change. This arises from visibility of the Proposed Development to the north-west while Lairg wind farm is to the south-east, and thus leads to a wind farm being theoretically visible at each end of Loch Shin. It is limited to a low level by the relatively distant visibility of Lairg wind farm, its restricted turbine size, and the very small proportion of the view that it will occupy; the small number of wind farms that may contribute to the cumulative effect (Lairg and the Proposed Development); and the similar landscape setting of Lairg and the Proposed Development within *rounded hills* LCT.
- 6.7.379 In the operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms cumulative scenario, with Lairg 2 also considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development will increase to a **medium-low** level. This is due to the increased wind farm influence arising from Lairg 2, with its larger turbine dimensions and extent across the view, despite its grouping with Lairg wind farm.
- 6.7.380 In the operational/under-construction plus application-stage wind farms cumulative scenario, with the application stage wind farm at Strath Tirry also considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development will increase slightly due to the addition of

theoretical visibility of a third wind farm, in a different aspect of the view, but will remain **medium-low** due to the very limited visibility of Strath Tirry.

- 6.7.381 In the operational/under-construction plus consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms cumulative scenario, the scoping wind farms at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are also considered. These sites are given less weight than application-stage wind farms as there is no certainty as to the cut-off date that they will be submitted as applications. The additional consideration of Lairg 2 Resubmission would not lead to any notable increase in the **medium-low** cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development in the previous scenario due to the minor increase in the visibility of turbines over that of the consented Lairg 2 turbines. Garvary would add a further wind farm to the scenario to which the Proposed Development would be added, but would be seen in conjunction with the group at Lairg and would not increase wind farm influence notably around the view. When Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development may increase slightly but would not increase over a **medium-low** level.
- 6.7.382 It is possible that a scenario may arise where the Proposed Development is added to one or both of the scoping sites, but the application-stage sites are no longer relevant. In this case, the consideration of Lairg 2 Resubmission and/or Garvary would not increase the cumulative magnitude of change over the **medium-low** level assessed in the operational/under-construction plus consented scenario.
- 6.7.383 The cumulative effect at this viewpoint in any scenario will be **not significant** due to a combination of the factors that lead to the maximum medium-low cumulative magnitude and the medium-high sensitivity of the viewpoint.
- 6.7.384 A combination of a medium-low cumulative magnitude of change and a medium-high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be **not significant** primarily due to the limited number of cumulative wind farms and the grouping together of these (other than Strath Tirry), which ensures that the great majority of the view remains unaffected by wind farm influence. The small proportion of the view occupied by the Proposed Development is also relevant, as is the very limited visibility of Strath Tirry.

Viewpoint 5 - A838 near Colaboll

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.385 This viewpoint is located on the A838, approximately 750 m to the north-west of the 90-degree bend at Colaboll where the road turns up to run north-westwards along Loch Shin. This stretch of the road gains the first open and clear view towards the Proposed Development for westbound travellers; eastbound road-users will not gain this view.
- 6.7.386 This viewpoint lies within the *strath* LCT (Strath Tirry unit) and characteristics of this LCT can be seen in the deciduous hedgerow vegetation that lines the northern side of the road and the settled landscape that lies beyond the hedgerow. The strip of land between the road and the loch also shows some more settled characteristics. Beyond the *strath* LCT, and beyond the loch, *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT forms a middle-ground to the focal point mountains that rise on the skyline to the north-west.
- 6.7.387 The *rounded hills* LCT within which the site lies covers the foreground of the south, west, north-west and south-west aspects of the view (much of it seen perpendicular/oblique to the angle of view of westbound travellers), including Loch Shin and the slope that rises on the southern side of the loch, which is the visible part of the *rounded hills* LCT ridge that separates Loch Shin and Glen Cassley.
- 6.7.388 Rising above the ridge of *rounded hills* LCT is the upper part of Ben More Assynt. Further to the right are Beinn Leoid and the dome-shaped Meallan a' Chuail, grouped together and further right still is the

distinctive pointed peak of Ben Hee. All of these mountains are in the *rugged mountain massif* LCT, which wraps around the head of Loch Shin.

6.7.389 Operational, under construction and consented wind farms that were relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA include the operational wind farm at Lairg, theoretically visible to the south-east of this viewpoint at a minimum distance of 8.4 km away, with the adjacent consented Lairg 2 theoretically visible at 8.7 km away. However, these wind farms are both largely screened by woodland and are unlikely to have notable visibility. It is also relevant that these sites lie to the south-east, and this viewpoint is included specifically to represent visibility of the Proposed Development that may be gained by westbound travellers on the A838. This means that westbound road-users will not gain visibility of Lairg or Lairg 2, irrespective of the woodland screening, as these wind farms lie behind their direction of travel.

6.7.390 This view has a medium value. It is not a marked or formal viewpoint, the A838 is not identified as a tourist route, and it does not lie within a scenic designation. It does, however, have scenic qualities and provides an outlook across and up Loch Shin to distinctive mountains (including part of the Assynt-Coigach NSA). The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint will be medium as the view will be gained by road-users, and the A838 is not a recognised tourist route or cycle route.

6.7.391 This view has a **medium** sensitivity due to a combination of the medium value of the view and medium susceptibility of viewers.

Magnitude of Change

6.7.392 The nine turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen to the north-west of this viewpoint from a minimum of 15.10 km away with six hubs visible, and will extend across around 2° of the view. The two leftmost turbines (T8 and T9) are seen as blade tip extremities only. While the great majority of infrastructure will be screened by landform, part of one hardstanding is theoretically visible, although this will not be discernible at over 15 km away. Tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.

6.7.393 The magnitude of change on this view will be **medium-low**, for the following reasons.

- The Proposed Development will be seen in the open north-western open aspect of the view, up Loch Shin, to which the eye of the viewer is drawn. It will also be seen in the direction of travel of westbound road-users.
- The Proposed Development will introduce movement and contrasting colour and texture into the moorland context in which it is seen.
- The Proposed Development will be seen in a relatively undeveloped aspect of the outlook, where it will contrast with the remote, upland characteristics.
- The relatively low elevation of the viewpoint in relation to the Proposed Development increases the perceived vertical impact of the closer turbines (T1 and T2), which have greater visibility of towers.

6.7.394 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a **medium-low** level are as follows:

- Screening of turbines (towers and blades) by landform reduces the overall visibility of the Proposed Development, and the two blades (T8 and T9) that are theoretically visible are unlikely to be seen in reality, as they are over 18 km from the viewpoint. The screening of the Proposed Development also reduces the vertical impact of the turbines other than T1 and T2.
- The Proposed Development will affect a very limited proportion (around 2°) of the open view from this viewpoint, so that the great majority of the view will remain unaffected.

- The Proposed Development is seen in the context of the large-scale and simple landform of the Loch Shin ridge of *rounded hills* LCT, which reduces the perceived scale of the turbines and avoids uncomfortable scale comparisons with the landscape setting. It is also relevant that in the middle-ground the ridge rises higher than the turbines, providing enclosure and containment which ensures that the Proposed Development does not appear to compete with the landform but is subservient to it.
- The Proposed Development will not be seen in the context of the eye-catching mountainous landform that provides a series of focal points to the north-west, including Ben More Assynt, Beinn Leoid, Meallan a' Chuail and Ben Hee.
- The Proposed Development forms a very compact group of turbines that relates well to its landform setting and this, combined with the distance from the viewpoint, reduces its influence on the view.
- The Proposed Development will be seen by moving viewers.

Significance of the Effect

- 6.7.395 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **not significant**. This is due to a combination of the factors that lead to the medium-low magnitude of change on the view and the medium sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

- 6.7.396 As described in the baseline section above, there is theoretical visibility of the operational and consented wind farms at Lairg and Lairg 2. However, these wind farms are both largely screened by woodland and are unlikely to have notable visibility. It is also relevant that these sites lie to the south-east, and this viewpoint is included specifically to represent visibility of the Proposed Development that may be gained by westbound travellers on the A838. This means that westbound road-users will not gain visibility of Lairg or Lairg 2, irrespective of the woodland screening, as these wind farms lie behind their direction of travel.
- 6.7.397 There is also theoretical visibility of the scoping sites at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission, 9.9 km and 8.7 km away respectively. While Lairg 2 Resubmission will also be largely screened by woodland, there is likely to be theoretical visibility of Garvary. Again, however, these two wind farms lie behind the westbound traveller, and will not be seen by people on the road who gain the view of the Proposed Development that is illustrated in this viewpoint.
- 6.7.398 The maximum cumulative magnitude of change on this viewpoint in any scenario will be **low**, due to the screening of visibility and the location of the cumulative wind farms in relation to westbound travellers. The limited influence of the Proposed Development is also a factor in the low cumulative magnitude of change.
- 6.7.399 The cumulative effect at this viewpoint in any scenario will be **not significant** due to a combination of the factors that lead to the maximum low cumulative magnitude and the medium sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Viewpoint 6 - A838 near Achnairn

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.400 This viewpoint is located at the Achnairn junction on the A838, approximately 1.75 m to the north-west of the previous viewpoint. It has been included as it lies at the end of a stretch where visibility is screened and filtered by vegetation along the road, and so represents a point where a clear and open view along the loch becomes available.

- 6.7.401 The landscape setting to this viewpoint is similar to that of the previous viewpoint; this too lies within the *strath* LCT (Strath Tirry unit) and characteristics of this LCT can be seen in the settled, managed landscape that lies on both sides of the road. Beyond the *strath*, and beyond the loch, *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT forms a middle-ground to the focal point mountains that rise on the skyline to the north-west.
- 6.7.402 The *rounded hills* LCT within which the site lies covers the foreground of the south, west and south-west aspects of the view, including Loch Shin and the slope that rises on the southern side of the loch, and is also seen to the north-west, beyond *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT.
- 6.7.403 Rising above the ridge of *rounded hills* LCT is Ben More Assynt, and further to the right are Beinn Leoid and the dome-shaped Meallan a' Chuail (Ben Hee is screened by vegetation in this view). All of these mountains are in the *rugged mountain massif* LCT, which wraps around the head of Loch Shin.
- 6.7.404 Operational, under construction and consented wind farms that were relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA include the operational wind farm at Lairg, theoretically visible to the south-east of this viewpoint at a minimum distance of 10.2 km away, with the adjacent consented Lairg 2 theoretically visible at 10.5 km away. However, these wind farms are both largely screened by woodland and are unlikely to have notable visibility. It is also relevant that these sites lie to the south-east, and this viewpoint is included specifically to represent visibility of the Proposed Development that may be gained by westbound travellers on the A838. This means that westbound road-users will not gain visibility of Lairg or Lairg 2, irrespective of the woodland screening, as these wind farms lie behind their direction of travel. There is also theoretical visibility of Achany wind farm at a minimum of 8.1 km away to the south-west. This visibility is, however, negligible.
- 6.7.405 This view has a medium value. It is not a marked or formal viewpoint, the A838 is not identified as a tourist route, and it does not lie within a scenic designation. It does, however, have scenic qualities and provides an outlook across and up Loch Shin to distinctive mountains (including part of the Assynt-Coigach NSA). The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint will be medium as the view will be gained by road-users, and the A838 is not a recognised tourist route or cycle route.
- 6.7.406 This view has a **medium** sensitivity due to a combination of the medium value of the view and medium susceptibility of viewers.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.407 The nine turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen to the north-west of this viewpoint from a minimum of 13.45 km away with seven hubs visible, and will extend across around 2° of the view. The two leftmost turbines (T8 and T9) are seen as blade tips only. While the great majority of infrastructure will be screened by landform, part of one hardstanding is theoretically visible, although this will not be discernible at over 13 km away. Tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.
- 6.7.408 The magnitude of change on this view will be **medium-low**, for the following reasons.
- The Proposed Development will be seen in the north-western open aspect of the view, up Loch Shin, to which the eye of the viewer is drawn. It will also be seen in the direction of travel of westbound road-users.
 - The Proposed Development will introduce movement and contrasting colour and texture into the moorland context in which it is seen.
 - The Proposed Development will be seen in a relatively undeveloped aspect of the outlook, where it will contrast with the remote, upland characteristics.

- The relatively low elevation of the viewpoint in relation to the Proposed Development increases the perceived vertical impact of the closer turbines (T1 and T2), which have greater visibility of towers.

6.7.409 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a **medium-low** level are as follows:

- Screening of turbines (towers and blades) by landform reduces the overall visibility of the Proposed Development, and the two blades (T8 and T9) that are theoretically visible are unlikely to be seen in reality, as they are over 16 km from the viewpoint. The screening of the Proposed Development also reduces the vertical impact of the turbines other than T1 and T2.
- The Proposed Development will affect a very limited proportion (around 2%) of the open view from this viewpoint, so that the great majority of the view will remain unaffected.
- The Proposed Development is seen in the context of the large-scale and simple landform of the Loch Shin ridge of *rounded hills* LCT, which reduces the perceived scale of the turbines and avoids uncomfortable scale comparisons with the landscape setting. It is also relevant that in the middle-ground the ridge rises higher than the turbines, providing enclosure and containment which ensures that the Proposed Development does not appear to compete with the landform but is subservient to it.
- The Proposed Development will not be seen in the context of the eye-catching mountainous landform that provides focal points to the north-west, including Ben More Assynt, Beinn Leoid, and Meallan a' Chuail.
- The Proposed Development forms a very compact group of turbines that relates well to its landform setting and this, combined with the distance from the viewpoint, reduces its influence on the view.
- The Proposed Development will be seen by moving viewers.

Significance of the Effect

6.7.410 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **not significant**. This is due to a combination of the factors that lead to the medium-low magnitude of change on the view and the medium sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

6.7.411 As described in the baseline section above, there is theoretical visibility of the operational and consented wind farms at Lairg and Lairg 2. However, these wind farms are both largely screened by woodland and are unlikely to have notable visibility. It is also relevant that these sites lie to the south-east, and this viewpoint is included specifically to represent visibility of the Proposed Development that may be gained by westbound travellers on the A838. This means that westbound road-users will not gain visibility of Lairg or Lairg 2, irrespective of the woodland screening, as these wind farms lie behind their direction of travel. Achany has been discounted from the assessment due to its negligible visibility.

6.7.412 There is also theoretical visibility of the scoping sites at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission, 11.7 km and 10.5 km away respectively. While Lairg 2 Resubmission will also be largely screened by woodland, there is likely to be theoretical visibility of Garvary. Again, however, these two wind farms lie behind the westbound traveller, and will not be seen by people on the road who gain the view of the Proposed Development that is illustrated in this viewpoint.

6.7.413 The maximum cumulative magnitude of change on this viewpoint in any scenario will be **low**, due to the screening of visibility by woodland and the location of the cumulative wind farms in relation to

westbound travellers. The limited influence of the Proposed Development is also a factor in the low cumulative magnitude of change.

- 6.7.414 The cumulative effect at this viewpoint in any scenario will be **not significant** due to a combination of the factors that lead to the maximum low cumulative magnitude and the medium sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Viewpoint 7 - A838 Cnoc an Laoigh

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.415 This viewpoint is located on the A838, approximately 8.7 km to the north-west of the previous viewpoint. It has been included as it lies at a point where the road is relatively elevated and rounds a gentle bend before dropping down to the north-west with open views towards the site. This outlook of the Proposed Development will be gained by westbound travellers only.
- 6.7.416 This viewpoint lies within *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT and this landscape can be seen around the viewpoint although long views to the east and north-east are obscured by the slopes rising away from the lochside and the coniferous forestry that covers these slopes. Visibility of Loch Shin is also limited by the landform that lies between the loch and the road. A 132 kv transmission line runs through the *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT landscape to the north-east of the road.
- 6.7.417 The *rounded hills* LCT within which the site lies covers the foreground of the south, west and north-west aspects of the view, including the part of Loch Shin that is visible and the slope that rises on the southern side of the loch. This slope, with its simple, strong skyline, is the visible part of the *rounded hills* LCT ridge that separates Loch Shin and Glen Cassley, with the dome of Maovally at its northern end, just to the right of Ben More Assynt.
- 6.7.418 Rising above the *rounded hills* LCT skyline is the upper part of Ben More Assynt, with Beinn Uidhe to its right. Further to the right are Beinn Leoid and Meallan a' Chuail and finally Ben Hee. All of these mountains are in the *rugged mountain massif* LCT which wraps around the head of Loch Shin.
- 6.7.419 Operational, under construction and consented wind farms that were relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA include some visibility of Achany wind farm at a minimum of 13.4 km away to the south. The operational wind farm at Lairg also has theoretical visibility to the south-east of this viewpoint at a minimum distance of 18.9 km away, but this is negligible and has no discernible effect on the view. The adjacent consented Lairg 2 is also theoretically visible at 19.1 km away, but has very limited theoretical visibility with further screening by trees on the skyline, and is also unlikely to have any discernible effect on the view. It is relevant that these sites lie to the south and south-east, and this viewpoint is included specifically to represent visibility of the Proposed Development that may be gained by westbound travellers on the A838. This means that westbound road-users will not gain visibility of Achany, Lairg or Lairg 2 as these wind farms lie behind their direction of travel.
- 6.7.420 This view has a medium value. It is not a marked or formal viewpoint, the A838 is not identified as a tourist route, and it does not lie within a scenic designation. It does have scenic qualities and provides an outlook across to distinctive mountains (including part of the Assynt-Coigach NSA), although the influences along the A838 corridor – the road itself, transmission line, fencing and forestry – locally detract from these qualities. The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint will be medium as the view will be gained by road-users, and the A838 is not a recognised tourist route or cycle route.
- 6.7.421 This view has a **medium** sensitivity due to a combination of the medium value of the view and medium susceptibility of viewers.

Magnitude of Change

6.7.422 The nine turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen to the north-west of this viewpoint from a minimum of 6.40 km away with all hubs and turbine bases visible, and will extend across around 10° of the view. Elements of infrastructure will also be visible, including access tracks and hardstandings (as shown on the photomontage visualisations in Figure 6.21e and Figure 6.44). Tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.

6.7.423 The magnitude of change on this view will be **medium-high** for the following reasons.

- The Proposed Development will be seen in the north-western open aspect of the view, across Loch Shin, and in the context of Ben More Assynt, to which the eye of the viewer is drawn. It will also be seen in the direction of travel of westbound road-users. The backclothing of turbines by dark moorland can emphasise its presence due to the contrast arising.
- The Proposed Development will introduce movement and contrasting colour and texture into the moorland and mountain context in which it is seen.
- The Proposed Development will be seen in a relatively undeveloped aspect of the outlook, where it will contrast with the remote, upland characteristics.

6.7.424 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a **medium-high** level are as follows:

- The backclothing of the great majority of the Proposed Development by landform reduces the vertical impact and prominence of the turbines. Moreover, the turbines will not rise above the high point of Ben More Assynt, and this also reduces prominence.
- The relatively low elevation of the turbines also restricts their prominence and vertical impact, ensuring that they are subservient in relation to the mountainous skyline.
- The appearance of the turbines on the distinctive dark ridge of *rounded hills* LCT gives them a strong separation from Ben More Assynt, which is clearly a separate landform. This reduces the sense of encroachment towards and influence on Ben More Assynt, which remains as a distinct entity.
- The Proposed Development will affect a limited proportion (around 10°) of the large-scale, open view from this viewpoint, so that the great majority of the view will remain unaffected, including Beinn Leoid, Meallan a' Chuail and Ben Hee.
- The Proposed Development is clearly associated with the large-scale and simple landform of the Loch Shin ridge of *rounded hills* LCT, which reduces the perceived scale of the turbines and avoids uncomfortable scale comparisons with the landscape setting.
- The Proposed Development forms a balanced group of turbines with a strong, even composition that relates well to its landform setting and this reduces its influence on the view.
- The Proposed Development will be seen by moving viewers.

Significance of the Effect

6.7.425 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **significant**. This is due to a combination of the factors that lead to the medium-high magnitude of change on the view and the medium sensitivity of the viewpoint. A combination of a medium magnitude of change and a medium sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be significant largely because of the horizontal extent of the Proposed Development across the view, in the direction of travel for westbound road-users.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

- 6.7.426 As described in the baseline section above, there is theoretical visibility of the operational and consented wind farms at Achany, Lairg and Lairg 2. While Achany does have some limited and relatively distant visibility, Lairg and Lairg 2 have negligible or very limited visibility and will have no readily discernible effect on the view. It is also relevant that all of these sites lie to the south and south-east, and this viewpoint is included specifically to represent visibility of the Proposed Development that may be gained by westbound travellers on the A838. This means that westbound road-users will not gain visibility of the other wind farms, irrespective of their level of visibility, as these wind farms lie behind their direction of travel.
- 6.7.427 There is also theoretical visibility of the scoping sites at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission, 20.3 km and 19.1 km away respectively. Visibility of both of these sites is distant and very limited due to landform screening, and again these wind farms lie behind the westbound traveller, where they will not be seen by people on the road who gain this view of the Proposed Development.
- 6.7.428 The maximum cumulative magnitude of change on this viewpoint in any scenario will be **low**, due to the very limited visibility of cumulative wind farms, and the location of these wind farms in relation to westbound travellers.
- 6.7.429 The cumulative effect at this viewpoint in any scenario will be **not significant** due to a combination of the factors that lead to the maximum low cumulative magnitude and the medium sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Viewpoint 8 - A838 near Fiag

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.430 This viewpoint is located on the A838, approximately 5 km to the north-west of the previous viewpoint and opposite the eastern end of the site. Unlike the previous viewpoint, this location is adjacent to Loch Shin and thus gains views towards the site directly across the loch. This outlook of the Proposed Development will be gained primarily by westbound travellers but may be seen obliquely by eastbound road-users.
- 6.7.431 While this viewpoint lies within *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT very little of this landscape can be seen due to foreshortening by landform and screening by forestry, and the most prevalent landscape around the view is the *rounded hills* LCT that extends along the full southern side of Loch Shin, with its long, simple skyline. Loch Shin itself is a key component in the view.
- 6.7.432 The key focal point mountains in this view are Beinn Leoid and Meallan a' Chuail, which are seen in the direct line of travel of westbound road-users with some foreground vegetation screening. The upper part of Ben More Assynt can also be seen, rising above the *rounded hills* LCT skyline.
- 6.7.433 Operational, under construction and consented wind farms that were relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA include theoretical visibility of the operational wind farm at Lairg to the south-east of this viewpoint at a minimum distance of 23.3 km away, but this is screened by woodland and has no discernible effect on the view. The adjacent consented Lairg 2 is also theoretically visible at 23.5 km away, but is partially screened by woodland and is unlikely to have a clearly discernible effect on the view. It is relevant that these sites lie to the south-east, and this viewpoint is included primarily to represent visibility of the Proposed Development that may be gained by westbound travellers on the A838, although an oblique view of the Proposed Development may be gained by eastbound travellers. Westbound road-users will therefore not gain visibility of Lairg or Lairg 2, irrespective of woodland screening, as these wind farms lie behind their direction of travel.
- 6.7.434 This view has a medium value. It is not a marked or formal viewpoint, the A838 is not identified as a tourist route, and it does not lie within a scenic designation. It does, however, have scenic qualities

and provides an outlook towards a focal point of distinctive mountains (including part of the Assynt-Coigach NSA). The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint will be medium as the view will be gained by road-users, and the A838 is not a recognised tourist route or cycle route.

6.7.435 This view has a **medium** sensitivity due to a combination of the medium value of the view and medium susceptibility of viewers.

Magnitude of Change

6.7.436 The nine turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen at full height to the south-west of this viewpoint from a minimum of 2.21 km away, and will extend across around 50° of the view. Elements of infrastructure will also be visible, including upgraded and new access tracks and hardstandings (as shown on the photomontage visualisations in Figure 6.22f and Figure 6.45). The substation compound is also theoretically visible from around 6 km away on the shore of Loch Shin, to the right of the existing hydro power station. This lies outwith the field of view covered in the photomontages although the existing hydro power station can be seen on the lochside in the baseline photograph on Figure 6.22d. Tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.

6.7.437 The magnitude of change on this view will be **high**, for the following reasons.

- The Proposed Development has a high level of visibility at close proximity in an aspect of the view that is currently unaffected by wind farm development, and will affect a notable proportion of the open aspect gained by westbound travellers.
- The relatively low elevation of the viewpoint in relation to the Proposed Development increases the perceived vertical impact and prominence of the turbines on the skyline (although this is limited by the partial backclothing of the turbines by landform).
- The Proposed Development will be seen across water, and this can reduce the perceived distance of the viewpoint from the turbines as there are fewer 'layers' of landscape between the viewpoint and the turbines.
- The Proposed Development will introduce movement and contrasting colour and texture into the moorland backdrop against which it is seen.
- The turbines are seen partly backclothed by landform and partly on the skyline, which can be eye-catching.
- Visibility of infrastructure will increase the overall visibility and influence of the Proposed Development.

6.7.438 There are factors that mitigate the effect of the Proposed Development to some extent, although these are not sufficient to reduce the level of magnitude of change.

- The Proposed Development is seen in the context of a relatively unremarkable, large-scale and simple landform both in the site area and in relation to the skyline backdrop, and this reduces the perceived scale of the turbines and avoids uncomfortable scale comparisons with the landscape setting.
- While the presence of Loch Shin can reduce the perceived distance between the Proposed Development and the viewpoint, as described above, it does also provide a separation from the viewpoint, so that the turbines do not appear to be encroaching towards the viewpoint.
- The Proposed Development forms a balanced group of turbines with a strong, even composition that relates well to its landform setting and this reduces its influence on the view.
- The Proposed Development will be seen by moving viewers.

Significance of the Effect

- 6.7.439 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **significant**. This is due to a combination of the factors that lead to the high magnitude of change on the view and the medium sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

- 6.7.440 As described in the baseline section above, there is theoretical visibility of the operational and consented wind farms at Lairg and Lairg 2, but due to a combination of distance and woodland screening these sites will have no readily discernible effect on the view. It is also relevant that these sites lie to the south-east, and this viewpoint is included primarily to represent visibility of the Proposed Development that may be gained by westbound travellers on the A838 although oblique view of the Proposed Development may be gained by eastbound travellers. Westbound road-users will not gain visibility of the other wind farms as these wind farms lie behind their direction of travel, while eastbound travellers may gain some very limited and distant visibility of the cumulative wind farms and oblique visibility of the Proposed Development.
- 6.7.441 There is also theoretical visibility of the scoping sites at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission, 2.45 km and 23.5 km away respectively. Visibility of both of these sites is distant and partly screened by woodland, and again these wind farms lie behind the westbound traveller.
- 6.7.442 There are therefore three potential cumulative scenarios to which the Proposed Development may be added: operational/under-construction wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms; and operational/under-construction plus consented and scoping wind farms.
- 6.7.443 In the operational/under-construction cumulative scenario, the addition of the Proposed Development to Lairg will have a **negligible** cumulative magnitude of change due to the lack of visibility of Lairg wind farm.
- 6.7.444 In the operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms cumulative scenario, with Lairg 2 also considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development will increase to a **low** level. This increase arises from visibility of the Proposed Development to the west while Lairg 2 is to the south-east, and thus leads to a wind farm being theoretically visible at each end of Loch Shin. The larger turbine size of Lairg 2 will also increase its level of visibility. The change is limited to a low level by the relatively distant and limited actual visibility of Lairg 2, and the small number of wind farms that may contribute to the cumulative effect (effectively Lairg 2 and the Proposed Development). The cumulative magnitude of change is also limited by for westbound travellers by the location of the cumulative wind farms behind the direction of travel, and for eastbound travellers by the oblique view of the Proposed Development.
- 6.7.445 In the operational/under-construction plus consented and scoping wind farms cumulative scenario, the scoping wind farms at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are also considered. These sites are given less weight than application-stage wind farms as there is no certainty as to the cut-off date that they will be submitted as applications. The additional consideration of Lairg 2 Resubmission would not lead to any notable increase in the **low** cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development in the previous scenario due to the minor increase in the visibility of turbines over that of the consented Lairg 2 turbines. While Garvary would add a further wind farm to the scenario to which the Proposed Development would be added, visibility of this wind farm is limited and grouped together with Lairg 2, and the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development would increase slightly but remain **low**.
- 6.7.446 The cumulative effect at this viewpoint in any scenario will be **not significant** due to the factors that lead to the maximum low cumulative magnitude and the medium sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Viewpoint 9 - A838 west of Overscaig

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.447 This viewpoint is located on the A838, approximately 500 m to the north-west of the Overscaig House Hotel. Shortly to the east of this point, the road drops slightly and views are screened and filtered by vegetation, houses, fences and other elements, so that visibility of the Proposed Development is more intermittent and filtered. This location is therefore considered to represent the more open outlook that may be gained from houses and the hotel as well as by eastbound road-users. Westbound road-users may gain oblique views of the Proposed Development.
- 6.7.448 This viewpoint lies within *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT and some of this landscape can be seen to the north, east and north-west of the viewpoint although long views are obscured by the slopes rising away from the lochside and the coniferous forestry that covers these slopes. Transmission lines, including a 132 kv line, run through the *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT landscape to the north of the road.
- 6.7.449 The *rounded hills* LCT within which the site lies covers the foreground of the south, west and south-east aspects of the view, including Loch Shin and the slope that rises on the southern side of the loch. This slope, with its simple, strong skyline, is the visible part of the *rounded hills* LCT ridge that separates Loch Shin and Glen Cassley, with the distinctive dome of Maovally at its northern end, towards the right side of the view.
- 6.7.450 The hydro-electric infrastructure of Cassley and Duchally Power Stations can be clearly seen on the slopes of Maovally, including Cassley Hydro-Power Station itself (on the lochside), the telecoms mast, transmission lines, access tracks, areas of disturbed ground and fencing.
- 6.7.451 Rising above the northern shoulder of Maovally is the top of Ben More Assynt, with Beinn an Fhurain and then Beinn Uidhe to its right. Further to the right are Beinn Leoid and the distinctive dome-shaped Meallan a' Chuail. All of these mountains are in the *rugged mountain massif* LCT which wraps around the head of Loch Shin.
- 6.7.452 Operational, under construction and consented wind farms that were relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA include theoretical visibility of the operational Lairg wind farm to the south-east of this viewpoint at a minimum distance of 27.7 km away, and the adjacent consented Lairg 2 which is also theoretically visible at 27.9 km away with some screening by landform.
- 6.7.453 This view has a medium value. It is not a marked or formal viewpoint, the A838 is not identified as a tourist route, and it does not lie within a scenic designation. It does have scenic qualities and provides an outlook across and up Loch Shin to distinctive mountains, although the influences seen on the southern side of Loch Shin and along the A838 corridor – the road itself, transmission lines, fencing and forestry – locally detract from these qualities.
- 6.7.454 The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint will be high due to its representation of the view that may be gained by nearby residents in Overscaig (see Appendix 6.2 for the Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA), which assesses effects on individual properties). In this instance, the combination of the high susceptibility to change of the view and its medium value results in a **high** sensitivity for this viewpoint due to the residential nature of some viewers.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.455 The nine turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen at full height to the south of this viewpoint from a minimum of 2.75 km away, and will extend across around 52° of the view. Elements of infrastructure will also be visible, including upgraded and new access tracks and hardstandings (as shown on the photomontage visualisations in Figure 6.23e and Figure 6.46). The substation compound is also theoretically visible from around 1.75 km away on the shore of Loch Shin, to the

right of the existing hydro power station. This lies outwith the field of view covered in the photomontages although the existing hydro power station can be seen on the lochside in the baseline photograph on Figure 6.23c . Tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.

6.7.456 The magnitude of change on this view will be **high**, for the following reasons.

- The Proposed Development has a high level of visibility at close proximity in an aspect of the view that is currently unaffected by wind farm development, and will affect a notable proportion of the open aspect gained by residents and eastbound travellers.
- The relatively low elevation of the viewpoint in relation to the Proposed Development increases the perceived vertical impact and prominence of the turbines on the skyline (although this is limited by the partial backclothing of the turbines by landform).
- The Proposed Development will be seen across water, and this can reduce the perceived distance of the viewpoint from the turbines as there are fewer 'layers' of landscape between the viewpoint and the turbines.
- The Proposed Development will introduce movement and contrasting colour and texture into the moorland backdrop against which it is seen.
- From some houses, the Proposed Development will be seen in the main orientation of open views.
- The turbines are seen partly backclothed by landform and partly on the skyline, which can be eye-catching.
- Visibility of infrastructure will increase the overall visibility and influence of the Proposed Development.

6.7.457 There are factors that mitigate the effect of the Proposed Development to some extent, although these are not sufficient to reduce the level of magnitude of change.

- The Proposed Development is seen in the context of the unremarkable, large-scale and simple landform of the *rounded hills* LCT ridge, both in the site area and the backdrop skyline, and this reduces the perceived scale of the turbines as well avoiding uncomfortable scale comparisons with the landscape setting. Views towards the focal point mountains seen to the west will not be affected.
- While the presence of Loch Shin can reduce the perceived distance between the Proposed Development and the viewpoint, as described above, it does also provide a separation from the viewpoint, so that the turbines do not appear to be encroaching towards the viewpoint.
- The Proposed Development forms a balanced group of turbines with a strong, even composition that relates well to its landform setting and this reduces its influence on the view.

Significance of the Effect

6.7.458 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **significant**. This is due to a combination of the factors that lead to the high magnitude of change on the view and the high sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

6.7.459 Visibility of operational, under-construction and consented wind farms is described in the baseline section above. There is also theoretical visibility of the scoping sites at Garvary and Lairg 2

Resubmission, 28.8 km and 27.9 km away respectively. Visibility of both of these sites is distant and partly screened by landform (particularly Garvary).

- 6.7.460 There are therefore three potential cumulative scenarios to which the Proposed Development may be added: operational/under-construction wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms; and operational/under-construction plus consented and scoping wind farms.
- 6.7.461 In the operational/under-construction cumulative scenario, the addition of the Proposed Development to Lairg will have a **low-negligible** cumulative magnitude of change due to the distant visibility of Lairg, its restricted turbine size, and, when considered in relation to residents, its peripheral location in relation to the main orientation of houses in Overscaig.
- 6.7.462 In the operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms cumulative scenario, with Lairg 2 also considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development will increase to a **low** level. This increase arises from the addition of further turbines to the cumulative scenario and the larger turbine size of Lairg 2. The change is limited to a low level by the relatively distant and limited actual visibility of Lairg 2; the grouping of Lairg and Lairg 2; the containment of wind energy development (including the Proposed Development) within a 90° aspect of the view, so that scenic views to the west and south-west remain unaffected; and the small number of wind farms that may contribute to the cumulative effect (Lairg, Lairg 2 and the Proposed Development).
- 6.7.463 In the operational/under-construction plus consented and scoping wind farms cumulative scenario, the scoping wind farms at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are also considered. These sites are given less weight than application-stage wind farms as there is no certainty as to the cut-off date that they will be submitted as applications. The additional consideration of Lairg 2 Resubmission would not lead to any notable increase in the **low** cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development in the previous scenario due to the minor increase in the visibility of turbines over that of the consented Lairg 2 turbines. While Garvary would add a further wind farm to the scenario to which the Proposed Development would be added, visibility of this wind farm is limited and grouped together with Lairg and Lairg 2, and the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development would increase slightly but remain **low**.
- 6.7.464 The cumulative effect at this viewpoint in any scenario will be **not significant** due to the factors that lead to the maximum low cumulative magnitude despite the high sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Viewpoint 10 - A838 Loch a' Ghriama

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.465 This viewpoint is located on the A838 adjacent to Loch a' Ghriama, approximately 4 km to the north-west of the previous viewpoint. This location is included as it marks the start of a stretch of more consistent theoretical visibility (although in places, as seen at this viewpoint, it is still limited in terms of turbine numbers) for eastbound travellers on the road, and travelling eastwards up to this point, theoretical visibility is very intermittent. Westbound road-users will not gain this view.
- 6.7.466 This viewpoint lies on the cusp of the *rugged mountain massif* (to the west) and *rounded hills* (to the east) LCTs. The majority of the setting in the outlook towards the site – other than Loch a' Ghriama, which is within *rugged mountain massif* LCT - is covered by *rounded hills* (within which the site lies) and the distinctive simple, bold skyline of this LCT is clearly apparent, with its northern extent marked by the rounded shape of Maovally.
- 6.7.467 The hydro-electric infrastructure of Cassley and Duchally Power Stations can be seen on the slopes of Maovally, including the telecoms mast, transmission lines, access tracks, areas of disturbed ground and fencing. Transmission lines can also be seen running along the eastern side of the road.

- 6.7.468 Ben More Assynt is seen across Loch Merkland, south-west of the road and outwith the aspect of the view that focusses on the site.
- 6.7.469 There was no visibility of relevant operational, under construction or consented wind farms from this viewpoint at the time of the April 2021 LVIA.
- 6.7.470 This view has a medium value. It is not a marked or formal viewpoint, the A838 is not identified as a tourist route, and it does not lie within a scenic designation. It does, however, have scenic qualities and the focal point of Ben More Assynt can be seen peripherally across Loch a' Ghriama. The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint will be medium as the view will be gained by road-users, and the A838 is not a recognised tourist route or cycle route.
- 6.7.471 This view has a **medium** sensitivity due to a combination of the medium value of the view and medium susceptibility of viewers.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.472 Three of the turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen to the south-east of this viewpoint from a minimum of 6.04 km away with three hubs and two turbine bases visible, and will extend across around 8° of the view. In this specific view, visibility of the leftmost turbine, of which the tower is completely screened, is filtered by the timber poles of a transmission line. This turbine is, however, likely to be partially seen in nearby views and so has been taken into consideration in the assessment. Elements of infrastructure will also be visible, including upgraded and new access tracks and hardstandings (as shown on the photomontage visualisations in Figure 6.24f and Figure 6.47). Tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.
- 6.7.473 The magnitude of change on this view will be **medium**, for the following reasons.
- The Proposed Development will be seen at moderate proximity in the direct line of view gained by eastbound travellers. This aspect of the view is gently channelled by the landform that rises on either side of Loch Shin, which also draws the eye of the viewer.
 - The Proposed Development will introduce movement and contrasting colour and texture into the moorland context in which it is seen. The turbines are also seen partly backclothed by landform and partly on the skyline, which can be eye-catching.
 - The juxtaposition of the turbines with the transmission line that runs to the east of the road can cause visual confusion as they will add additional vertical elements to the view.
- 6.7.474 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a **medium** level are as follows:
- The screening of six turbines by landform reduces the overall visibility and horizontal extent of the Proposed Development, so that the great majority of the view will remain unaffected, including the focal point landform of Ben More Assynt and the scenic view across the loch.
 - The Proposed Development is seen in the context of the large-scale and simple landform of the Loch Shin ridge of *rounded hills* LCT, which reduces the perceived scale of the turbines and avoids uncomfortable scale comparisons with the landscape setting. It is also relevant that the landform on either side of the loch rises higher than the turbines, again reducing the perceived scale of the turbines and also providing containment which ensures that the Proposed Development does not appear to compete with the landform but is subservient to it.
 - The part of the view in which the Proposed Development will be seen is affected by visibility of the transmission line and coniferous forestry, and it therefore lacks the most remote, undeveloped characteristics with which the Proposed Development would have the greatest contrast.

- The Proposed Development will be seen by moving viewers.

Significance of the Effect

- 6.7.475 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **significant**. This is due to a combination of the factors that lead to the medium magnitude of change on the view and the medium sensitivity of the viewpoint. A combination of a medium magnitude of change and a medium sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be significant largely because of the location of the Proposed Development in the direction of travel for eastbound road-users.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

- 6.7.476 There is no visibility of operational, under construction, consented, application stage of scoping wind farms from this viewpoint, and the Proposed Development will therefore not give rise or contribute to any cumulative effects.

Viewpoint 11 - A838 near West Merkland

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.477 This viewpoint is located on the A838 adjacent to Loch Merkland and has been included as it represents the westernmost stretch of theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development as shown on the ZTV. This stretch of visibility is less than 1.8 km long and the ZTV shows that visibility is limited to a maximum of two turbines, much of it blade only. This view will be gained only by eastbound road-users.
- 6.7.478 This viewpoint is an unusual low-level location within *rugged mountain massif* LCT that gains visibility of the Proposed Development, as the majority of visibility from this LCT is gained from more elevated areas (including Viewpoints 2, 3, 11, 12 and 22). The viewpoint is, however, surrounded by more elevated landform that characterises the *rugged mountain massif* and *rounded hills* LCTs that form the context; towards the right of the view is the abrupt landform of Creag na Suibheag (*rugged mountain massif*) while towards the left, screening the majority of the Proposed Development, is Cnoc a' Ghriama (*rounded hills*). The ruins at Garvault can be seen on the western shore of Loch Merkland.
- 6.7.479 There is no visibility of operational, under construction or consented wind farms from this viewpoint.
- 6.7.480 This view has a medium value. It is not a marked or formal viewpoint, the A838 is not identified as a tourist route, and it does not lie within a scenic designation. It does, however, have scenic qualities in its view along the loch, although these are affected to some degree by the transmission line that runs along the eastern side of the road. The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint will be medium as the view will be gained by road-users, and the A838 is not a recognised tourist route or cycle route.
- 6.7.481 This view has a **medium** sensitivity due to a combination of the medium value of the view and medium susceptibility of viewers.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.482 Three of the turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen to the south-east of this viewpoint from a minimum of 11.89 km away with one hub and two blade tip extremities visible, and will theoretically extend across less than 5° of the view. The two blade tips are, however, unlikely to be readily discernible when seen from over 11 km away and, in reality, visibility is likely to be limited to one hub. Infrastructure is screened by landform, although tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.
- 6.7.483 The magnitude of change on this view will be **low**, for the following reasons.

- The Proposed Development will be seen in the line of view gained by eastbound travellers. This aspect of the view is channelled by the landform that rises on either side of Loch Shin, which also draws the eye of the viewer.
- The Proposed Development will introduce movement and contrasting colour and texture into the moorland context in which it is seen. The most visible turbine is also seen partly backclothed by landform and partly on the skyline, which can be eye-catching.

6.7.484 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a **low** level are as follows:

- The screening of the great majority of the turbines by landform considerably reduces the overall visibility and horizontal extent of the Proposed Development, so that the great majority of the view will remain unaffected, including the rugged mountain landform around the viewpoint and the scenic view across the loch.
- The Proposed Development is seen in the context of massive-scale and simple landform, which reduces the perceived scale of the turbines and avoids uncomfortable scale comparisons with the landscape setting. It is also relevant that the landform on either side of the Proposed Development rises higher than the turbines, again reducing the perceived scale of the turbines and also providing containment which ensures that the Proposed Development does not appear to compete with the landform but is subservient to it.
- The distance from the viewpoint reduces the influence of the Proposed Development on the view.
- The Proposed Development will be seen by moving viewers.

Significance of the Effect

6.7.485 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **not significant**. This is due to a combination of the factors that lead to the low magnitude of change on the view and the medium sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

6.7.486 There is no visibility of operational, under construction, consented, application stage of scoping wind farms from this viewpoint, and the Proposed Development will therefore not give rise or contribute to any cumulative effects.

Viewpoint 12 - Ben Hee

Baseline and Sensitivity

6.7.487 This viewpoint is located at the summit of Ben Hee, 873 m AOD, from where a panoramic view is gained across extensive areas of north-western Scotland, including Ben More Assynt, Ben Klibreck, Ben Hope and Ben Loyal. The viewpoint is located on the eastern edge of the same extensive area of *rugged mountain massif* LCT within which Ben More Assynt lies, and this type dominates the view to the north, west and south-west. In contrast, areas to the north-east and south-east are covered by the low-lying expanses of *sweeping moorland and flows* and *strath* LCTs, including Cnoc an Alaskie (Viewpoint 13). To the south is the area of *rounded hills* LCT that encloses the southern side of Loch Shin, while to the east is the band of *rounded hills* LCT (Loch Fiag unit) that links the *rugged mountain massif* LCT to the *lone mountains* LCT of Ben Klibreck.

6.7.488 At the time of the April 2021 LVIA there were several operational and under-construction wind farms theoretically visible to the south and south-east of this viewpoint, of which Achany, Rosehall and Creag Riabhach wind farms are seen from within their own study areas, with the other sites lying beyond a distance at which they could contribute to a significant effect. Achany and Rosehall are seen

close to the edge of their study areas, at 28.8 km and 29.4 km away respectively, with Creag Riabhach 10.5 km away, all to the south-east. Two consented wind farms are also theoretically visible from within their study areas; Lairg II and Braemore, 35.4 km and 33.5 km away respectively to the south-east.

- 6.7.489 This view has a medium-high value. It is a hillwalking location within the Foinaven-Ben Hee WLA (although it should be noted that the WLA is not a scenic designation) and has value in its notable scenic qualities, particularly in the outlook over the Assynt-Coigach NSA and the Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA. The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint is high as people who gain the view will be walkers who are engaging in outdoor recreation and are likely to have a specific focus on the scenery and surrounding landscape.
- 6.7.490 The combination of the high susceptibility to change of the view and its medium-high value results in a **high** sensitivity for this viewpoint.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.491 The nine turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen to the south of this viewpoint from a minimum of 13.24 km away with all hubs visible, and will extend across around 14° of the view. Hardstandings, sections of access tracks and a very small part of the substation compound are theoretically visible but will have a limited effect on the view when seen from over 10 km away (the closest infrastructure with theoretical visibility is a section of upgraded access track, seen from around 10.4 km away). Tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.
- 6.7.492 The magnitude of change on this view will be **medium-low**, for the following reasons.
- The full extent of the Proposed Development will be seen at moderate proximity, introducing movement and contrasting colour and texture into the moorland backdrop against which it is seen.
 - The Proposed Development is seen at its full extent in this view, and thus affects a relatively wide horizontal field of view in relation to its distance from the viewpoint.
 - The Proposed Development will be seen by static viewers.
- 6.7.493 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a **medium-low** level are as follows:
- The Proposed Development is seen in the context of the large-scale and simple landform of the Loch Shin ridge of *rounded hills* LCT, which reduces the perceived scale of the turbines and avoids uncomfortable scale comparisons with the landscape setting.
 - The backclothing by landform and low elevation of the Proposed Development in relation to the viewpoint and the wider setting notably reduces its vertical impact and prominence.
 - The Proposed Development will be seen in a relatively unremarkable aspect of the view and will not affect the dramatic, remote mountainous landscape (which includes a number of key focal point mountains) that lies to the north and west of the viewpoint. It will therefore not affect the spectacular views gained to the north and west, where the special qualities of NSAs and wildness qualities of WLAs are most apparent.
 - Whilst it is seen at its widest extent, the Proposed Development will affect a limited proportion (around 14°) of the panoramic view that is available from this viewpoint, so that the great majority of the view will remain unaffected.

- The Proposed Development has a well-balanced, regular and even composition that relates well to its landform setting and this, combined with the distance from the viewpoint, reduces its influence on the view.

Significance of the Effect

6.7.494 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **significant**. This is due to the factors that lead to the medium-low magnitude of change on the view and the high sensitivity of the viewpoint. In this case, the effect is judged to be significant primarily because of the horizontal extent of the Proposed Development across the view and the static nature of viewers.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

6.7.495 Visibility of operational, under-construction and consented wind farms is described in the baseline description above. There is theoretical visibility of the application-stage wind farms at Strath Tirry and Meall Buidhe, 24.4 km and 37.3 km away respectively to the south-east. South Kilbraur is shown in the wirelines but is seen from outwith its study area. The scoping sites at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are also theoretically visible at 36.6 km and 35.4 km away respectively to the south-east.

6.7.496 There are therefore four potential cumulative scenarios to which the Proposed Development may be added: operational/under-construction wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented and application-stage wind farms; and operational/under-construction plus consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms.

6.7.497 All of the cumulative wind farms, including application and scoping sites, lie to the south-east of the viewpoint and are contained within less than 70° of the view, and when the Proposed Development is also considered, all relevant wind farms are contained within 80° of the view.

6.7.498 In the operational/under-construction cumulative scenario, the addition of the Proposed Development to operational and under-construction wind farms at Achany, Rosehall and Creag Riabhach will have a will have a **low** cumulative magnitude of change. This arises from the addition of the Proposed Development to a scenario that includes two groups of development – Achany/Rosehall and Creag Riabhach, of which Creag Riabhach is closer and more visible - and is limited to this level by the distant visibility of the operational wind farms and their relatively restricted turbine size; the small proportion of the view that will be occupied by them; the similar landscape setting of all of the sites within or partly within *rounded hills* LCT; and the containment of the Proposed Development and cumulative wind farms within an 80° aspect of the view. This last point ensures that the great majority of the view remains without wind farm influence, including the dramatic and eye-catching mountainous NSA landscape that lies to the north and west of the viewpoint. The relatively low elevation of the cumulative wind farms in relation to the viewpoint is also important, as this precludes any prominent visibility on the skyline and reduces vertical impact, ensuring that the turbines form a subservient component in the view.

6.7.499 In the operational/under-construction plus consented-stage wind farms cumulative scenario, with Braemore and Lairg 2 also considered, the cumulative magnitude of change will increase to a **medium-low** level due to additional wind farm visibility, the addition of a further group of development at Lairg 2, and the larger scale of the Lairg 2 turbines. The cumulative magnitude of change is limited to a medium-low level by the distant visibility of both sites and their grouping together in the same aspect of the view between Creag Riabhach and Achany/Rosehall.

6.7.500 In the operational/under-construction plus consented and application-stage wind farms scenario, the application stage wind farms at Meall Buidhe and Strath Tirry are also considered. The additional consideration of either or both of these sites would not lead to any notable increase in the **medium-**

low cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development due to the distant visibility of both wind farms, and their location within the south-eastern aspect of the view that is affected by baseline cumulative wind farms, ensuring that the great majority of the view will continue to remain unaffected.

- 6.7.501 In the operational/under-construction plus consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms cumulative scenario, the scoping wind farms at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are also considered. These sites are given less weight than application-stage wind farms as there is no certainty as to the cut-off date that they will be submitted as applications. The additional consideration of Lairg 2 Resubmission would not lead to any notable increase in the **medium-low** cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development due to the minor increase in the visibility of turbines over that of the consented Lairg 2 turbines. Garvary would add a further wind farm to the scenario to which the Proposed Development would be added, but would be seen in conjunction with Lairg 2 and would not increase wind farm influence any further around the view. Therefore, when Garvary and/or Lairg 2 Resubmission are considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development may increase slightly but would not increase over a **medium-low** level.
- 6.7.502 The cumulative effect at this viewpoint in any scenario will be **not significant** due to the factors that lead to the maximum medium-low cumulative magnitude despite the high sensitivity of the viewpoint.
- 6.7.503 A combination of a medium-low cumulative magnitude of change and a high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be not significant for a number of reasons, including the relatively distant visibility of all cumulative wind farms and their grouping together (along with the Proposed Development) within a maximum 80° aspect of the view; the resultant retention of the great majority of the view without wind farm influence, including the dramatic mountainous NSA landscape that lies to the north and west; and the low elevation of the cumulative wind farms and the Proposed Development in relation to the viewpoint, which precludes prominent visibility and reduces vertical impact, ensuring that the turbines form a subservient component in the view.

Viewpoint 13 - Cnoc an Alaskie

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.504 This viewpoint is located near the trig point on Cnoc an Alaskie (312 m AOD) and has been included as it represents a low-level view from within the Foinaven-Ben Hee WLA. It is also within the less-accessible (i.e. not by vehicle) interior of the Crask/Overscaig unit of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT that covers the vast, open and low-lying area between Loch Shin and Strath Tirry. The nature of this landscape is apparent at the viewpoint, where the surrounding vast expanse of moorland leads to a sense of remoteness and exposure. The *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT is surrounded by *rounded hills* LCT and, further away, *rugged mountain massif* LCT, that emphasise the scale and extent of this low-lying basin of landform.
- 6.7.505 The trig point on Cnoc an Alaskie itself is not accessed by a path. There is, however, a vehicular track, parking area, interpretation board and signposted walking route that leads from the A836 to Loch Gaimeamhach. The footpath extends nearly as far as a hydro-electric diversion canal that was built in the 1950s to feed into the Loch Shin hydro scheme, from where Cnoc an Alaskie is reached by walking across rough ground.
- 6.7.506 Ben More Assynt is a focal point to the south-west while Ben Hee rises on the skyline to the north-west and Ben Klibreck is the focal point of the outlook to the north-east.

- 6.7.507 Operational, under construction and consented wind farms that were relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA include Achany, Lairg, Rosehall and Creag Riabhach, theoretically visible from this viewpoint at 20.9 km, 25.5 km, 21.7 km and 2.5 km away respectively. There is also theoretical visibility of consented wind farms at Braemore and Lairg 2 at a minimum of 24.9 km and 25.9 km away respectively, although Braemore has very limited and distant visibility. All of these operational and consented wind farms lie to the south/south-east of the viewpoint other than Creag Riabhach, which is to the east.
- 6.7.508 This view has a medium value. It is not a marked or recognised viewpoint, facilities are not provided for the enjoyment of the view, and it is not within a scenic designation. It is, however, within the Foinaven-Ben Hee WLA (although it should be noted that the WLA is not a scenic designation) and overlooks the Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA. The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint is high as people who gain the view will be walkers who are engaging in outdoor recreation and are likely to have a specific focus on the scenery and surrounding landscape.
- 6.7.509 The combination of the high susceptibility to change of the view and its medium value results in a **medium-high** sensitivity for this viewpoint.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.510 The nine turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen to the south-west of this viewpoint from a minimum of 9.59 km away with all hubs visible and will extend across around 20° of the view. Elements of infrastructure will also be theoretically visible, including upgraded and new access tracks and hardstandings (as shown on the photomontage visualisations in Figure 6.27g and Figure 6.50). Tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.
- 6.7.511 The magnitude of change on this view will be **medium** for the following reasons.
- The full extent of the Proposed Development will be seen at moderate proximity, introducing movement and contrasting colour and texture into the moorland backdrop against which it is seen.
 - The Proposed Development is seen at its full extent in this view, and thus affects a relatively wide horizontal field of view in relation to its distance from the viewpoint.
 - The Proposed Development will be added to the south-western aspect of a view that has the close-proximity influence of Creag Riabhach to the north-east, and wind energy development will therefore be seen in either direction from the viewpoint.
 - The turbines are seen partly backclothed by landform and partly on the skyline, which can be eye-catching.
 - The Proposed Development will be seen by static viewers.
- 6.7.512 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a **medium** level are as follows:
- The Proposed Development is seen in the context of the large-scale and simple landform and skyline of the Loch Shin ridge of *rounded hills*, which reduces the perceived scale of the turbines and avoids uncomfortable scale comparisons with the landscape setting.
 - The partial backclothing by landform and the similar elevation of the Proposed to the viewpoint notably reduce its vertical impact and prominence.
 - The Proposed Development will be seen in a relatively unremarkable aspect of the view and will not affect views towards the dramatic focal point mountains that are seen around the viewpoint.

- Whilst it is seen at its widest extent, the Proposed Development will affect a limited proportion (around 20°) of the panoramic view that is available from this viewpoint, so that the great majority of the view will remain unaffected.
- The Proposed Development has a well-balanced, regular and even composition that relates well to its landform setting and this, combined with the distance from the viewpoint, reduces its influence on the view.

Significance of the Effect

- 6.7.513 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **significant**. This is due to a combination of the factors that lead to the medium magnitude of change on the view and the medium-high sensitivity of the viewpoint. A combination of a medium magnitude of change and a medium-high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be significant primarily because of the horizontal extent of the Proposed Development across the view and its addition to an outlook that includes the close-proximity visibility of the under-construction wind farm at Creag Riabhach in the opposite direction. The static nature of viewers is also relevant.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

- 6.7.514 Visibility of operational and consented wind farms is described in the baseline description above. There is theoretical visibility of the application-stage wind farms at Strath Tirry and South Kilbraur, 14.6 km and 35 km respectively to the south-east, and Meall Buidhe, 30.5 km to the south. Visibility of South Kilbraur is very limited and distant, and this site has been discounted from the assessment. The scoping sites at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are also theoretically visible, 27.2 km and 25.9 km away respectively to the south-east.
- 6.7.515 There are therefore four potential cumulative scenarios to which the Proposed Development may be added: operational/under-construction wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented and application-stage wind farms; and operational/under-construction plus consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms.
- 6.7.516 With the exception of Creag Riabhach, all of the cumulative wind farms, including application and scoping sites, lie to the south-east of the viewpoint and are contained within less than 65° of the view.
- 6.7.517 In the operational/under-construction cumulative scenario, the addition of the Proposed Development to operational and under-construction wind farms at Achany, Lairg, Rosehall and Creag Riabhach will have a **medium-low** cumulative magnitude of change. This arises primarily from the addition of the Proposed Development (which itself has a significant effect) into a part of the 360° outlook that is not otherwise affected by wind farm development, so that it will extend development around the view, and most specifically its addition to Creag Riabhach, which results in visibility of apparent development on either side of the viewpoint. The more distant development at Lairg and Achany/Rosehall makes a more limited contribution, but does provide other baseline development, in a different direction, to which the Proposed Development will be added.
- 6.7.518 In the operational/under-construction plus consented-stage wind farms cumulative scenario, with Braemore and Lairg 2 also considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development will increase to a **medium** level due to additional wind farm visibility, the addition of a further group of development at Lairg 2, and the larger scale of the Lairg 2 turbines. Braemore will have a very limited influence on the view and is not instrumental in this increase in the cumulative magnitude of change.
- 6.7.519 In the operational/under-construction plus consented and application-stage wind farms scenario, the application stage wind farms at Meall Buidhe and Strath Tirry are also considered. The additional consideration of either or both of these sites would not lead to any notable increase in the **medium**

cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development due to the distant visibility of both wind farms.

- 6.7.520 In the operational/under-construction plus consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms cumulative scenario, the scoping wind farms at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are also considered. These sites are given less weight than application-stage wind farms as there is no certainty as to the cut-off date that they will be submitted as applications. The additional consideration of Lairg 2 Resubmission would not lead to any notable increase in the **medium** cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development due to the minor increase in the visibility of turbines over that of the consented Lairg 2 turbines. Garvary would add a further wind farm to the scenario to which the Proposed Development would be added, but would be seen in conjunction with Lairg 2 and would not increase wind farm influence any further around the view. Therefore, when Garvary and/or Lairg 2 Resubmission are considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development may increase slightly but would not increase over a **medium** level.
- 6.7.521 The cumulative effect at this viewpoint in any scenario will be **significant** due to the factors that lead to the minimum medium-low cumulative magnitude and the medium-high sensitivity of the viewpoint. A combination of a medium-low cumulative magnitude of change (as is assessed in the operational/under-construction scenario) and a medium-high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be significant as a result of its addition to Creag Riabhach, so that there will be apparent development on either side of the viewpoint as well as the distant influence of Achany/Rosehall and Lairg wind farms.

Viewpoint 14 - West Shinness

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.522 This viewpoint is located on the minor road that accesses the small group of houses at West Shinness, situated several hundred metres to the north-east of the A838, and around 20 m more elevated than the A838 at this point. This slight increase in elevation ensures that the houses in West Shinness gain a long and open view across Loch Shin and beyond. This viewpoint is included to represent views that may be gained by residents of the houses as they go about their daily business.
- 6.7.523 This viewpoint lies within *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT and the characteristics of the relatively settled fringe of this landscape can be seen in the foreground and middle-ground of the view, up to the edge of Loch Shin. Long views to the east and north-east are, however, obscured by the slopes rising away from the lochside and the woodland and houses that are found on these slopes. The elevation of the viewpoint ensures that Loch Shin is clearly visible and forms an important feature in the view. Several transmission lines, including a 132 kv line, run across the view between the viewpoint and the loch.
- 6.7.524 The *rounded hills* LCT within which the site lies covers Loch Shin and the slope that rises on the opposite, southern, side of the loch. This slope, with its simple, strong skyline, is the visible part of the *rounded hills* LCT ridge that separates Loch Shin and Glen Cassley. The upper part of the rounded form of Maovally, which marks the western end of the ridge, can be seen to the right of Ben More Assynt.
- 6.7.525 Rising above the *rounded hills* LCT skyline is Ben More Assynt, and further to the right are Beinn Leoid and Meallan a' Chuail. These mountains are in the *rugged mountain massif* LCT which wraps around the head of Loch Shin.
- 6.7.526 Operational, under construction and consented wind farms that were relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA include operational wind farm at Lairg, theoretically visible to the south-east of this viewpoint at a minimum distance of 13.5 km away, with the adjacent consented Lairg 2 theoretically visible at 13.8 km away. These wind farms are in fact largely screened by forestry and a house, and

are to the south-east, peripheral to the main outlook from West Shinness, which is across Loch Shin. There is also limited theoretical visibility (with further screening by woodland) of Achany and Rosehall wind farms at a minimum of 10.2 km away to the south.

6.7.527 This view has a medium value. It is not a marked or formal viewpoint and it does not lie within a scenic designation. It does, however, provide an outlook across and up Loch Shin to distinctive mountains (including part of the Assynt-Coigach NSA), although the transmission lines seen in the foreground of view detract locally from these qualities.

6.7.528 The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint will be high due to its representation of the view that may be gained by residents of West Shinness. In this instance, the combination of the high susceptibility to change of the view and its medium value results in a **high** sensitivity for this viewpoint due to the residential nature of some viewers.

Magnitude of Change

6.7.529 The nine turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen to the north-west of this viewpoint from a minimum of 10.80 km away with all hubs visible, and will extend across around 1.5° of the view. Hardstandings and sections of access tracks are theoretically visible but will have a limited effect on the view when seen from over 10 km away and at this angle, where the Proposed Development is seen across its shorter aspect. Tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.

6.7.530 The magnitude of change on this view will be **medium-low**, for the following reasons.

- The Proposed Development will be seen in the open aspect of the view, across Loch Shin, to which the eye of the viewer is drawn.
- The Proposed Development will be seen in a relatively undeveloped landscape context (albeit that the view is affected by foreground transmission lines and other development), where it will introduce movement and contrasting colour and texture into the remote, upland characteristics of the landscape on and around the site.
- The angle of the view means that the turbines will be seen in a cluster, with eye-catching overlapping of blades. The partial backclothing by landform can also be eye-catching.

6.7.531 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a **medium-low** level are as follows:

- The Proposed Development will affect a very limited proportion (around 1.5°) of the open view from this viewpoint, so that the great majority of the view will remain unaffected.
- The orientation of properties in West Shinness is generally to the south-west across the loch, whereas the Proposed Development will be seen to the north-west, where it will be peripheral to the main direction of views.
- The Proposed Development is seen in the context of the large-scale and simple landform of the Loch Shin ridge of *rounded hills* LCT, which reduces the perceived scale of the turbines and avoids uncomfortable scale comparisons with the landscape setting. It is also relevant that the distant mountain skyline rises considerably higher than the turbines, providing enclosure and containment which ensures that the Proposed Development does not appear to compete with this important landform but is subservient to it.
- The Proposed Development will not be seen in the context of the eye-catching mountainous landform of Ben More Assynt, Beinn Leoid, and Meallan a' Chuail, and will therefore not affect views towards these key focal points.

- Whilst the landscape of the site and its vicinity appears undeveloped and remote, the transmission lines across the foreground of the view mean that the outlook lacks the remote, undeveloped, upland character with which the Proposed Development would have the greatest contrast.
- The Proposed Development forms a very compact group of turbines and this, combined with the distance from the viewpoint, reduces its influence on the view.

Significance of the Effect

6.7.532 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **not significant**. This is due to the factors that lead to the medium-low magnitude of change on the view despite the high sensitivity of the viewpoint. A combination of a medium-low magnitude of change and a high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be not significant largely because of the peripheral location of the Proposed Development in relation to the main orientation of views from West Shinness and the very small part of the open, expansive view that will be affected by the Proposed Development.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

6.7.533 Visibility of operational and consented wind farms is described in the baseline description above. There is also theoretical visibility of the scoping sites at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission, 15 km and 13.8 km away respectively to the south-east.

6.7.534 There are therefore three potential cumulative scenarios to which the Proposed Development may be added: operational/under-construction wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms; and operational/under-construction plus consented and scoping wind farms.

6.7.535 In the operational/under-construction cumulative scenario, the addition of the Proposed Development to Lairg, Achany and Rosehall will have a **low/medium-low** cumulative magnitude of change. This arises from visibility of the Proposed Development to the north-west while Achany and Rosehall are to the south and Lairg is theoretically seen to the south-east, and the Proposed Development thus theoretically extends wind farm influence around the view. It is limited to a low level by the relatively distant, very limited and peripheral visibility of Lairg wind farm, its restricted turbine size, and the very small proportion of the view that it will occupy; the limited visibility of Achany and Rosehall; the small number of wind farms that may contribute to the cumulative effect (effectively Achany/Rosehall and the Proposed Development); and the similar landscape setting of Lairg and the Proposed Development within *rounded hills* LCT. The limited effect of the Proposed Development is also a contributing factor.

6.7.536 In the operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms cumulative scenario, with Lairg 2 also considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development will increase slightly but will not rise above a **low/medium-low** level. This is due to the very limited actual visibility of Lairg 2, its peripheral location in the view, and its distance from the viewpoint.

6.7.537 In the operational/under-construction plus consented and scoping wind farms cumulative scenario, the scoping wind farms at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are also considered. These sites are given less weight than application-stage wind farms as there is no certainty as to the cut-off date that they will be submitted as applications. The additional consideration of Lairg 2 Resubmission would not lead to any notable increase in the **low/medium-low** cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development in the previous scenario due to the minor increase in the visibility of turbines over that of the consented Lairg 2 turbines.

- 6.7.538 However, Garvary would add a further wind farm to the scenario to which the Proposed Development would be added, and would have a higher level of visibility than Lairg and Lairg 2, with part of the site being seen on the open skyline with no screening. As a result of this when Garvary is considered, with or without Lairg 2 Resubmission, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development would increase to a **medium-low** level.
- 6.7.539 The cumulative effect at this viewpoint in any scenario will be **not significant** due to the factors that lead to the maximum medium-low cumulative magnitude despite the high sensitivity of the viewpoint.
- 6.7.540 A combination of a medium-low cumulative magnitude of change and a high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be **not significant** primarily due to the limited number of cumulative wind farms, their limited/very limited and relatively distant visibility and the location of the Lairg group in a peripheral aspect of the view. The limited effect of the Proposed Development is also relevant.

Viewpoint 15 - Achnairn

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.541 This viewpoint is located in the crofting settlement at Achnairn on the northern side of Loch Shin, and has been included to represent views that may be gained by nearby residents. The more distant aspects of the outlook are similar to that seen in Viewpoint 6 (which is on the A838 approximately 600 m to the south-west of this location) but the slightly increased elevation and greater distance from the loch mean that the foreground and middle-ground of the view are quite different, with considerably less visibility of Loch Shin.
- 6.7.542 The *strath* LCT (Strath Tirry unit) dominates the foreground setting of this location, and can be seen in the settled, managed landscape that lies around the viewpoint. A 132 kv transmission line crosses the strath landscape between the viewpoint and Loch Shin. The *rounded hills* LCT within which the site lies covers the foreground of the south, west, north-west and south-west aspects of the view, with its simple skyline rising on the southern side of the loch. Rising above the ridge of *rounded hills* LCT is Ben More Assynt, and further to the right is Beinn Leoid, both of which are in the *rugged mountain massif* LCT, which wraps around the head of Loch Shin.
- 6.7.543 In contrast to Viewpoint 6 and other lochside viewpoints, there is no clear visibility of the *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT that forms the setting to much of the north side of Loch Shin, and instead, the *strath* LCT gives way directly to *rounded hills* and *rugged mountain massif* LCTs.
- 6.7.544 Operational, under construction and consented wind farms that were relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA include the operational wind farm at Lairg, theoretically visible to the south-east of this viewpoint at a minimum distance of 10.4 km away, with the adjacent consented Lairg 2 theoretically visible at 10.7 km away. These wind farms are partly screened by woodland, are seen through a fence, and are to the south-east, peripheral to the main outlook from here, which is across Loch Shin. There is also very limited theoretical visibility of Achany wind farm at a minimum of 8.6 km away to the south-west.
- 6.7.545 This view has a medium value. It is not a marked or formal viewpoint, and it does not lie within a scenic designation. It does, however, have some scenic qualities and provides an outlook across Loch Shin to distinctive mountains (including part of the Assynt-Coigach NSA). The susceptibility to change will be high due to its representation of the view that may be gained by nearby residents in Achnairn as well as users of the minor road. In this instance, the combination of the high susceptibility to change of the view and its medium value results in a **high** sensitivity for this viewpoint due to the residential nature of some viewers.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.546 The nine turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen to the north-west of this viewpoint from a minimum of 13.52 km away with all hubs visible although some towers are screened, and will extend across around 1.5° of the view. While the great majority of infrastructure will be screened by landform, one hardstanding is theoretically visible, although this will not be discernible at over 13 km away. Tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.
- 6.7.547 The magnitude of change on this view will be **low**, for the following reasons.
- The Proposed Development will be seen in an open, attractive aspect of the view to which the eye of the viewer is drawn.
 - The Proposed Development will be seen in a relatively undeveloped landscape context (albeit that the view is affected by foreground transmission lines and other development), where it will introduce movement and contrasting colour and texture to the remote, upland characteristics of the landscape on and around the site.
 - The angle of the view means that the turbines will be seen in a cluster, with eye-catching overlapping of blades.
- 6.7.548 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a **low** level are as follows:
- The Proposed Development will affect a very limited proportion (around 1.5°) of the open view from this viewpoint, so that the great majority of the view will remain unaffected.
 - The orientation of properties in Achnairn is generally to the south-west, across the loch, whereas the Proposed Development will be seen to the north-west, where it will be peripheral to the main direction of views.
 - The Proposed Development is seen in the context of the large-scale and simple landform of the Loch Shin ridge of *rounded hills* LCT, which reduces the perceived scale of the turbines and avoids uncomfortable scale comparisons with the landscape setting. It is also relevant that the distant mountain skyline rises higher than the turbines, providing enclosure and containment which ensures that the Proposed Development does not appear to compete with this important landform but is subservient to it.
 - The Proposed Development will not be seen in the context of the eye-catching mountainous landform of Ben More Assynt and Beinn Leoid and will therefore not affect views towards these key focal points.
 - Whilst the landscape of the site and its vicinity appears undeveloped and remote, the transmission lines across the foreground of the view mean that the outlook lacks the remote, undeveloped, upland character with which the Proposed Development would have the greatest contrast.
 - The Proposed Development forms a very compact group of turbines and this, combined with the distance from the viewpoint, reduces its influence on the view.

Significance of the Effect

- 6.7.549 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **not significant**. This is due to the factors that lead to the low magnitude of change on the view despite the high sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

- 6.7.550 Visibility of operational and consented wind farms is described in the baseline description above. There is also theoretical visibility of the scoping sites at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission, 11.9 km and 10.7 km away respectively to the south-east.
- 6.7.551 There are therefore three potential cumulative scenarios to which the Proposed Development may be added: operational/under-construction wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms; and operational/under-construction plus consented and scoping wind farms.
- 6.7.552 In the operational/under-construction cumulative scenario, the addition of the Proposed Development to Lairg and Achany will have a **low** cumulative magnitude of change. This arises from visibility of the Proposed Development to the north-west while Lairg wind farm is to the south-east, and thus leads to a wind farm being theoretically visible at each end of Loch Shin. It is limited to a low level by the relatively distant, limited and peripheral visibility of Lairg wind farm, its restricted turbine size, and the very small proportion of the view that it will occupy; the very limited visibility of Achany; the small number of wind farms that may contribute to the cumulative effect (effectively Lairg and the Proposed Development); and the similar landscape setting of Lairg and the Proposed Development within *rounded hills* LCT. The limited effect of the Proposed Development is also a contributing factor.
- 6.7.553 In the operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms cumulative scenario, with Lairg 2 also considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development will increase slightly but will not rise above a **low** level. This is due to the peripheral location of Lairg 2 in the view, its partial screening by woodland, its grouping with Lairg wind farm, and distance from the viewpoint.
- 6.7.554 In the operational/under-construction plus consented and scoping wind farms cumulative scenario, the scoping wind farms at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are also considered. These sites are given less weight than application-stage wind farms as there is no certainty as to the cut-off date that they will be submitted as applications. The additional consideration of Lairg 2 Resubmission would not lead to any notable increase in the **low** cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development in the previous scenario due to the minor increase in the visibility of turbines over that of the consented Lairg 2 turbines.
- 6.7.555 However, Garvary would add a further wind farm to the scenario to which the Proposed Development would be added, and would have a higher level of visibility than Lairg and Lairg 2, with part of the site being seen on the open skyline with no screening. As a result of this when Garvary is considered, with or without Lairg 2 Resubmission, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development would increase to a **medium-low** level.
- 6.7.556 The cumulative effect at this viewpoint in any scenario will be **not significant** due to the factors that lead to the maximum medium-low cumulative magnitude despite the high sensitivity of the viewpoint.
- 6.7.557 A combination of a medium-low cumulative magnitude of change and a high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be **not significant** primarily due to the limited number of cumulative wind farms, their limited and relatively distant visibility and their grouping together in a peripheral aspect of the view, which ensures that the great majority of the view (including its most attractive and eye-catching parts) remains unaffected by wind farm influence. The limited effect of the Proposed Development is also relevant.

Viewpoint 16 - A836 near Lairg

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.558 This viewpoint is located in a layby beside the A836 just to the north of Lairg. To the north and south of this point visibility from the road is very limited due to vegetation screening, whereas a more open view is gained from the layby. This view will be gained by people parking in the layby and a perpendicular fleeting, glimpsed view may also be gained by northbound road-users on the A836. This viewpoint is the first in a series of viewpoints on the A836 that have been included in order to illustrate a sequence of views of the Proposed Development.
- 6.7.559 Vegetation and landform screen views from this viewpoint other than the long, open view to the north-west, up Loch Shin. This outlook is gently channelled by the landform that encloses either side of the loch, with a focal point of the *rugged mountain massif* LCT mountains that rise at the head of Loch Shin - Beinn Leoid, Meallan a' Chuail and Ben Hee. Ben More Assynt is screened by vegetation in this specific view.
- 6.7.560 This viewpoint is located at the southern extremity of the *strath* – Strath Tirry LCT and some of the characteristics of this landscape can be seen in the foreground and middle-ground of the view. Beyond the *strath, sweeping moorland and flows* LCT also forms part of the middle-ground to the view. The *rounded hills* LCT within which the site lies can be seen to the north-west, enclosing the southern side of Loch Shin.
- 6.7.561 Operational, under construction and consented wind farms that were relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA include Creag Riabhach, theoretically visible to the north of this viewpoint at a minimum of 19.1 km away. This visibility is, however, screened by woodland in the foreground of the view, and there is no actual visibility.
- 6.7.562 This view has a medium value. It is not a marked or formal viewpoint and does not lie within a scenic designation but is a scenic view up Loch Shin, and the mountains provide scenic focal points. The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint will be medium as the view will be gained by road-users, and this part of the A836 is not a recognised tourist route or cycle route.
- 6.7.563 The combination of the medium susceptibility to change of the view and its medium value results in a **medium** sensitivity for this viewpoint.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.564 The nine turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen to the north-west of this viewpoint from a minimum of 17.36 km away with six hubs visible, and will extend across around 2.5° of the view. Infrastructure is screened by landform, although tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.
- 6.7.565 The magnitude of change on this view will be **low**, for the following reasons.
- The Proposed Development will be seen in the open and scenic north-western aspect of the view, up Loch Shin, to which the eye of the viewer is drawn by channelling landform.
 - The Proposed Development will introduce movement and contrasting colour and texture into the relatively undeveloped upland context in which it is seen, where it will contrast with the remote characteristics.
 - The turbines are seen partly backclothed by landform and partly on the skyline, which can be eye-catching. The landform that lies behind turbines is the lower slope of the focal point of Beinn Leoid, which may also draw the eye of the viewer.
- 6.7.566 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a **low** level are as follows:

- Screening of turbines (towers and blades) by landform reduces the overall visibility of the Proposed Development, and the blades of the three turbines that are theoretically seen as blades only (T7, T8 and T9) are unlikely to be seen in reality, as they are a minimum of around 20 km from the viewpoint. The screening of the Proposed Development also reduces the vertical impact of the turbines.
- The Proposed Development will affect a very limited proportion (theoretically around 2.5° but in reality less than this as the three leftmost blades are unlikely to be readily discernible) of the open view from this viewpoint, so that the great majority of the view will remain unaffected, including the focal points of Meallan a' Chuail, Ben Hee and the upper part of Beinn Leoid.
- The Proposed Development is seen in the context of the large-scale and simple landform of the Loch Shin ridge of *rounded hills* LCT, which reduces the perceived scale of the turbines and avoids uncomfortable scale comparisons with the landscape setting. It is also relevant that the landform on either side rises higher than the turbines, providing enclosure and containment which ensures that the Proposed Development does not appear to compete with the landform but is subservient to it.
- The Proposed Development forms a compact, balanced and regular group of turbines that relates well to its landform setting and this, combined with the distance from the viewpoint, reduces its influence on the view.

Significance of the Effect

- 6.7.567 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **not significant**. This is due to a combination of the factors that lead to the low magnitude of change on the view and the medium sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

- 6.7.568 There is no theoretical visibility of operational, under construction, consented, application stage of scoping wind farms from this viewpoint other than that of Creag Riabhach, which will not be seen in reality due to woodland screening. The Proposed Development will therefore not give rise or contribute to any cumulative effects.

Viewpoint 17 - A836 north Dalchork

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.569 This viewpoint is located on the A836 approximately 15 km to the north of the previous viewpoint. Theoretical and actual visibility of the Proposed Development is very limited between these two viewpoints and this is the next stretch of the road from where clear, open views are available. This view will be gained perpendicular by northbound travellers on the A836 and may be seen at an oblique angle by southbound travellers. This viewpoint illustrates the vast, open view that is gained from the A836 as it crosses the massive expanse of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT that lies to the north of Lairg.
- 6.7.570 The characteristics of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT are seen chiefly to the west, north-west and south-west of the view, with the outlook to the east, north-east and south-east foreshortened by landform. To the west, north-west and south-west, the moorland plain appears to extend as far as the distant mountains of *rugged mountain massif* LCT, with just a low rise of *rounded hills* LCT seen in front of Ben More Assynt. These mountains form focal points around the view, including Ben More Assynt to the west and Beinn Leoid, Meallan a' Chuail and Ben Hee to the north-west. Ben Hee provides a notable feature in the direct line of view of northbound road-users.

- 6.7.571 The south-western backdrop of the view is formed by the long ridgeline of *rounded hills* LCT that rises to the south of Lairg and encloses the western side of Loch Shin.
- 6.7.572 Operational, under construction and consented wind farms that were relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA include visibility of Achany and Rosehall wind farms at a minimum of 16 km away on the skyline to the south. Adjacent to Achany is very limited theoretical visibility of the consented Braemore wind farm at 19 km away, and this site will have a negligible effect on the view. To the north there is limited theoretical visibility of Creag Riabhach, 6 km away. It is relevant that Creag Riabhach lies to the north, and this viewpoint is included specifically to represent visibility of the Proposed Development that may be gained by southbound travellers on the A836, who will not gain visibility of Creag Riabhach as this wind farm lies behind their direction of travel.
- 6.7.573 This view has a medium value. It is not a marked or formal viewpoint but while it does not lie within a scenic designation, it does have scenic qualities and provides a distinctive outlook across the moorlands with Ben More Assynt, within the Assynt–Coigach NSA, as a focal point. This peak, and the other distant hills that form the distinctive skyline, also provide scenic qualities.
- 6.7.574 The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint will be medium as the view will be gained by road-users, and this stretch of the A836 is not a recognised tourist route or cycle route. The combination of the medium susceptibility to change of the view and its medium value results in a **medium** sensitivity for this viewpoint.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.575 The nine turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen to the west of this viewpoint from a minimum of 10.41 km away with all hubs and towers visible, and will extend across around 10° of the view. Hardstandings and sections of access tracks are theoretically visibly but will have a limited effect on the view when seen from over 10 km away. Tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.
- 6.7.576 The magnitude of change on this view will be **medium-low**, for the following reasons.
- The full extent of the Proposed Development will be seen at moderate proximity, introducing movement and contrasting colour and texture into the moorland backdrop against which it is seen.
 - The Proposed Development is seen at its full extent in this view, and thus affects a relatively wide horizontal field of view in relation to its distance from the viewpoint.
 - The turbines are seen against a backdrop of the Ben More Assynt massif, and their location in the context of this landform is likely to draw the eye of the viewer.
- 6.7.577 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a **medium-low** level are as follows:
- The Proposed Development is seen in the context of the massive-scale and simple landform of *sweeping moorland and flows* and *rounded hills* LCT, which reduces the perceived scale of the turbines and avoids uncomfortable scale comparisons with the landscape setting.
 - The backclothing of the Proposed Development by landform and the low elevation of the Proposed Development in relation to the massive landform that rises behind it also notably reduce its vertical impact and prominence, as well as the perceived scale of the turbines.
 - Other than Ben More Assynt, the focal point mountains that are seen around the viewpoint will not be affected by the Proposed Development. This is of particular importance in the case of Ben Hee, which provides a key focal point for northbound road-users.

- Whilst it is seen at its widest extent, the Proposed Development will affect a limited proportion (around 10%) of the open view that is available from this viewpoint, so that the great majority of the view will remain unaffected.
- The Proposed Development will be seen perpendicular to the direction of travel for northbound travellers on the A836 and at an oblique angle for southbound travellers, and this will notably reduce its influence on views as it will not be seen in the direction of travel, and will be seen by moving viewers.
- The Proposed Development has a well-balanced, regular and even composition that relates well to its landform setting and this, combined with the distance from the viewpoint, reduces its influence on the view.

Significance of the Effect

6.7.578 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **not significant**. This is due to a combination of the factors that lead to the medium-low magnitude of change on the view and the medium sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

6.7.579 Visibility of operational and consented wind farms is described in the baseline description above. The consented wind farm at Braemore has been discounted from the assessment due to the negligible influence that it will have on the view. There is also theoretical visibility of the application-stage sites at Meall Buidhe and Strath Tirry at 26 km and 7.6 km away respectively. These sites have both been discounted from the assessment due to their negligible visibility.

6.7.580 There is therefore one potential cumulative scenario to which the Proposed Development may be added: operational/under-construction wind farms, including Achany, Rosehall and Creag Riabhach. In this scenario, the addition of the Proposed Development will have a **medium-low** cumulative magnitude of change. This arises from visibility of the Proposed Development to the west while Achany and Rosehall are to the south and Creag Riabhach is theoretically seen to the north, so that the Proposed Development theoretically extends wind farm influence around the view to an otherwise unaffected aspect. It is limited to a medium-low level by the relatively distant visibility of Achany and Rosehall; the limited visibility of Creag Riabhach and its location to the north where it will not be seen in this view of the Proposed Development by southbound travellers; and the small number of wind farms that may contribute to the cumulative effect (effectively Achany/Rosehall and the Proposed Development). The limited effect and perpendicular/oblique visibility of the Proposed Development is also a contributing factor.

6.7.581 The cumulative effect at this viewpoint will be **not significant** due to the factors that lead to the medium-low cumulative magnitude and the medium sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Viewpoint 18 - A836 Crask Viewpoint

Baseline and Sensitivity

6.7.582 This viewpoint is located at a signposted viewpoint that lies just off the A836, approximately 800 m south of the Crask Inn. Interpretation, parking and seating is provided at the viewpoint. This view will be gained by people stopping at the viewpoint, and a similar outlook will be available to southbound travellers on the A836, albeit at an angle to the direction of travel. Northbound travellers on the A836 will not gain this view.

6.7.583 As with the previous viewpoint, this viewpoint illustrates the vast, open view that is gained from the A836 as it crosses the massive expanse of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT that lies to the north of Lairg.

- 6.7.584 The characteristics of *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT are seen around the view. To the west, north-west and south-west, the moorland plain appears to extend as far as the distant mountains of *rugged mountain massif* LCT, with just a low rise of *rounded hills* LCT seen in front of Ben More Assynt. A rare local high point of *sweeping moorland and flows* - Cnoc an Ulbhaidh (292 m AOD) - can be seen in the middle-ground of the view to the left of Ben More Assynt. The distant mountains form focal points around the view, including Ben More Assynt to the west; Beinn Leoid, Meallan a' Chuail, Meall and Fhuer Loch and Ben Hee to the north-west; and Ben Klibreck to the north-east.
- 6.7.585 The southern and south-western backdrop of the view is formed by the long ridgeline of *rounded hills* LCT that rises to the south of Lairg and encloses the southern side of Loch Shin.
- 6.7.586 Operational, under construction and consented wind farms that were relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA include Achany, Rosehall and Creag Riabhach, theoretically visible from this viewpoint at 18.4 km, 19.2 km and 3 km away respectively. There is also theoretical visibility of the consented wind farm at Braemore at a minimum of 21.9 km away, although this is very limited and distant. Achany and Rosehall lie to the south of the viewpoint while Creag Riabhach is to the north.
- 6.7.587 This view has a high value. It is a marked viewpoint with facilities provided for the enjoyment of the view and while it does not lie within a scenic designation, it provides a scenic and distinctive outlook across the moorlands to focal point mountains, some of which lie within scenic designations.
- 6.7.588 The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint will also be high. People who gain the view will have consciously stopped at the viewpoint and are likely to have a specific focus on the scenery and surrounding landscape. The combination of the high susceptibility to change and the high value of the view results in a **high** sensitivity for this viewpoint.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.589 The nine turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen to the west of this viewpoint from a minimum of 9.87 km away. Five turbines are seen as blades only, four hubs are just visible, and all towers are screened by the landform of Cnoc an Ulbhaidh in the middle ground of the view. The turbines will extend across just under 15° of the view. A small section of access track is theoretically visible but will have a negligible effect on the view. Tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.
- 6.7.590 The magnitude of change on this view will be **low**, for the following reasons.
- The blades and four hubs of the turbines will be seen at moderate proximity, introducing movement and contrasting colour and texture into the undeveloped hill backdrop against which they are partially seen.
 - The Proposed Development is seen at its full extent in this view, and thus affects a relatively wide horizontal field of view in relation to its distance from the viewpoint.
 - The turbines are seen partly backclothed by landform and partly on the skyline, which can be eye-catching. The landform that lies behind some of the turbines is the lower slope of the focal point of Ben More Assynt.
- 6.7.591 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a **low** level are as follows:
- The Proposed Development is screened to a large degree by landform, and this both reduces its overall visibility and minimises the vertical impact and prominence of the turbines.
 - The Proposed Development is seen in the context of the massive-scale and simple landform of *sweeping moorland and flows* and *rounded hills* LCTs, which reduces the perceived scale of the turbines and avoids uncomfortable scale comparisons with the landscape setting.

- The low elevation of the Proposed Development ensures that it is subservient to the landform context.
- Other than Ben More Assynt, the focal point mountains that are seen around the viewpoint will not be affected by the Proposed Development. This is of particular importance in the case of Ben Hee and Ben Klibreck.
- Whilst it is seen at its widest extent, the Proposed Development will affect a limited proportion (around 15°) of the panoramic view that is available from this viewpoint, so that the great majority of the view will remain unaffected.
- The Proposed Development has a well-balanced, regular and even composition that relates well to its landform setting and this, combined with the distance from the viewpoint, reduces its influence on the view.

Significance of the Effect

- 6.7.592 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **not significant**. This is due to the factors that lead to the low magnitude of change on the view despite the high sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

- 6.7.593 Visibility of operational and consented wind farms is described in the baseline description above. The consented wind farm at Braemore has been discounted from the assessment due to the negligible influence that it will have on the view. There is also theoretical visibility of the application-stage site at Meall Buidhe and the scoping site at Garvary at 28.3 km and 23.7 km away respectively. However these sites have both been discounted from the assessment due to their negligible visibility.
- 6.7.594 There is therefore one potential cumulative scenario to which the Proposed Development may be added: operational/under-construction wind farms, including Achany, Rosehall and Creag Riabhach. In this scenario, the addition of the Proposed Development will have a **medium-low** cumulative magnitude of change. This arises from visibility of the Proposed Development to the west while Achany and Rosehall are to the south and Creag Riabhach is seen to the north, so that the Proposed Development theoretically extends wind farm influence around the view to an otherwise unaffected aspect. It is limited to a low/medium-low level by the distant visibility of Achany and Rosehall; the limited visibility and influence of the Proposed Development itself; the small number of wind farms that may contribute to the cumulative effect, and the lack of coalescence between sites; and the retention of the great majority of the 360° outlook with no wind farm influence, including the eye-catching mountains of Ben Klibreck, Ben More Assynt, and Ben Hee.
- 6.7.595 The cumulative effect at this viewpoint will be **not significant** due to the factors that lead to the maximum medium-low cumulative magnitude despite the high sensitivity of the viewpoint. A combination of a medium-low cumulative magnitude of change and a high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be not significant primarily due to the relatively distant visibility of Achany and Rosehall, the limited visibility and influence of the Proposed Development, and the retention of the great majority of the view without wind farm influence, including its most attractive and eye-catching parts.

Viewpoint 19 - Ben Klibreck

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.596 This viewpoint is located at the summit of Ben Klibreck (Meall nan Con), 962 m AOD. A panoramic view is gained from here, overlooking extensive areas of north-west Scotland. The viewpoint is located in the *lone mountains* LCT, and is surrounded by relatively low-lying *sweeping moorland and flows* and *rounded hills* LCTs, punctuated by other distinctive hills (such as Ben Loyal, Ben Hope, Ben More

Assynt, Ben Griam More and Ben Griam Beg) and to the west, larger areas of dramatic and scenic irregular massif, including Ben Hee.

- 6.7.597 The part of the view in which the Proposed Development will be seen shows a foreground of *lone mountains* LCT, which drops abruptly down to the vast area *sweeping moorland and flows* LCT that extends as far as the northern side of Loch Shin. This elevated view illustrates the southern and western extents of this moorland plain, and also shows coniferous forestry that is not visible from the lower level viewpoints within the *sweeping moorland and flows* (e.g. Viewpoints 13 and 18). Cnoc an Alaskie (Viewpoint 13) can be seen in the middle-ground of the view (below Ben More Assynt), and the Crask Inn and A836 are also clearly visible to the south-west, below the steep slopes of Ben Klibreck.
- 6.7.598 Operational, under construction and consented wind farms that were relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA include Kilbraur and Extension, 29.7 km away to the south-east; Lairg, 26 km to the south; and Achany and Rosehall wind farms, a minimum of 25.9 km to the south-west. There is also theoretical visibility of Creag Riabhach, 5.2 km to the west, and consented sites at Braemore and Lairg 2, a minimum of 28.3 km and 26.8 km away respectively to the south.
- 6.7.599 This view has a high value. It is a noted hillwalking location within the Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA and the Ben Klibreck–Armine Forest WLA (although it should be noted that the WLA is not a scenic designation). Although this location is not a recognised viewpoint, it does have some value due to the Munro status of Ben Klibreck and the documentation of routes to this point. It also has notable scenic qualities and a strong sense of place. The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint is high as people who gain the view will be walkers who are engaging in outdoor recreation and are likely to have a specific focus on the scenery and surrounding landscape.
- 6.7.600 The combination of the high susceptibility to change of the view and its high value results in a **high** sensitivity for this viewpoint.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.601 The nine turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen to the south of this viewpoint from a minimum of 18.42 km away with all hubs visible, and will extend across just under 10° of the view. Hardstandings and sections of access tracks are theoretically visible but will have a very limited effect on the view when seen from over 18 km away. Tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.
- 6.7.602 The magnitude of change on this view will be **low** for the following reasons.
- The Proposed Development will introduce movement and contrasting colour and texture into the moorland and hill backdrop against which it is seen.
 - The Proposed Development is seen at its full extent in this view, and thus affects a relatively wide horizontal field of view in relation to its distance from the viewpoint.
- 6.7.603 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a **low** level are as follows:
- The Proposed Development is seen in the context of the large-scale and simple landform of the Loch Shin ridge of *rounded hills* LCT, which reduces the perceived scale of the turbines and avoids uncomfortable scale comparisons with the landscape setting.
 - The backclothing by landform and low elevation of the Proposed Development in relation to the viewpoint and the wider setting notably reduce its vertical impact and prominence and ensure that it is subservient to the landform context.
 - The Proposed Development will be seen in a relatively unremarkable aspect of the view and will not affect the dramatic, remote mountainous landscape (which includes a number of key focal

point mountains) that lies to the north and west of the viewpoint. It will therefore not affect the most spectacular views, where the special qualities of NSAs and wildness qualities of WLAs are most apparent. The Proposed Development will also be seen in an aspect of the view that is affected by coniferous forestry and other development (e.g. the A836), thus avoiding the contrast that can arise when it is seen in the context of the most remote, upland landscapes.

- Whilst it is seen at its widest extent, the Proposed Development will affect a limited proportion (around 10°) of the panoramic view that is available from this viewpoint, so that the great majority of the view will remain unaffected.
- The Proposed Development has a well-balanced, regular and even composition that relates well to its landform setting and this, combined with the distance from the viewpoint, reduces its influence on the view.

Significance of the Effect

- 6.7.604 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **not significant**. This is due to the factors that lead to the low magnitude of change on the view despite the high sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

- 6.7.605 Visibility of operational and consented wind farms is described in the baseline description above. There is theoretical visibility of the application-stage wind farms at Meall Buidhe, 36 km to the south-west, South Kilbraur, 31 km to the south-east, and Strath Tirry, 15.2 km to the south. There is also theoretical visibility of scoping sites at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission, 28 km and 26.8 km away respectively to the south.
- 6.7.606 All of the cumulative wind farms, including application and scoping sites, with the exception of Creag Riabhach, lie to the south, south-west and south-east of the viewpoint and are contained within less than 70° of the view, and when Creag Riabhach (which lies to the west) is also considered, all relevant wind farms are contained within 140° of the view.
- 6.7.607 There are four potential cumulative scenarios to which the Proposed Development may be added: operational/under-construction wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented wind farms; operational/under-construction plus consented and application-stage wind farms; and operational/under-construction plus consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms.
- 6.7.608 In the operational/under-construction cumulative scenario, the addition of the Proposed Development to operational and under-construction wind farms at Achany, Lairg, Rosehall and Creag Riabhach will have a **medium-low** cumulative magnitude of change. This arises primarily from the addition of the Proposed Development into an outlook that effectively has baseline influence of four wind farms; Kilbraur, Lairg, Achany/Rosehall and Creag Riabhach. The association between the Proposed Development and Creag Riabhach is of particular importance here as the Proposed Development will be seen adjacent to but further away than Creag Riabhach.
- 6.7.609 The cumulative magnitude of change is limited to this level by a number of factors. Importantly, the Proposed Development is located between Creag Riabhach and Achany/Rosehall, so that it will not extend wind farm influence to an otherwise unaffected part of the view but will lie within the same 140° western to south-eastern aspect of the view that is already affected by operational and under-construction sites. This ensures that the northern, eastern, north-eastern and north-western aspects remain unaffected by development. The relatively distant (other than Creag Riabhach) visibility and restricted turbine size of the operational sites also tempers the cumulative magnitude of change, as does the limited influence of the Proposed Development itself.
- 6.7.610 In the operational/under-construction plus consented-stage wind farms cumulative scenario, with Braemore and Lairg 2 also considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed

Development will increase slightly due to the additional wind farm visibility to which the Proposed Development will be added, but will remain **medium-low**. This is due to the grouping of the consented sites (Lairg 2 and Braemore) in conjunction with operational wind farms, so that the number of wind farm 'groups' to which the Proposed Development is added will effectively not increase, and the Proposed Development is not added to a scenario that extends further around the view than in the operational/under-construction scenario. The distant visibility of the consented wind farms is also a consideration.

- 6.7.611 In the operational/under-construction plus consented and application-stage wind farms scenario, the application stage wind farms at Meall Buidhe, South Kilbraur and Strath Tirry are also considered. The additional consideration of Meall Buidhe will not lead to any increase in the cumulative magnitude of change due to its distant visibility and location behind Achany and Rosehall wind farms. South Kilbraur would also have a very limited effect, seen adjacent to the operational Kilbraur wind farm at over 30 km away. The consideration of Strath Tirry would lead to a minor increase in the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development, but this is again limited by its location in the same southern aspect of the view as other operational and consented sites, which ensures that it would have little implication on the effect arising from the subsequent addition of the Proposed Development. The limited influence of the Proposed Development itself and its ongoing association with Creag Riabhach also continues to restrict its cumulative magnitude of change. The cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development to the operational/under-construction plus consented and application-stage wind farms scenario will therefore be **medium-low**.
- 6.7.612 In the operational/under-construction plus consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms cumulative scenario, the scoping wind farms at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are also considered. These sites are given less weight than application-stage wind farms as there is no certainty as to the cut-off date that they will be submitted as applications. The additional consideration of Lairg 2 Resubmission would not lead to any notable increase in the medium cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development due to the minor increase in the visibility of turbines over that of the consented Lairg 2 turbines. Garvary would add a further wind farm to the scenario to which the Proposed Development would be added, but would be seen in conjunction with Lairg 2 and would not increase wind farm influence any further around the view. Therefore, when Garvary and/or Lairg 2 Resubmission are considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development may increase slightly but would not increase over a **medium-low** level.
- 6.7.613 The cumulative effect at this viewpoint in any scenario will be **not significant** due to the factors that lead to the maximum medium-low cumulative magnitude despite the high sensitivity of the viewpoint. A combination of a medium-low cumulative magnitude of change and a high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be not significant due primarily to the location of the Proposed Development within the aspect of the view that is already affected by baseline wind farms, its visual association with Creag Riabhach, and the limited and distant influence that the Proposed Development itself will have on the view.

Viewpoint 20 - Lairg

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.614 This viewpoint is located in the settlement of Lairg, adjacent to the A839 just east of its junction with the A836. The ZTVs show an area of visibility of the Proposed Development from part of Lairg, and this viewpoint has been included in order to illustrate the type of visibility that is likely to be available. This view will be gained by road-users on the A839, people walking in Lairg, and a similar view is likely to be gained by residents of nearby houses.

- 6.7.615 This view is, as with many views from the western part of Lairg, dominated by Loch Shin and the associated hydro-electric infrastructure. The foreground, including the loch, is covered by the *farmed and forested slopes with crofting* LCT that covers Lairg, characterised by houses, field enclosure, roads, woodland, and other infrastructure of a crofting landscape. Beyond this, the *rounded hills* LCT that enclose the southern side of Loch Shin can be seen rising behind the dam and, in the distance, Beinn Leoid rises as a focal point at the head of Loch Shin.
- 6.7.616 Operational, under construction and consented wind farms that were relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA include Achany, Braemore, Lairg, and Lairg 2, all theoretically visible from this viewpoint. This visibility is, however, screened by landform, buildings and woodland, and there is negligible actual visibility.
- 6.7.617 This view has a medium-high value. It is not a marked, recognised or formal viewpoint and does not lie within a scenic designation. It does, however, have value due to the recognition of the A839 as the Moray Firth Tourist Route, and the view that is gained along Loch Shin towards Beinn Leoid. The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint will be high as some people who gain the view, or a similar outlook, will be residents of nearby properties. Other viewers will be people following the Moray Firth Tourist Route, who also have a heightened susceptibility.
- 6.7.618 The combination of the high susceptibility to change of the view and its medium-high value results in a **high** sensitivity for this viewpoint.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.619 The Proposed Development will theoretically be seen as seven blades to the north-west of this viewpoint from a minimum of 19.71 km away, and will extend across around 2° of the view. There is, however, screening by foreground vegetation and this, combined with the very limited visibility of some blades, ensures that visibility will be very limited. Infrastructure is screened by landform, although tall cranes may be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.
- 6.7.620 The magnitude of change on this view will be **low/negligible** due to the very limited visibility and distance from the viewpoint.

Significance of the Effect

- 6.7.621 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **not significant**. This is due to the factors that lead to the low/negligible magnitude of change on the view despite the high sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

- 6.7.622 The operational, under-construction and consented wind farms at Achany, Braemore, Lairg, and Lairg 2 are theoretically visible from this viewpoint, as is the scoping site at Lairg 2 Resubmission. This visibility is, however, screened by landform, buildings and woodland, and there is negligible actual visibility of cumulative wind farms. The Proposed Development will therefore not give rise or contribute to any cumulative effects.

Viewpoint 21 - Rhian Breck, Lairg

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.623 This viewpoint is located in the crofting area that lies to the south-east of Lairg, on the elevated lower slopes of Cnoc na h-Inghinn. There are several houses in this area, and the viewpoint has been included to represent the type of visibility that may be gained from them as well as by road-users. This specific location has been selected as it provides a relatively clear and open view towards the Proposed Development.

- 6.7.624 This viewpoint lies on the cusp of several LCTs; *farmed and forested slopes with crofting* to the north and west; *rounded hills* to the south, east and north-east; and *strath* also to the north-east. *Farmed and forested slopes with crofting* LCT, which covers the foreground of the view to the north and west, including the north-western aspect in which the Proposed Development is seen, is distinctive, characterised by houses, field enclosure, roads, woodland, and other infrastructure of a crofting landscape as well as the forestry that is also found in this LCT.
- 6.7.625 The outlook to the north-west, towards the site, is an attractive, open view with distant focal point mountains of Ben More Assynt, Beinn Leoid, Meallan a' Chuail, Meall an Fhuer Loch and Ben Hee, which provide a scenic mountain backdrop to the north-west, around the head of Loch Shin. The *lone mountains* LCT of Ben Klibreck is a focal point on the skyline to the north.
- 6.7.626 Operational, under construction and consented wind farms that were relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA include Achany, Creag Riabhach, Lairg and Rosehall. However, visibility of Lairg is very limited due to screening by the landform that rises steeply to the south of the viewpoint, and just one blade tip is visible. Achany and Rosehall have higher visibility, although still limited by landform screening, a minimum of 6.8 km to the west of the viewpoint. Creag Riabhach lies 23.5 km away to the north and will be largely screened by forestry. There is also theoretical visibility of the consented wind farms at Braemore and Lairg 2, a minimum of 5.6 km and 1.7 km away respectively. These sites have limited/negligible theoretical visibility and are unlikely to be seen due to screening by foreground vegetation.
- 6.7.627 This view has a medium value. It is not a marked, recognised or formal viewpoint and does not lie within a scenic designation. It does, however, have value in its scenic outlook of the distant mountains, including parts of the Assynt-Coigach NSA and Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA. The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint will be high as some people who gain the view, or a similar outlook, will be residents of nearby properties. This view has a **high** sensitivity. This is due to the residential nature of viewers, as the high susceptibility of these receptors outweighs the medium value of the view.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.628 The nine turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen to the north-west of this viewpoint from a minimum of 21.95 km away with six hubs visible, and will extend across around 2.5° of the view. While the great majority of infrastructure will be screened by landform, a part of one hardstanding is theoretically visible, although this will not be discernible at over 21 km away. Tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.
- 6.7.629 The magnitude of change on this view will be **low**, for the following reasons.
- The Proposed Development will be seen in the open and scenic north-western aspect of the view, up Loch Shin, to which the eye of the viewer is drawn by the focal point mountains.
 - The Proposed Development will introduce movement and contrasting colour and texture into the relatively undeveloped upland context in which it is seen.
 - The turbines are seen backclothed by the landform of the lower slope of Beinn Leoid, which may draw the eye of the viewer.
- 6.7.630 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a **low** level are as follows:
- The distance of the viewpoint from the Proposed Development (21.95 km) and the very small horizontal field of view that will be occupied by the Proposed Development (theoretically around 2.5° but in reality less than this as the three leftmost blades are unlikely to be discernible) ensures that it will have a very limited influence on the view. The great majority of

the view will remain unaffected, including the focal points of Ben More Assynt, Meallan a' Chuail, Meall an Fhuer Loch, Ben Hee, Ben Klibreck and the upper part of Beinn Leoid.

- Screening of turbines (towers and blades) by landform reduces the overall visibility of the Proposed Development and reduces the vertical impact of the turbines.
- The Proposed Development is seen in the context of the large-scale and simple landform of the Loch Shin ridge of *rounded hills* LCT, which reduces the perceived scale of the turbines and avoids uncomfortable scale comparisons with the landscape setting. It is also relevant that the skyline mountain landform rises higher than the turbines, providing enclosure and containment which ensures that the Proposed Development does not appear to compete with the mountains.
- The Proposed Development forms a compact, balanced and regular group of turbines that relates well to its landform setting.

Significance of the Effect

- 6.7.631 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **not significant**. This is due to the factors that lead to the low magnitude of change on the view despite the high sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

- 6.7.632 Visibility of operational and consented wind farms is described in the baseline description above. There is theoretical visibility of the application-stage wind farms at Meall Buidhe and Strath Tirry, 16.7 km and 9.6 km away to the south-west and north respectively, with very limited visibility of Meall Buidhe. The scoping site at Lairg 2 Resubmission is also theoretically visible, but as with the consented site at Lairg 2, this is very limited due to rising landform in the foreground.
- 6.7.633 Wind farms at Braemore, Lairg, Lairg 2, Lairg 2 Resubmission and Meall Buidhe have been discounted from the assessment due to the negligible influence that these wind farms have on the view.
- 6.7.634 There are therefore two potential cumulative scenarios to which the Proposed Development may be added: operational/under-construction wind farms, and operational/under-construction plus application-stage wind farms.
- 6.7.635 In the operational/under-construction cumulative scenario, the addition of the Proposed Development to Achany, Rosehall and Creag Riabhach will have a **low** cumulative magnitude of change. This arises primarily from the addition of visibility of the Proposed Development to that of Achany and Rosehall, so that two groups of wind farms are theoretically visible, one to the west and the other to the north-west so that the Proposed Development will theoretically increase wind farm influence around the view. Creag Riabhach has a very limited influence on the view due to screening and distance, and will make a very minor contribution to the cumulative situation.
- 6.7.636 The cumulative magnitude of change is limited to a low level by the small number of visible wind farms and the distant and limited influence of the Proposed Development itself, which ensures that it too will make a very minor contribution to the cumulative situation. The location of the Proposed Development in the same 55° aspect of the view as Achany and Rosehall is also relevant, as the great majority of the outlook will remain unaffected by wind farm influence.
- 6.7.637 In the operational/under-construction plus application-stage wind farms cumulative scenario, with Strath Tirry also considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development will increase slightly but will not rise above a **low** level. This is due to the continuing very limited influence of the Proposed Development as well as the limited and relatively distant visibility of Strath Tirry.

6.7.638 The cumulative effect at this viewpoint in any scenario will be **not significant** due to the factors that lead to the maximum low cumulative magnitude despite the high sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Viewpoint 22 - Quinag

Baseline and Sensitivity

6.7.639 This viewpoint is located at the summit of Quinag (809 m AOD). A panoramic view is gained from here, overlooking extensive areas of north-west Scotland. The viewpoint is located in a small area of *lone mountains* LCT, and is surrounded by a diverse group of LCTs: to the north and west by the low-lying *cnocan* LCT; to the south and east by a band of *rocky hills and moorland*; and slightly further away to the east, by the massive *rugged mountain massif*. The view to the south-east, towards the site, is dominated by *lone mountains* LCT in the foreground and beyond that, on either side of Loch Shin, the *sweeping moorland and flows* and *rounded hills* LCTs. Loch Shin itself can be seen as a narrow ribbon of water.

6.7.640 At the time of the April 2021 LVIA a number of operational, under-construction and consented wind farms were theoretically visible to the east and south-east of this viewpoint, as shown in the wireline view. However, these are either seen from outwith their study areas, and are thus seen at a distance where they will not contribute to a significant cumulative effect, and/or they have very limited visibility.

6.7.641 This view has a high value. It is a noted hillwalking location (with parking and signage provided) within the Assynt-Coigach NSA and the Quinag WLA (although it should be noted that WLA is not a scenic designation). It also has notable scenic qualities and a strong sense of place. The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint is high as people who gain the view will be walkers who are engaging in outdoor recreation and are likely to have a specific focus on the scenery and surrounding landscape.

6.7.642 The combination of the high susceptibility to change of the view and its high value results in a **high** sensitivity for this viewpoint.

Magnitude of Change

6.7.643 The nine turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen to the south-east of this viewpoint from a minimum of 21.03 km away with all hubs visible but all towers screened by landform, and will extend across less than 1-degree of the view. The turbines will be the only visible element of the Proposed Development, with infrastructure being screened by landform. Tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.

6.7.644 The magnitude of change on this view will be **low/negligible**, for the following reasons.

- The Proposed Development will introduce movement and contrasting colour and texture into the undeveloped moorland context in which it is seen, where it will contrast with the remote characteristics.
- The Proposed Development is seen as a cluster of turbines, which can be eye-catching due to the overlapping of blades.

6.7.645 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a **low/negligible** level are as follows:

- Screening of turbine towers by landform reduces the overall visibility of the Proposed Development and minimises the vertical impact of the turbines. Backclothing by landform also reduces vertical impact.
- The Proposed Development will affect a very limited proportion (less than 1-degree) of the panoramic outlook from this viewpoint, so that the great majority of the view will remain unaffected.

- The Proposed Development forms a compact group of turbines that relates to its landform setting and this, combined with the distance from the viewpoint (over 21 km away), reduces its influence on the view.

Significance of the Effect

- 6.7.646 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **not significant**. This is due to the factors that lead to the low/negligible magnitude of change on the view despite the high sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

- 6.7.647 A number of operational, under-construction, consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms are theoretically visible to the east and south-east of this viewpoint, as shown in the wireline view. However, these are either seen outwith their study areas, and are thus seen at a distance where they will not contribute to a significant cumulative effect, and/or they have very limited visibility. In this context, the very limited influence of the Proposed Development ensures that it will not give rise or contribute to any significant cumulative effects.

Viewpoint 23 - Arkle

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.648 This viewpoint is located at the summit of Arkle (787 m AOD). A panoramic view is gained from here, overlooking extensive areas of north-west Scotland, including the coast and sea. The viewpoint is located at the northern end of the extensive *rugged mountain massif* LCT that also covers other mountain viewpoints, including Ben More Assynt and Ben Hee, as well as several lower level viewpoints on the A838.
- 6.7.649 *Rugged mountain massif* LCT extends in all directions around the viewpoint other than the west, where the *cnocan* LCT provides a strong contrast. The view to the south-east, towards the site, is dominated by *rugged mountain massif* LCT with just a small part of the *rounded hills* LCT, within which the site lies, being visible.
- 6.7.650 At the time of the April 2021 LVIA a number of operational, under-construction and consented wind farms were theoretically visible to the south-east of this viewpoint, as shown in the wireline view. However, these are all seen from outwith their study areas, and are thus seen at a distance where they will not contribute to a significant cumulative effect.
- 6.7.651 This view has a high value. It is a noted hillwalking location within the North-West Sutherland NSA and the Foinaven-Ben Hee WLA (although it should be noted that WLA is not a scenic designation). It also has notable scenic qualities and a strong sense of place. The susceptibility to change at this viewpoint is high as people who gain the view will be walkers who are engaging in outdoor recreation and are likely to have a specific focus on the scenery and surrounding landscape.
- 6.7.652 The combination of the high susceptibility to change of the view and its high value results in a **high** sensitivity for this viewpoint.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.653 Eight of the turbines in the Proposed Development will be seen to the south-east of this viewpoint from a minimum of 25.78 km away with all hubs visible, and will extend across just under 5° of the view. Some sections of access tracks and turbine hardstandings are theoretically visible but are unlikely to be discernible from over 25 km away. Tall cranes will be visible during the short-term construction and decommissioning phases.
- 6.7.654 The magnitude of change on this view will be **low/negligible**, for the following reasons.

- The Proposed Development will introduce movement and contrasting colour and texture into the moorland and hill backdrop against which it is seen.
- The Proposed Development is seen at a wide extent due to the angle of the view, and thus affects a relatively wide horizontal field of view in relation to its distance from the viewpoint.

6.7.655 The factors that restrict the magnitude of change to a **low/negligible** level are as follows:

- The backclothing by landform and low elevation of the Proposed Development in relation to the viewpoint and the wider setting notably reduces its vertical impact and prominence.
- Whilst it is seen at its widest extent, the Proposed Development will affect a very limited proportion (less than 5°) of the panoramic view that is available from this viewpoint, so that the great majority of the view will remain unaffected.
- The Proposed Development has a well-balanced, regular and even composition that relates well to its landform setting and this, combined with the distance from the viewpoint (over 25 km), reduces its influence on the view.

Significance of the Effect

6.7.656 The effect of the Proposed Development on this view will be **not significant**. This is due to the factors that lead to the low/negligible magnitude of change on the view despite the high sensitivity of the viewpoint.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

6.7.657 A number of operational, under-construction, consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms are theoretically visible to the south-east of this viewpoint, as shown in the wireline view. However, these are all seen from outwith their study areas, and are thus seen at a distance where they will not contribute to a significant cumulative effect. In this context, the limited and distant influence of the Proposed Development ensures that it will not give rise or contribute to any significant cumulative effects.

A836

Baseline and Sensitivity

6.7.658 The A836 runs through the study area from its commencement near Edderton in the south, through Ardgay, Bonar Bridge and Invershin, before passing through Lairg and then northwards to Tongue. The A836 passes through widely varied landscapes within the study area, ranging from the enclosed, vegetated southern shore of the Dornoch Firth to remote upland moorland and forestry north of Lairg. It also passes through a number of settlements, of which the most notable are Edderton, Ardgay, Bonar Bridge and Lairg. Viewpoints 16, 17 and 18 are located on the A836.

6.7.659 At the time of the April 2021 LVIA there were a number of operational, under-construction and consented cumulative wind farms of which there may be theoretical visibility from the A836 within the Proposed Development study area. These include, starting in the south of the study area, Braemore, Lairg 2, Lairg, Achany, Rosehall, and Creag Riabhach. There is negligible theoretical visibility of Kilbraur and extension from the road.

6.7.660 The value of views from the A836 is medium. While the section between the junction with the B9176 (the 'Struie road') and Lairg is part of the Moray Firth National Tourist Route, the section of the road that may be affected by the Proposed Development is to the north of Lairg and is not part of the recognised tourist route. Moderate value arises on the relevant stretch as a result of the scenic qualities of the open moorland north of Lairg, and views towards focal-point mountains such as Ben Klibreck. The susceptibility to change is medium as the view will be gained by road-users, and the

A836 is not a recognised tourist route or cycle route. The combination of the medium susceptibility to change and the medium value of views results in a **medium** sensitivity for the A836.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.661 The magnitude of change on views from the A836 will vary dependent on the direction of travel, and the northbound and southbound routes are therefore described separately.
- 6.7.662 Travelling northwards, the ZTV shows that the first theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development is in Lairg, at the junction with the A839, where a stretch of approximately 700 m gains theoretical visibility of blades only, from between around 20 km away. Visibility from this stretch is very limited, with further screening by vegetation, and is gained perpendicular to the direction of travel. The magnitude of change on views from here will be **negligible** due to the very limited and distant visibility. As the road leaves Lairg, passing Lairg Lodge, there is a further stretch approximately 1.3 km long where the ZTV shows limited visibility of blades only. This is largely screened by roadside vegetation and the magnitude of change will again be **negligible**.
- 6.7.663 As the road turns northwards to the north of Lairg, the ZTVs show higher theoretical visibility of hubs and blades for a stretch of approximately 3.9 km. Viewpoint 16 lies on this stretch, in a layby; the magnitude of change on this view is assessed to be low and the maximum magnitude of change on views from this stretch will also be **low**. There will be no visibility from the majority of this stretch due to screening by woodland along the road.
- 6.7.664 Over the next 8.5 km the ZTVs show some very intermittent theoretical visibility of blades only. These views would be gained from a minimum of over 12 km away, at an angle to the direction of travel for northbound road-users and with filtering and screening by vegetation, and the maximum magnitude of change will be **low**.
- 6.7.665 The final stretch of visibility that may theoretically be gained by northbound road-users is between North Dalchork and landform of The Crask and is approximately 8 km long. This visibility is gained perpendicular or oblique to the northbound direction of travel and is partly blade only. Viewpoint 17 lies on this stretch and is assessed to have a medium-low magnitude of change; the maximum magnitude of change on this stretch of road will also be **medium-low** as this viewpoint illustrates the maximum level of visibility that may be gained. In some places there will be no change or a **negligible** magnitude of change due to screening by woodland and forestry. The outlook seen at Viewpoint 18 will not be gained by northbound road-users as it lies behind their direction of travel.
- 6.7.666 After this stretch, no further visibility will be gained by northbound road-users. This is due both to the negligible theoretical visibility as shown on the ZTVs and the location of the Proposed Development behind the northbound traveller.
- 6.7.667 Travelling southwards, the ZTV shows that the first theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development is a short stretch of intermittent visibility gained approximately 4.5 km north of Altnaharra. This is almost all blade only, is limited to a maximum of four turbines and is approximately 25 km from the Proposed Development, ensuring that the magnitude of change will be **negligible**.
- 6.7.668 The next theoretical visibility, which is partly blade only, commences as the road passes around landform of The Crask, several kilometres north of the Crask Inn. This stretch of visibility is approximately 8 km long and while the Proposed Development will be seen in the broad direction of travel for the first 4 km kilometres, it will thereafter be seen perpendicular and then obliquely.
- 6.7.669 Viewpoints 17 and 18 lie on or adjacent to this stretch, although the outlook at Viewpoint 17 will be gained obliquely by southbound travellers. These viewpoints are assessed as having a medium-low magnitude of change, and the maximum magnitude of change on this stretch of road will also be **medium-low** as these viewpoints illustrate the maximum level of visibility that may be gained. In some

places there will be no change or a **negligible** magnitude of change due to screening by woodland and forestry.

- 6.7.670 After this stretch, no further visibility will be gained in the direction of travel of southbound road-users, due to the location of the Proposed Development behind the southbound traveller.

Significance of the Effect

- 6.7.671 The effect of the Proposed Development on views from the A836 will be **not significant** for travellers in both directions, due to the factors that lead to the maximum medium-low magnitude of change on views and the medium sensitivity of the route.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

- 6.7.672 The operational and consented wind farms at Braemore, Lairg 2, Lairg, Achany, Rosehall, and Creag Riabhach may be seen from the A836. The application-stage wind farms at Strath Tirry and Meall Buidhe and scoping sites at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission may also be seen in views from the road.
- 6.7.673 With the exception of Creag Riabhach and Strath Tirry, all of these wind farms lie to the south of the Proposed Development and are located along the 10 km stretch of the road that runs between Lairg and the A837 junction. Braemore, Achany/Rosehall and Creag Riabhach lie to the west of the road while Garvary, Lairg, Lairg 2 and Strath Tirry are to the east.
- 6.7.674 As a result of their locations and patterns of visibility, these wind farms will be experienced in different ways by northbound and southbound travellers. Northbound travellers may gain brief visibility of Achany and Rosehall from the Bonar Bridge area, and then around the A837 junction the wind farms to the south of Lairg will become more visible at close proximity. These too are passed rapidly over a 10 km stretch of the road, with visibility reduced by woodland screening along the road. There is then no close-proximity visibility of wind farms until Strath Tirry, followed by Creag Riabhach.
- 6.7.675 Southbound travellers will gain visibility of Creag Riabhach, Strath Tirry, and then the sites to the south of start to come intermittently into view, albeit at some distance (as seen in Viewpoints 17 and 18). Visibility of the sites south of Lairg continues with increasing influence as road-users travel southwards.
- 6.7.676 The Proposed Development itself has been assessed as having a not significant effect on views from the A836.
- 6.7.677 The cumulative magnitude of change will vary for northbound and southbound travellers. For northbound travellers, the maximum cumulative magnitude of change will be **medium-low**, as assessed at Viewpoints 17 and 18. This level of change is primarily restricted by the limited, intermittent and distant visibility and often perpendicular or oblique views of the Proposed Development itself (which has a not significant effect on views from the road) but also by the limited stretch of the road that is affected by the wind farms that lie to the south of Lairg, as they will lie behind the northbound traveller from the point where the road leaves Lairg.
- 6.7.678 Visibility of the Proposed Development for southbound travellers is also limited, intermittent and distant, and often gained in perpendicular or oblique views. There is, however, more consistent visibility of cumulative wind farms, particularly the group that lies to the south of Lairg, which are theoretically seen intermittently in the direct line of southwards views from the A836 to the south of Crask. The maximum cumulative magnitude of change for southbound travellers will be **medium-low**, as assessed at Viewpoints 17 and 18.
- 6.7.679 The cumulative effect arising from the addition of the Proposed Development to views from the A836 will be **not significant** for northbound and southbound travellers in any cumulative scenario. This is

due to the factors considered in the maximum medium-low cumulative magnitude of change and the medium-high sensitivity of the route. A combination of a medium-low magnitude of change and a medium-high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be not significant primarily because of the limited, intermittent and distant visibility and often perpendicular or oblique views of the Proposed Development itself.

A838

Baseline and Sensitivity

- 6.7.680 The A838 runs along the north side of Loch Shin on its route between Laxford Bridge and the A836 just north of Lairg. This road passes through a largely undeveloped and remote moorland landscape, with just a few groups of houses and some coniferous forestry plantation along the way. Scenic views across Loch Shin, to the south, west and north-west, provide a focus from much of the road. Viewpoints 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 are located on the A838.
- 6.7.681 At the time of the April 2021 LVIA there were a number of operational, under-construction and consented cumulative wind farms of which there may be theoretical visibility from the A838 within the Proposed Development study area. These are grouped at the eastern end of the road, and include Achany, Braemore, Lairg and Lairg 2. There is no visibility of Rosehall and negligible theoretical visibility of Creag Riabhach and Kilbraur and extension from the road.
- 6.7.682 The value of views from the A838 is medium. The route does not pass through any designations and is not a recognised tourist or cycle route, but does have scenic qualities and parts of the route gain consistent views towards the Assynt-Coigach NSA. The susceptibility to change is also medium; it is not a tourist route, cycle route or walking route but is an important route between the west coast and central areas, used by visitors as well as local people, and has importance as an A-class road.
- 6.7.683 The combination of the medium susceptibility to change and the medium value of views results in a **medium** sensitivity for the A838.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.7.684 The magnitude of change on views from the A838 will vary dependent on the direction of travel, and the eastbound and westbound routes are therefore described separately.
- 6.7.685 Travelling eastwards, the ZTV shows that the first theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development is a from a short stretch approximately 1.8 km long near West Merkland, where the ZTVs show that visibility is limited to a maximum of two turbines, much of it blade only. Viewpoint 11 lies on this stretch; the magnitude of change on this view is assessed to be low and the maximum magnitude of change on views from this stretch will also be **low**.
- 6.7.686 There is then a stretch of around 4 km with no theoretical visibility as the road passes the southern part of Loch Merkland and Merkland Lodge. Limited theoretical visibility commences again at the head of Loch a'Ghriama, where the level of visibility is lower than and then similar to that seen at Viewpoint 10, which lies around 600 m to the south of the head of the loch. The maximum magnitude of change here will be **medium**, as found at Viewpoint 10. Around 400 m to the south of Viewpoint 10, forestry and woodland screen and filter views, and the maximum magnitude of change will continue to be **medium** for around 800 m, with visibility likely to be restricted to glimpses.
- 6.7.687 Theoretical visibility increases approximately 600 m to the west of the site access at Corriekinloch, but in reality views of the turbines will continue to be filtered and restricted by forestry and woodland for around 2.5 km, whereupon the view opens out, just before Viewpoint 9, as the road passes out of forestry and runs more closely along Loch Shin.

- 6.7.688 While the turbines will have limited visibility over this 2.5 km stretch, there will be some visibility of the upgraded access road at the site entrance at Corriekinloch (see Appendix 6.2 for the RVAA, which assesses effects on individual properties). The existing road is surfaced and provides access to Corriekinloch (Cassley, Duchally) hydro-electric power station. During the construction phase, the earthworks and groundworks required to create areas of hardstanding adjacent to the A838 (required for turbine access onto the site) will be immediately visible. Once construction is complete, the areas of hardstanding will be seen from the road and will have a limited influence over that of the existing access road. These infrastructure works will have a localised **high** magnitude of change during construction and a **low** magnitude of change during the operational phase as restoration will have taken place, and the new hardstanding areas are not unfamiliar elements in views from this stretch of the road.
- 6.7.689 Viewpoints 9 and then 8 are located on the stretch of visibility gained where the road runs close to the lochside, and both of these illustrate the open view across the loch. The magnitude of change at both of these viewpoints is assessed to be high, and this **high** magnitude of change will also apply intermittently to views from a stretch of the road approximately 6 km long. There is considerable birch woodland along the road to the east of Carrachan that will screen and filter views of the Proposed Development, ensuring that visibility from this stretch is intermittent, particularly in summer when the trees are in leaf.
- 6.7.690 Just to the east of Viewpoint 8, no further visibility will be gained in the direction of travel of eastbound road-users, due to the location of the Proposed Development behind the eastbound traveller.
- 6.7.691 Travelling westwards, the ZTV shows theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development commencing at the start of the route, where it leaves the A836. There is, however, unlikely to be open visibility until the road rounds the bend at Colaboll, near Viewpoint 5. The **medium-low** magnitude of change assessed at Viewpoint 5 will also apply to this stretch of the road, and will continue intermittently (with extensive screening by woodland) as far as Viewpoint 6, which is assessed to have a **medium-low** magnitude of change. Around 500 m to the west of Viewpoint 6, woodland screening will restrict visibility to glimpses and several short open stretches, and the maximum magnitude of change will remain **medium-low**. This will increase to **medium** to the west of West Shinness Lodge as the Proposed Development becomes a more apparent component in the orientation of the westbound view and woodland screening becomes intermittent, with open views more consistently available.
- 6.7.692 As the road approaches Viewpoint 7, the magnitude of change will gradually increase to a **medium-high** level as the field of view occupied by the Proposed Development increases and the turbines become increasingly apparent. It is also around this point that the Proposed Development becomes fully visible again after a stretch of partial screening, and is aligned in the same aspect of the view as the Ben More Assynt massif (although it is not seen in front of this landform). Viewpoint 7 is itself assessed to have a medium-high magnitude of change and the description given in the viewpoint assessment is also applicable to this stretch of the road.
- 6.7.693 To the west of Viewpoint 7, the magnitude of change will continue to gradually increase until it reaches a **high** level around Viewpoint 8 (which is assessed to have a high magnitude of change). This will continue intermittently (with extensive screening and filtering by birch woodland between around Viewpoint 8 and Carrachan) as far as Viewpoint 9, which also has a **high** magnitude of change.
- 6.7.694 Just to the east of Viewpoint 9, no further visibility of the turbines will be gained in the direction of travel of westbound road-users, due to the location of the Proposed Development behind the westbound traveller. The construction and operation of the upgraded access road into the site and areas of hardstanding adjacent to the A838 will, however, be visible at Corriekinloch, as described for eastbound road-users.

Significance of the Effect

- 6.7.695 The effect of the Proposed Development on the great majority of views from the A838 will be not significant. There are, however, several stretches where a significant effect is likely to arise.
- For eastbound travellers, an intermittent or very intermittent **significant** effect is likely to arise on a stretch of approximately 9.5 km between just north of Viewpoint 10 and just east of Viewpoint 8, due to a combination of the factors considered in the medium to high magnitude of change and the medium sensitivity of the route.
 - For westbound travellers, an intermittent **significant** effect is likely to arise on a stretch of approximately 15 km long, between West Shinness and just west of Viewpoint 9, due to a combination of the factors considered in the medium to high magnitude of change and the medium sensitivity of the route. There will also be a localised **significant** effect over several hundred metres at the site access point during the construction phase.
- 6.7.696 A combination of a medium magnitude of change and a medium sensitivity, as is found on some stretches of the road in both directions, can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be significant due largely to the location of the Proposed Development in the direction of travel of road-users.
- 6.7.697 For travellers in both directions, visibility of the Proposed Development over some stretches is intermittent or very intermittent due largely to screening along parts of the road by forestry, woodland and, around Overscaig, buildings.

Cumulative Effects (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)

- 6.7.698 The operational, under-construction and consented cumulative wind farms that may be theoretically visible from the A838 within the Proposed Development study area are described in the baseline description above. The application-stage wind farm at Strath Tirry and scoping sites at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission may also be seen in views from the road.
- 6.7.699 Creag Riabhach, Kilbraur and Extension and Rosehall have been discounted from the assessment due to their lack of or negligible influence on views from the road.
- 6.7.700 All of the relevant wind farms with the exception of the application-stage wind farm at Strath Tirry are broadly grouped to the south of the road at its eastern end, and lie to the south-east of the Proposed Development. As a result of their locations and patterns of visibility, these wind farms will be experienced in different ways by eastbound and westbound travellers.
- 6.7.701 Eastbound travellers may start to gain relatively distant visibility of Achany (from around 15 km away) as the A838 passes the end of Glen Fiag, and this visibility theoretically continues for the remainder of the road other than a short stretch at Colaboll. The closest visibility is gained from around 6.8 km away at the eastern end of the road, where it is seen perpendicular to the eastbound direction of travel. As seen in the A838 viewpoints, Achany is often largely screened by the ridge of *rounded hills* LCT that encloses the western side of Loch Shin and is peripheral to views from the road, but does have some limited influence on views.
- 6.7.702 Lairg and Lairg 2 also become theoretically visible at some distance away, as far west as Overscaig. The eastbound direction of travel is orientated towards these two sites, channelled by the landform of Loch Shin. Lairg has intermittent theoretical visibility along much of the eastbound road, but in reality is frequently screened by landform and vegetation. Lairg 2, with its larger turbines and greater extent, is likely to have a greater level of visibility although this will still be intermittent.
- 6.7.703 Braemore has limited theoretical visibility from a 1.4 km long stretch at the eastern extremity of the road, a minimum of 8.5 km away. Eastbound travellers may gain visibility of Braemore, perpendicular

to the eastbound direction of travel, over around 950 m of this stretch while over the remaining 450 m Braemore will lie behind the eastbound traveller.

- 6.7.704 Strath Tirry has theoretical visibility from approximately 2 km at the eastern end of the road, but this is limited by landform and vegetation screening and is generally gained perpendicular to the direction of travel. The scoping site at Garvary becomes theoretically visible around Overscaig, with a similar pattern of visibility to Lairg 2.
- 6.7.705 The highest level of visibility of the sites at Lairg, Lairg 2 and Garvary is likely to be gained from a stretch of the eastbound road between Viewpoint 7 and West Shinness Lodge, where there are long down the loch to the south-east. There will also be visibility as the road approaches Lairg, but with some screening and filtering by woodland along the road and in the middle-ground of the view.
- 6.7.706 For westbound travellers, visibility of cumulative wind farms is considerably more limited and cumulative visibility will arise only from Achany, Braemore and Strath Tirry. There is negligible/very limited and largely perpendicular theoretical visibility of Achany and Braemore at a minimum of 6.9 km away from an approximately 1 -1.2 km long stretch at the eastern end of the A838. Beyond this stretch, both Achany and Braemore pass behind the westbound traveller and will not affect their views. Strath Tirry has theoretical visibility from approximately 2 km at the eastern end of the road, but this is limited by landform and vegetation screening and is gained perpendicular to or behind the direction of travel. Lairg, Lairg 2, Lairg 2 Resubmission and Garvary will have no effect on westbound views as they lie behind the westbound traveller and will not affect their views.
- 6.7.707 The Proposed Development itself has been assessed as having an intermittent significant effect on views from stretches of approximately 9.5 km long for eastbound travellers and approximately 15 km long for westbound travellers.
- 6.7.708 There are four potential cumulative scenarios at this viewpoint; the addition of the Proposed Development to operational/under construction wind farms; the addition of the Proposed Development to operational/under construction plus consented wind farms; the addition of the Proposed Development to operational/under construction plus consented and application-stage wind farms; and the addition of the Proposed Development to operational/under construction plus consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms.
- 6.7.709 For westbound travellers, the cumulative magnitude of change in all scenarios will be a maximum of **low** due to the negligible or very limited and largely perpendicular theoretical visibility of cumulative wind farms; the small number of sites that may theoretically be seen (three – Achany, Braemore and Strath Tirry); and their theoretical visibility over a very short stretch at the eastern end of the road. Viewpoints 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 illustrate the type of cumulative effects that may be gained by westbound travellers, as they all represent views gained by westbound travellers on the A838. These viewpoints are assessed to have a maximum low cumulative magnitude of change. As seen in the viewpoints, theoretical visibility of cumulative wind farms is generally very limited, with further screening by woodland and other vegetation, and consistently lies behind the westbound traveller. Visibility of the Proposed Development is limited in the eastern viewpoints – Viewpoints 5 and 6 – and this also contributes to the low cumulative magnitude of change on views from the eastern part of the A838.
- 6.7.710 For eastbound travellers, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development will be a maximum of **low** in the operational/under-construction scenario. This will arise as a result of the following considerations.
- Significant visibility of the Proposed Development be added to a road from which two operational wind farms (Achany and Lairg) are intermittently visible.

- The Proposed Development will extend wind farm influence further west along the road and will be immediately apparent in views from a stretch of the road that is currently not affected by readily discernible wind farm influence.
 - The Proposed Development will introduce wind energy development at closer proximity and with a higher level of visibility than the operational wind farm influence.
- 6.7.711 The following considerations limit the theoretical cumulative magnitude of change to a maximum **low** level.
- The number of operational wind farms that can be seen from the road is limited (two – Achany and Lairg) and these wind farms have a generally limited and relatively distant effect on views, as can be seen in viewpoints along the road.
 - The extensive length of the road between the Proposed Development and Lairg/ Achany ensures that they are perceived as separate entities and sequential effects between wind farms are not apparent.
 - The Proposed Development will affect a relatively short stretch of the road, as landform screening ensures that it will not be seen in long views over a prolonged approach but will instead become apparent and then pass behind the eastbound traveller within a limited stretch.
 - Achany wind farm has very little visibility from the stretch of the road that lies in closest proximity to it, while the areas of higher visibility are at a greater distance, thus reducing its influence on views.
 - Operational wind farm visibility is consistently gained to the south and south-east of the road, and the Proposed Development will conform to this pattern.
 - The Proposed Development and operational sites will not be concurrently readily apparent in eastbound views, and there will be no perception of encirclement of the road.
- 6.7.712 When the consented site at Lairg 2 is also considered, the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development will increase to a **medium-low** level as Lairg 2 has a higher level of visibility and larger turbines than Lairg, and is likely to have a greater level of influence on views gained by eastbound road-users, particularly between Viewpoint 7 and West Shinness Lodge (although this is still limited in places by landform and woodland screening, as seen at the A838 viewpoints). Visibility of Braemore is very limited, gained only from the easternmost stretch of the road, and will not affect the cumulative magnitude of change.
- 6.7.713 In the operational/under-construction plus consented and application-stage wind farms scenario, the application stage wind farm at Strath Tirry is also considered. The additional consideration of this site would lead to a minor increase in the **medium-low** cumulative magnitude of change assessed in the previous scenario, due to the inclusion of a further wind farm to the scenario to which the Proposed Development would be added. This would not, however, lead to an increase in the level of change, due largely to the limited visibility of Strath Tirry, the very short stretch of the road from which it is theoretically visible, and its visibility from a part of the road that is already affected by visibility of operational and consented wind farms.
- 6.7.714 In the operational/under-construction plus consented, application-stage and scoping wind farms cumulative scenario, the scoping wind farms at Garvary and Lairg 2 Resubmission are also considered. These sites are given less weight than application-stage wind farms as there is no certainty as to the cut-off date that they will be submitted as applications. The additional consideration of Lairg 2 Resubmission would not lead to any notable increase in the in the **medium-low** cumulative magnitude

of change arising from the Proposed Development in the previous scenario due to the minor increase in the visibility of turbines over that of the consented Lairg 2 turbines.

- 6.7.715 However, Garvary is shown in Viewpoints 5 and 6, in particular, to have a higher level of visibility than Lairg 2 due to its more southern location, which ensures that woodland and vegetation along the A838 does not provide the same level of screening. Because of this, it would be seen on the skyline in views from extensive stretches of the eastbound A838, and would be seen in conjunction with the Proposed Development in some eastbound views.
- 6.7.716 As a result, the additional consideration of Garvary would lead to an increase in the cumulative magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Development to a **medium/medium-low** level. (assuming that Lairg 2 is developed).
- 6.7.717 The significance of cumulative effect on views from the A838 will be **not significant** in any scenario due to a combination of the factors considered in the maximum **medium/medium-low** cumulative magnitude of change on views and the medium sensitivity of the route.
- 6.7.718 A combination of a medium/medium-low cumulative magnitude of change and a medium sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be not significant due to the extensive separation between the Proposed Development and the other wind farm sites, which prevents the occurrence of notable sequential effects.

6.8 Summary

- 6.8.1 The purpose of the LVIA is to identify and record the potential effects that the Proposed Development may have on physical elements of the landscape; landscape character; WLAs; areas that have been designated for their scenic or landscape-related qualities; and views from various locations such as settlements, routes, tourism features and other sensitive locations. The potential cumulative effects that may arise from the addition of the Proposed Development to other wind farms are also considered, in relation to the cumulative scenario as it was at the time of the April 2021 LVIA.
- 6.8.2 The study area for the LVIA covers a radius of 40 km from the outer turbines in the Proposed Development. The assessment has shown that the effect of the Proposed Development on the landscape and visual resource of the great majority of this study area will be not significant, which means that for the great majority of the study area, and the receptors that lie within it, the effect of the Proposed Development is not defining and the existing, baseline, characteristics of the landscape and views will continue to prevail. The receptors that will not be significantly affected by the Proposed Development include SLAs; settlements; 'A' roads other than the A838; railway lines; long-distance walking routes; core paths, the Crask Viewpoint; mountain tops at Ben Klibreck, Quinag, and Arkle; and the great majority of the landscape character types that are found within the study area.
- 6.8.3 While the effect on the majority of the study area will be not significant, the LVIA has indicated that there is potential for the Proposed Development to result in some localised significant effects on the area that lies in closer proximity to the site. The LVIA has identified that there is potential for significant effects to arise on the landscape character of the site and some parts of its surroundings; and views from mountain tops at Ben More Assynt and Ben Hee, a stretch of the A838, the high point of Cnoc an Alaskie, the Maovally track, and the corrie at Coire Ceann Loch. The RVAA concludes that while there are likely to be significant effects on the residential visual amenity of the 11 properties that lie within 3 km of the nearest turbine in the Proposed Development or 250 m of the Proposed Development infrastructure, these effects do not have the potential to reach the Residential Visual Amenity Threshold.
- 6.8.4 The effect that the Proposed Development may have on the Assynt-Coigach NSA has been considered in the assessment. Localised significant effects have been assessed to arise on two SLOs in one part

of the NSA, out of a total of 10 SLQs of the NSA. However, this effect is not considered to significantly adversely affect the overall 'integrity' of the NSA as a scenic designation, and it is considered that the *"objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the area will not be compromised"* by the Proposed Development.

- 6.8.5 The Proposed Development lies within the south-eastern fringes of the Reay-Cassley WLA (WLA 34). The assessment of effects on wild land indicates that the Proposed Development is likely to result in a localised significant effect on one of the four WLQs of this WLA. However, the mitigation that has been applied to the Proposed Development ensures that *"any significant effects on the qualities of these areas"* have been *"substantially overcome by siting, design or other mitigation"*.
- 6.8.6 As well as assessing the effect of the Proposed Development itself, the LVIA assesses the cumulative effect that may arise when the Proposed Development is added to various scenarios of operational, under-construction, consented, application and scoping stage wind farms. The cumulative assessment, which has been carried out on the basis of the cumulative scenario that was relevant at the time of the April 2021 LVIA, concludes that the cumulative effect of the Proposed Development on the great majority of receptors and viewpoints will be not significant. However, the addition of the Proposed Development to any scenario of cumulative wind farms is likely to lead to a significant cumulative effect on the view from Cnoc an Alaskie and on the LCT (*sweeping moorland and flows - LCT 134*) that covers this area and its vicinity.
- 6.8.7 The assessment has indicated that significant visual effects are likely to be contained within a maximum of approximately 12.2 km of the turbines in the Proposed Development, although they may, in unusual circumstances, arise beyond this. Significant effects on landscape character are likely to be contained within a maximum radius of approximately 8.2 km from the turbines in the Proposed Development (with this distance arising only in unusual circumstances; the maximum extent of a significant effect elsewhere is approximately 7 km).

Table 6.17 – Summary Table – Landscape And Visual Effects

Description of Effect	Significance of Potential Effect		Mitigation Measure	Significance of Residual Effect	
	Significance	Beneficial/ Adverse		Significance	Beneficial/ Adverse
Effects on Landscape Elements					
Rough grassland and moorland	Not significant	Adverse	N/A	Not significant	Adverse
Effects on Landscape Character					
Rounded hills (LCT 135) – Loch Shin/Glen Cassley unit	Significant effect up to a maximum of around 4.5 km from the nearest turbine in the Proposed Development	Adverse	N/A	Significant up to a maximum of around 4.5 km from the nearest turbine in the Proposed Development	Adverse
Rounded hills (LCT 135) – Loch Fiag unit	Significant effect on the southern slopes of Cnoc a' Ghriama (between 4.5 km and 6.5 km from nearest turbine)	Adverse	N/A	Significant effect on the southern slopes of Cnoc a' Ghriama (between around 4.5 km-6.5 km from the nearest turbine)	Adverse
Rugged mountain massif (LCT 139) – Ben More/ Ben Hee unit	Significant effect on the southern slopes of Sron na Garbh Uidh, lower east-facing slopes of Ben More Assynt, and Coire Ceann Loch (between 4.5 km and 7 km away)	Adverse	N/A	Significant effect on the southern slopes of Sron na Garbh Uidh, lower east-facing slopes of Ben More Assynt, and Coire Ceann Loch (between 4.5 km and 7 km away)	Adverse

Description of Effect	Significance of Potential Effect		Mitigation Measure	Significance of Residual Effect	
	Significance	Beneficial/ Adverse		Significance	Beneficial/ Adverse
	from the nearest turbine (up to 8.2 km in the case of Coire Ceann Loch))			from the nearest turbine (up to 8.2 km in the case of Coire Ceann Loch))	
Sweeping moorland and flows (LCT 134)- Crask/Overscaig unit	Significant effect on the northern side of Loch Shin between 2 km and 4.5-5 km away from the nearest turbine (6 km in the case of Cnoc an Ulbhaidh))	Adverse	N/A	Significant effect on the northern side of Loch Shin between 2 km and 4.5-5 km away from the nearest turbine (6 km in the case of Cnoc an Ulbhaidh))	Adverse
Effects on Landscape-Related Designated Areas					
Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area	Not significant effect on the 'integrity' of the NSA Localised significant effects on two 'special landscape qualities' in one area of the NSA	Adverse	N/A	Not significant effect on the 'integrity' of the NSA Localised significant effects on two 'special landscape qualities' in one area of the NSA	Adverse
Effects on Wild Land Areas					
Reay-Cassley (WLA 34)	Localised significant effect	Adverse	Refer to Section 6.7 for mitigation designed into the Proposed Development.	Localised significant effect	Adverse

Description of Effect	Significance of Potential Effect		Mitigation Measure	Significance of Residual Effect	
	Significance	Beneficial/ Adverse		Significance	Beneficial/ Adverse
	on one 'wild land quality'			on one 'wild land quality'	
Effects on Viewpoints					
Viewpoint 1 Track near Maovally	Significant	Adverse	N/A	Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 2 Ben More Assynt	Significant	Adverse	N/A	Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 3 Coire Ceann Loch	Significant	Adverse	N/A	Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 4 Arsaig track, Loch Shin	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 5 A838 near Colaboll	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 6 A838 near Achnairn	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 7 A838 Cnoc an Laoigh	Significant	Adverse	N/A	Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 8 A838 near Fiag	Significant	Adverse	N/A	Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 9 A838 west of Overscaig	Significant	Adverse	N/A	Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 10 A838 Loch a' Ghriama	Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 11 A838 near West Merkland	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 12 Ben Hee	Significant	Adverse	N/A	Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 13 Cnoc an Alaskie	Significant	Adverse	N/A	Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 14 West Shinness	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse

Description of Effect	Significance of Potential Effect		Mitigation Measure	Significance of Residual Effect	
	Significance	Beneficial/ Adverse		Significance	Beneficial/ Adverse
Viewpoint 15 Achnairn	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 16 A836 near Lairg	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 17 A836 north Dalchork	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 18 A836 Crask Viewpoint	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 19 Ben Klibreck	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 20 Lairg	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 21 Rhian Breck, Lairg	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 22 Quinag	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 23 Arkle	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Effects on Principal Visual Receptors					
A836	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
A838	Eastbound travellers: intermittent/very intermittent significant effect on approx. 9.5 km Westbound travellers: intermittent significant effect on approx. 15 km	Adverse	N/A	Eastbound travellers: intermittent/very intermittent significant effect on approx. 9.5 km Westbound travellers: intermittent significant effect on approx. 15 km	Adverse

Description of Effect	Significance of Potential Effect		Mitigation Measure	Significance of Residual Effect	
	Significance	Beneficial/ Adverse		Significance	Beneficial/ Adverse
	and several hundred metres at the site access (during construction only)			and several hundred metres at the site access (during construction only)	
Cumulative Effects on Landscape Character (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)					
Rounded hills (LCT 135) – Loch Shin/Glen Cassley unit	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Rounded hills (LCT 135) – Loch Fiag unit	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Rugged mountain massif (LCT 139) – Ben More/ Ben Hee unit	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Sweeping moorland and flows (LCT 134)- Crask/Overscaig unit	Localised significant effect in all scenarios on one part of the receptor	Adverse	N/A	Localised significant effect on one part of the receptor	Adverse
Cumulative Effects on Landscape-Related Designated Areas (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)					
Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Cumulative Effects on Wild Land Areas (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)					
Reay-Cassley (WLA 34)	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Cumulative Effects on Viewpoints (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)					

Description of Effect	Significance of Potential Effect		Mitigation Measure	Significance of Residual Effect	
	Significance	Beneficial/ Adverse		Significance	Beneficial/ Adverse
Viewpoint 1 Track near Maovally	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 2 Ben More Assynt	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 3 Coire Ceann Loch	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 4 Arsaig track, Loch Shin	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 5 A838 near Colaboll	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 6 A838 near Achnairn	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 7 A838 Cnoc an Laoigh	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 8 A838 near Fiag	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 9 A838 west of Overscaig	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 10 A838 Loch a' Ghriama	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 11 A838 near West Merkland	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 12 Ben Hee	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 13 Cnoc an Alaskie	Significant effect in all scenarios	Adverse	N/A	Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 14 West Shinness	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 15 Achnairn	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse

Description of Effect	Significance of Potential Effect		Mitigation Measure	Significance of Residual Effect	
	Significance	Beneficial/ Adverse		Significance	Beneficial/ Adverse
Viewpoint 16 A836 near Lairg	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 17 A836 north Dalchork	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 18 A836 Crask Viewpoint	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 19 Ben Klibreck	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 20 Lairg	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 21 Rhian Breck, Lairg	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 22 Quinag	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Viewpoint 23 Arkle	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
Cumulative Effects on Principal Visual Receptors (assessed in relation to the April 2021 LVIA cumulative scenario)					
A836	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse
A838	Not Significant	Adverse	N/A	Not Significant	Adverse

6.9 References

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