



Planning, Sustainable Design and Access Statement

Ben Sca Redesign Wind Farm

Ben Sca Wind Farm Limited

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Basis of Report

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Executive Summary

This Planning, Sustainable Design and Access Statement has been prepared by SLR Consulting Ltd on behalf of Ben Sca Wind Farm Limited ('the Applicant') to support a planning application under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended) for the Ben Sca Redesign Wind Farm (known as the 'Proposed Development').

The Proposed Development would comprise of nine wind turbines 149.9m to blade tip height and associated infrastructure on a site located approximately 2.5km to the southwest of Edinbane and 7km to the east of Dunvegan, in the northwest of the Isle of Skye, within The Highland Council (THC) administrative boundary (**Figure 1**). It is an amendment to the 'consented development', which comprises:

- the consented Ben Sca Wind Farm (20/00013/FUL) granted permission in December 2020 for the installation and operation of seven wind turbines with maximum blade height of 135m; and
- the consented Ben Sca Wind Farm Extension (21/05767/FUL) granted permission in April 2022 for the installation and operation of two wind turbines with a maximum blade height of 149.9m.

The primary aim of the proposed amendments is to maximise the renewable energy output from the consented site and to maximise the secured grid capacity contributing to net-zero emission targets.

The application site boundary measures approximately 429ha and encompasses both the previous Ben Sca and Ben Sca Extension Wind Farm application boundaries. All proposed changes to the turbine dimensions and associated infrastructure remain within the boundaries of the already consented site.

Access to the site remains unchanged from the consented development and would be via the existing Ben Aketil Wind Farm access track from the A850. There are no known statutory landscape or environmentally designated sites within the site boundary (**Figure 4**).

The generating capacity of the Proposed Development would be up to 40.8MW (equivalent to an annual output of 145,000MWh which is an additional 20,000MWh generated each year than the consented development), with an operational life of approximately 40 years. It is anticipated that the wind farm would be decommissioned and removed from the site at the end of its operational life unless it is commercially viable to extend its life (subject to upgrades and planning approval).

The existing and approved Habitat Management Plans (HMPs) for the consented development have been expanded for the Proposed Development to include a total forest to bog restoration area of 64.73ha to allow for compensation and enhancement of peatland habitats.

In considering the Proposed Development, the need to maximise the full renewable energy potential of the site has been carefully balanced against the need to ensure that the minor changes to the consented development do not result in any unacceptable environmental impacts with sustainable design criteria considered throughout. As such, relevant and proportionate assessment work has been undertaken to ensure that the proposed changes seek to avoid, prevent or reduce any potentially significant adverse environmental effects as far as possible. Full consideration has also been given to feedback received from consultees and the local community during the programme of public consultation that has been undertaken.

This Planning, Sustainable Design and Access Statement provides an overview of the Proposed Development and its associated benefits to renewable energy generation targets, carbon dioxide emissions off-setting, and to the local community in terms of contributing to the community benefit fund and that has already been committed to by the Applicant.



The Planning, Sustainable Design and Access Statement assesses the proposed changes against relevant national and local planning policy and supplementary guidance, energy policy and other relevant material considerations. For the purposes of this application, the Development Plan comprises National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) (2023), the Highland Wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) (2012), the adopted West Highlands and Islands Local Development Plan (WestPlan) (2019) and relevant supplementary guidance including the Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG) 2016. NPF4, adopted in February 2023, provides an up-to-date and supportive planning policy position within which to consider the proposal. As set out in NPF4, a priority for decision makers is the global climate emergency and it recognises that a rapid increase in electricity generation from renewable sources is essential for Scotland to meet its net zero emissions targets.

An assessment of the Proposed Development against the relevant policies of NPF4 has been undertaken as it provides the most up-to-date policy position followed by consideration of the relevant policies from the HwLDP. Other material considerations are then assessed in light of the Proposed Development including an assessment of Scotland's progress towards renewable energy generation and greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets.

Significant weight should be given to this up-to-date supportive policy context and the potential contribution of the Proposed Development to renewable energy and emissions reductions targets in the determination of this planning application. It is concluded that the planning balance lies firmly in favour of the minor changes proposed, and planning permission should therefore be granted.



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AILRS	Abnormal Indivisible Load Route Assessment
AOD	Above Ordnance Datum
cSAC	candidate Special Area of Conservation
CDM	Construction (Design and Management) (Regulations 2015)
CEMP	Construction Environmental Management Plan
CoWRP	Control of Woodland Removal Policy
CPI	Consumer Price Index
CTMP	Construction Traffic Management Plan
DfT	Department for Transport
DRP	Decommissioning Restoration Plan
EDPR	EDP Renewables
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
GSP	Grid Supply Point
GWDTEs	Groundwater Dependant Terrestrial Ecosystems
HCHET	The Highland Council Historic Environment Team
HGV	Heavy Goods Vehicle
HMP	Habitat Management Plan
HwLDP	Highland Wide Local Development Plan
IEMA	Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment
LCA	Landscape Character Area
LCT	Landscape Character Type
LVIA	Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MW	Megawatts
NATS	National Air Traffic Services
NGR	National Grid Reference
NTS	Non-Technical Summary
NPF	National Planning Framework
NPF4	National Planning Framework 4
NVC	National Vegetation Classification
OWESG	Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance
PMP	Peat Management Plan
RVAA	Residential Visual Amenity Assessment
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SCI	Site of Community Importance
SG	Supplementary Guidance



SI	Supplementary Information
SLA	Special Landscape Area
SM	Scheduled Monument
SLR	SLR Consulting Limited
SNH	Scottish Natural Heritage (now NatureScot)
SPA	Special Protection Area
SSSI	Special Scientific Interest
THC	The Highland Council
UkHab	UK Habitat Classification
VP	Viewpoint (Landscape and Visual)
WestPlan	West Highlands and Islands Local Development Plan
ZTV	Zone of Theoretical Visibility



1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Application

1. This Planning, Sustainable Design and Access Statement has been prepared by SLR Consulting Ltd on behalf of Ben Sca Wind Farm Limited ('the Applicant') to support a planning application under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended) for the Ben Sca Redesign Wind Farm (known as the 'Proposed Development').
2. The Proposed Development would comprise of nine wind turbines 149.9m to blade tip height and associated infrastructure on a site located approximately 2.5km to the southwest of Edinbane and 7km to the east of Dunvegan, in the northwest of the Isle of Skye, within The Highland Council (THC) administrative boundary (**Figure 1**). It is an amendment to the 'consented development', which comprises:
 - the consented Ben Sca Wind Farm (20/00013/FUL) granted permission in December 2020 for the installation and operation of seven wind turbines with maximum blade height of 135m; and
 - the consented Ben Sca Wind Farm Extension (21/05767/FUL) granted permission in April 2022 for the installation and operation of two wind turbines with a maximum blade height of 149.9m.
3. The application site has the benefit of extant planning permission for the erection of nine turbines and associated infrastructure.
4. Access to the site remains unchanged from the consented development and would be via the existing Ben Aketil Wind Farm access track from the A850.
5. The changes to the consented development are as follows:
 - increase blade tip height for seven turbines by up to 14.9m (from 135m to 149.9m);
 - increase the rotor size for all nine turbines by up to 23m (from 115m to 138m);
 - increase spacing to improve yield and efficiency, minor adjustment to turbine locations, maximum up to 132m movement from consented positions (Ben Sca Extension turbines remain in same locations as consented) with associated adjustments to the access tracks and crane hardstanding to accommodate the new locations;
 - re-location of the onsite substation to the southern area of the site;
 - addition of second temporary construction compound adjacent to Ben Aketil Wind Farm track;
 - increase of net generation capacity from consented 37.8MW to up to 40.8MW to maximise use of the available grid connection (MWh); and
 - increase operational life from 30 years to 40 years.
6. The difference between the consented and Proposed Development site layouts is shown on **Figure 3**.
7. The rationale for the proposed amendments to the consented development is to:
 - maximise the renewable energy output from the site;



- maximise the secured grid capacity contributing further to Scottish Government net-zero emission targets¹;
 - ensure that the candidate turbine can be sourced and installed; and
 - to reduce distance to the connection point to the national electricity grid network, following change dictated by Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks (connection point changed from Dunvegan GSP to Edinbane GSP).
8. The Proposed Development includes the felling of an area of 64.73ha of conifer forest of poor growth. The Proposed Development would restore this area to blanket bog habitat, as part of the Habitat Management Plan (HMP).
 9. The planning application is supported by an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report which sets out the findings of the EIA undertaken for the Proposed Development. This Planning, Sustainable Design and Access Statement does not form part of the EIA Report. However, reference is made to the conclusions of the EIA Report in assessing the Proposed Development against the provisions of the Development Plan and other relevant material considerations.
 10. The Proposed Development is classified as a 'major' development under the Town and County Planning (Hierarchy of Development) (Scotland) Regulations 2009 as the combined installed capacity of the wind farm would be over 20MW but under 50MW. The planning application is therefore accompanied by a **Pre-Application Consultation ('PAC') Report** which details the community consultation that was undertaken, the comments made, and how these comments have influenced the layout and design of the Proposed Development. The Sustainable Design and Access Statement for this application is contained within this report.

1.2 The Applicant

11. The Applicant for the proposed development is Ben Sca Wind Farm Limited. Ben Sca Wind Farm Limited is the legal entity set up for the sole purposes of developing the consented development and Proposed Development. The Proposed Development is being developed by Wind2 on behalf of EDP Renewables (EDPR).
12. The Wind2 team has a substantial track record in the successful development of onshore wind throughout the UK, being responsible for the delivery of approximately 1GW of renewable energy through its involvement with RDC Partners and West Coast Energy, sold to ENGIE in 2014. Wind2 is working on the development of a number of renewable energy projects, is committed to investing in the Highlands, and has personnel based in the Highlands with an office on the Black Isle.
13. EDPR is a global leader in the renewable energy sector and the world's third-largest wind energy producer. EDPR has recently invested in the Ben Sca Wind Farm Limited company.

1.3 Purpose of this Planning, Sustainable Design and Access Statement

14. The purpose of this Planning, Sustainable Design and Access Statement is to provide an assessment of the Proposed Development in relation to Development

¹ Net zero emissions of all greenhouse gases by 2045 ('Securing a green recovery on a path to net zero: climate change plan 2018–2032 – update')

Plan policy and other relevant material considerations. **Section 2.0** provides an overview of the project. **Section 3.0.** provides the sustainable design and access statement and **Section 4.0** provides the planning policy assessment. **Section 5.0** weighs up the planning case for the Proposed Development and provides concluding remarks on the acceptability of the proposed changes to the already consented development.

2.0 Project Overview

2.1 Introduction

15. This section introduces the site of the Proposed Development and provides an overview of the project description.

2.2 Site Location and Description

16. The site (centred on NGR 132800, 848600) is located on moorland, used for shooting game, and commercial forestry production, and is approximately 2.5km to the southwest of the settlement of Edinbane and approximately 7km to the east of the settlement of Dunvegan, located in the northwest of the Isle of Skye on the Coishletter Estate and within THC administrative boundary. The nearest Postcode to the site is IV51 9PW.
17. The application boundary which measures approximately 429ha, is shown on **Figure 1** and wholly includes the previous red line application boundaries for the consented Ben Sca Wind Farm and Ben Sca Wind Farm Extension. No additional land is included in the red line application boundary.
18. The site boundary includes forestry in the northwest which is consented to be used for peatland restoration and habitat enhancement as part of the consented HMPs for the consented development. This forestry was planted in 1990 and, as was confirmed through survey for the consented development (SLR 2020a and SLR 2021), is considered to be poor to very poor quality, due to the soil being unsuitable for tree growth.
19. Several small tributaries run through the site and eventually join larger watercourses to the north, such as Red Burn and Abhainn Choishleadar. Topography ranges from approximately 170m AOD to 283m AOD with the southern extent of the proposed site forming the most elevated section at Ben Sca (283m AOD). To the north of the summit of Ben Sca, a ridgeline extends in a northwest direction (Mullach Ben Sca) and includes a series of smaller summits descending to 200m AOD.
20. To the southwest of the site, lies the operational Ben Aketil Wind Farm and its extension which comprises 12 turbines (100.5m tip height). Ben Aketil Wind Farm extends in a northwest to southeast orientation and is located to the northwest of the summit of Ben Aketil (266m AOD).
21. To the east of the site is the operational Edinbane Wind Farm which comprises 18 turbines (100m tip height) extending in a north to south direction between Airgh Neil and Glen Vic Askill at approximately 150m to 160m AOD.
22. Access to the site remains unchanged from the consented development and would be via the existing Ben Aketil Wind Farm access track from the A850.
23. There are no known statutory landscape or environmentally designated sites within the site boundary (**Figure 4**).
24. The closest designated sites are the Greshornish Special Landscape Area (SLA) which is located approximately 2km to the north of the site, the North West Skye SLA which is located approximately 4km west of the site, and Dunvegan Garden and Designed Landscape (GDL) which is located approximately 7km to the west of the site.

25. Operational wind farms are a key component in the landscape of the local area, with the Proposed Development situated between two existing operational wind farms (Ben Aketil and Edinbane Wind Farms). If built, the consented Glen Ullinish Wind Farm would be located approximately 5.5km to the south of the site, and would comprise 11 wind turbines with a maximum blade tip height of 149.9m.

2.3 Planning History

2.3.1 Ben Sca Wind Farm

26. The original planning application for Ben Sca Wind Farm, which was submitted to THC in January 2020, was for the construction and operation of up to nine wind turbines with a maximum blade tip height of 135m and rotor blade diameter of 115m; and associated infrastructure. The application was accompanied by an EIA Report (SLR, 2020a).
27. During the consultation process for the Ben Sca Wind Farm application THC's landscape officer raised concerns that the submitted nine turbine scheme created a series of significant visual impacts which could be ameliorated by the removal or relocation of three turbines previously proposed at the highest elevation, close to the summit of Ben Sca (turbines 1 to 3).
28. In response to the THC landscape officer's consultation response, the Applicant agreed to remove two turbines. The reduced seven turbine scheme was accompanied by the submission of a Supplementary Information Report (SI Report) in August 2020 (SLR, 2020b) which included updated visuals and re-assessed the landscape and visual impacts of the amended scheme. Following submission of the amended scheme THC's landscape officer considered that there were perceptible improvements to the composition of the scheme from the majority of viewpoints and that the adverse effects on the perception of scale and distance in the landscape over which they had previously been concerned had been improved in a number of views. THC's landscape officer also considered that the amended scheme provided improved separation from the existing operational Edinbane turbines in a number of views which benefitted the overall cumulative composition of turbines in the landscape. Consequently, THC's landscape officer removed their objection to the proposals.
29. The amended seven turbine scheme was granted planning permission (reference 20/00013/FUL) subject to conditions by THC in December 2020. These conditions include the requirement to deliver peatland restoration through the submission and implementation of a Habitat Management Plan (HMP) for the site, the proposed restoration area to be located within the existing commercial forestry to the north of the site. Other pre-commencement conditions attached to this permission included the requirement for the submission of a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP), a Peat Management Plan (PMP), a Preliminary Access Management Plan (PAMP) and an updated Schedule of Mitigation including all of the mitigation identified in the EIA Report (January 2020) and SI Report (August 2020).
30. The consented development site layout is shown on **Figure 3**.

2.3.2 Ben Sca Wind Farm Extension

31. The planning application for Ben Sca Wind Farm Extension was submitted to THC in November 2021 for the construction and operation of two wind turbines with a maximum blade tip height of 149.9m and rotor blade diameter of 115m; and

associated infrastructure. The two turbines would be located to the northwest of the string of the seven consented turbines on lower ground. The application was accompanied by an EIA Report (SLR, 2021).

32. The two turbine scheme was granted planning permission (reference 21/05767/FUL) subject to conditions by THC in April 2022. In accordance with the consent for the Ben Sca Wind Farm (reference 20/00013/FUL) these conditions include the requirement to deliver peatland restoration through the submission and implementation of a Habitat Management Plan (HMP) for the site, the proposed restoration area extending the Ben Sca Wind Farm HMP area up to 38.5ha, located within the existing commercial forestry. Other pre-commencement conditions attached to the permission included the requirement for the submission of a CEMP, a CTMP, a PMP, an AMP and an updated Schedule of Mitigation including the mitigation identified in the EIA Report (November 2021).
33. The consented development site layout is shown on **Figure 3**.

2.4 Proposed Development

34. The proposed wind turbines would be up to 149.9m to blade tip. The rotor diameter of the proposed candidate wind turbines would be up to 138m. The proposed coordinates for each wind turbine are provided in **Table 1**.
35. **Table 1** also shows the proposed distance of relocation for each turbine, and the approximate direction from the consented turbine location. The Proposed Development turbine layout is illustrated on **Figure 2**; and the difference between the consented development layout and Proposed Development is shown on **Figure 3**.

Table 1: Proposed Turbine Locations

Turbine	X	Y	Elevation (m)	Distance from consented location (m)	Direction from consented location
T1 (BS-01)	133475	847759	251	No change	No change
T2 (BS-02)	133368	848019	230	94	East
T3 (BS-03)	133215	848259	217	132	Northeast
T4 (BS-04)	132964	848403	200	47	Southeast
T5 (BS-05)	132723	848561	210	124	South
T6 (BS-06)	132591	848852	193	111	South
T7 (BS-07)	132453	849123	155	122	South
T8 (BSX-01)	132262	849473	128	No change	No change
T9 (BSX-02)	132046	849718	110	No change	No change

Where BS = Ben Sca; BSX – Ben Sca Extension

2.5 Associated Infrastructure

36. It is proposed that the consented development infrastructure is amended as follows for the Proposed Development as shown on **Figure 3**:

- realignment of the internal access tracks (and associated drainage and underground cabling) and crane hardstandings to accommodate the new turbine locations;
 - increase in crane hardstanding and laydown area to accommodate the construction of the proposed turbines;
 - additional temporary construction compound area adjacent to the Ben Aketil access track; and
 - re-location of the onsite substation compound to the southern area of the site to reduce distance to the connection point to the national electricity grid network at the new Edinbane GSP. This is proposed following a change dictated by Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks who has changed the connection point for the wind farm from Dunvegan GSP to Edinbane GSP.
37. The location of the borrow pits and construction compound would not change from the consented development (20/00013/FUL).

2.6 Forestry and Habitat Management

38. In accordance with the consented HMPs for the consented development, the Proposed Development includes an HMP (**Technical Appendix 5.3: Outline HMP**) which includes proposals for felling forestry of poor growth quality and restoring the area to blanket bog habitat. The peatland restoration area would extend to 64.73ha which is 26.2ha greater than for the consented development. The area of additional peatland restoration has been identified as suitable for forest to bog management due to its connectivity to the consented HMP area and poor growth quality of the existing trees.
39. The forestry to be felled was planted in 1990 and is considered to be poor to very poor quality, due to the soil being unsuitable for tree growth as noted in the EIA Reports for both Ben Sca Wind Farm (SLR, 2020) and Ben Sca Wind Farm Extension (SLR, 2021) and followed up by **Technical Appendix 5.4: Forestry Report** included in Volume 4 of the EIA Report for the Proposed Development. Peat depths in the area of proposed felling are typically >1m. It has previously been agreed with THC and Scottish Forestry that felling is appropriate at this site, without the need for restocking and no compensatory planting is required in line with the Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal (CoWRP) as the area is to be restored to peatland, compensating for and enhancing a priority habitat.

2.7 Construction Phase

40. The construction period for the Proposed Development would be approximately 18 months, comprising:
- access road improvements;
 - site establishment;
 - forest clearance;
 - construction of haul road and site access to borrow pits;
 - construction of access tracks, crane hardstanding and building compound;

- turbine foundation construction;
- substation/storage – civil and electrical works;
- cable laying and sand for cable bedding;
- crane delivery;
- turbine delivery, erection and commissioning;
- crane demobilisation; and
- site restoration.

2.8 Operational Phase

41. The operational life of the Proposed Development would be approximately 40 years and would have a generating capacity of up to 40.8MW.
42. It is expected that the wind farm would be decommissioned and removed from site at the end of its operational life unless commercially viable to extend its life with appropriate upgrading and improvement subject to planning approval.
43. Onsite activity would be at a minimum once the site is operational with routine service and maintenance undertaken periodically.

2.9 Benefits of the Proposed Development

44. The Proposed Development would produce an average of approximately 145,000 Mega Watt hours (MWh) of electricity annually (which corresponds to a capacity factor of 40.6%) which is approximately an additional 20,000MWh generated each year. This equates to the power consumed by approximately 45,000 average UK households. This is approximately 6,500 more UK homes powered; 0.69 million tonnes of CO₂ offset over its lifetime more than the consented development (when compared to fossil fuels); and 0.21 million tonnes of CO₂ offset over its lifetime more than the consented development (when compared to a grid mix).
45. Assuming a maximum project scale of 40.8MW, the Applicant is proposing a community benefit package of up to £204,000 per annum over the 40 year life of the Proposed Development, based on a figure of £5,000 per annum per MW. This would be index linked from the commencement of operation over the 40 years using the Retail Price Index (RPI). As part of this benefit package, it is proposed that a Near Neighbours Electricity Contribution scheme be created. Two options are potentially available with option 1 providing approximately £400 per property per annum be paid direct to the properties within 4km of the Proposed Development. Option 2 could see residents within the same catchment area, capitalise the electricity bill contribution, converting this to a single lump sum of approximately £4,500 to fund or part fund measures to improve the energy efficiency and decarbonisation of their home. This is in recognition of community consultation feedback and in an effort to deliver a direct benefit to those within closest proximity as well as helping to combat fuel poverty.
46. The proposed opportunity for the local community to invest in the wind farm, and hence share the profits resulting from its operation, supports the Scottish Government's ambition to deliver lasting economic and social benefits to communities from renewable energy development in Scotland. The Applicant is already in discussions with the local communities regarding the opportunity for investment in the consented project, with the final model to be agreed in due course.

47. The Applicant held initial meetings, during the consented development application process, in 2018 with Dunvegan Community Trust, Edinbane Community Company and Struan Community Trust in conjunction with Local Energy Scotland (LES) to introduce the project, during which community shared ownership was discussed. This was followed up by a joint meeting on 14 February 2019, led by LES. The meeting discussed the options as to how shared ownership could be taken forward by the community, including the level of shared ownership on offer (currently proposed as 5%) and opportunities for Development Loan and Enablement Grant support from LES's Community & Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES). Discussions have continued with the local communities in the period following the original consent being granted, with a view to producing a detailed investment proposal during 2024.
48. Development income derived from both the community benefits scheme and shared ownership could, depending on the choices made by the communities, have a positive effect on the physical and mental well-being of local residents as well as economic benefits. The long term nature of the income would allow the community to plan ahead, to draw in other sources of match funding to maximise the benefits, and investment projects could be designed to match local priorities.
49. The choice of investment priorities for the Community Trusts is not yet known, although they are likely to be based on existing community priorities such as those identified in An Atlas of Edinbane and the Skye Local Area Action Plan 2017².
50. The Atlas of Edinbane is a comprehensive assessment of needs and priorities for the Edinbane community which sets out recommendations for its long term sustainable development. The Skye Local Area Action Plan covers the whole of the Isle of Skye and seeks to address issues of socio-economic importance such as community connectivity and increasing employment opportunities locally.
51. Based on the information provided in the Skye Local Area Action Plan, the type of projects that might be considered for community investment can be grouped in the following areas:
- improved access to local services for residents and visitors;
 - sustainable development of community assets in particular those that support training and partnership working;
 - supporting the delivery of increased employment opportunities locally through new business start-ups and existing business diversification/ activities;
 - improved access for residents and visitors (physical and knowledge based) to cultural, natural and heritage assets; and
 - increased partnership working between groups (within and across areas, including intergenerational partnerships).
52. Many of the priority groups identified in the Action Plan are considered to deliver increased employment opportunities, increased partnership working, and improvements to the visitor experience, and there is a general desire to support initiatives that develop training and skills. The Proposed Development would tie into THC's Community Wealth Building Strategy, as it redirects more wealth back into the local economy and puts greater control of assets and resources into the

² An Atlas of Edinbane | Edinbane Community Company

hands of local people, which could in turn lead to more opportunities for local enterprises, job growth and opportunities for progression, thus boosting social inclusion and empowerment, and creating environmentally sustainable local economies, supporting the achievement of Net Zero targets.

3.0 Sustainable Design and Access Statement

53. A Design and Access Statement (DAS) is required for ‘major’ developments by Regulation 13 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Scotland) Regulations 2013 and Section 32(3) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, as amended.
54. This section of this report includes reference to sustainable design in line with THC’s Sustainable Design Guide Supplementary Guidance (SG) (adopted in January 2013) and addresses the criteria detailed within the Sustainable Design Checklist in Section 6 of the SG.
55. Policy 14 of NPF4 states that development proposals should be “*designed to improve the quality of an area whether in urban or rural locations and regardless of scale*”. The preparation of this Sustainable Design and Access Statement (SDAS) has had regard to the design policies of the adopted Development Plan, the SG and Planning Advice Note 68: Design Statements.

3.1 Location

56. The site benefits from extant planning permission for nine wind turbines and has therefore been tested and found to be an appropriate location for onshore wind energy development. As noted in Chapter 2: Site Description and Design Evolution of the Ben Sca Wind Farm EIA Report (SLR, 2020a), a number of factors were initially considered when selecting the site for wind farm development including:
- there are no international or national statutory designations for landscape and nature conservation in, or within immediate proximity of the site;
 - the site is located within an area which the Local Development Plan previously identified as having potential for wind farm development;
 - initial desk-based studies and wind monitoring on site confirms that there is a very good wind resource and the site is available for wind energy development;
 - available connection to the electrical grid system with potential to benefit from the Skye Reinforcement Project, a proposed 132kV overhead line running from Fort Augustus to Dunvegan, with a new substation at Edinbane;
 - it has good access from the public road network via an existing wind farm track; and
 - the site is a reasonable distance away from the nearest residential properties.

3.2 Design Principles

57. Following on from the constraint led design evolution process identified in Chapter 2: Site Description and Design Evolution of the Ben Sca Wind Farm EIA Report (SLR, 2020a) and Chapter 1: Introduction and Project Description of the Ben Sca Wind Farm Extension EIA Report (SLR, 2020b), the environmental constraints on site were refreshed and updated as follows:
- ornithological surveys (vantage points, breeding birds and raptor surveys) undertaken from January to December 2023;
 - vegetation Survey (UKHab and National Vegetation Classification (NVC) survey) undertaken in October 2023;

- additional phase 2 peat data collected in September 2023 and February 2024; and
 - protected mammals survey undertaken in January 2024.
58. The results of these updated surveys, along with the environmental constraints information collected during data collection for the consented development was analysed to refine the infrastructure alignment for the Proposed Development to ensure a ‘best fit’ within the environment of the site. All efforts have been made to avoid significant effects through positioning infrastructure outwith constraints and incorporating appropriate buffer distances from environmental receptors to avoid or reduce effects on the environment. The onsite constraints are shown on **Figure 5**.
59. The Proposed Development turbine layout has aimed to ensure continuity with the linear form of the consented development following the ridgeline of Ben Sca, to ensure that views of the Proposed Development would appear similar to those previously assessed and consented. Their spacing has been designed to be consistent within the turbine array to maximise the wind energy that can be captured. A series of comparative wirelines are presented in **Volumes 3b and 3c** of this EIA Report to show the differences between the consented and Proposed Development from each of the key viewpoints.
60. The dimensions of the proposed turbines have been made consistent across the site with a 149.9m tip height and up to 138m rotor diameter to provide continuity along the ridgeline. These dimensions are consistent with the adjacent proposed Balmeanach Wind Farm located to the southeast of the site to provide visual consistency.

3.3 Sustainable Design Criteria

61. The sustainable design criteria included in Section 6: Sustainable Design Checklist of THC’s Sustainable Design Guide SG (2013), which are considered to be in accordance with Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) Policy 29 Sustainable Development, are listed in **Table 2**, along with details of how each criteria has been addressed for the Proposed Development.

Table 2: Sustainable Design Checklist

Sustainable Design Criteria	How the Proposed Development has Addressed each Criteria
1. Layout, scale, proportion, materials, construction and finishing	The site has undergone an intensive programme of environmental surveys from 2018 to 2024 to ensure that any onsite constraints have been fully taken into account. The resulting layout, scale of the wind turbines, materials, construction methods and finishing of the Proposed development are fully considered and reported in the EIA Report.
2. Landscaping	The effects on the resulting landscape are provided in Chapter 3: Landscape and Visual of the EIA Report (Volume 2). The Proposed Development turbine layout has aimed to ensure continuity with the linear form of the consented development following the ridgeline of Ben Sca, to ensure that views of the Proposed Development would appear similar to those previously assessed and consented.
3. Cultural heritage	The effects on the cultural heritage of the site are provided in Chapter 7: Cultural Heritage and Archaeology of the EIA Report (Volume 2). The layout of the Proposed Development has avoided any known

Sustainable Design Criteria	How the Proposed Development has Addressed each Criteria
	heritage features on site through design and no significant effects are predicted.
4. Materials	<p>The Principal Contractor would source the most suitable materials for use on the site ensuring that secondary and recycled sources are considered.</p> <p>Technical Appendix 1.1: Outline Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) of the EIA Report (Volume 4) outlines where any materials could be recycled and reused on site.</p>
5. Natural heritage	<p>The effects on the ecology and ornithology of the site are provided in Chapter 5: Ecology and Chapter 6: Ornithology of the EIA Report (Volume 2). There are no ecological or ornithological designations within the site (Figure 4). Site specific surveys have informed the design and assessment of the Proposed Development and no significant effects are predicted.</p>
6. Enhancing wildlife	<p>Technical Appendix 5.3: Outline Habitat Management Plan of the EIA Report (Volume 4) outlines the objective to restore and manage c.64.73ha of peatland habitat within the afforested area to the northwest corner of the site. This would provide compensation and enhancement of peatland habitat beyond that of the consented development. Additional recommendations in relation to ornithological monitoring are also proposed.</p>
7. Energy efficiency	<p>A carbon balance calculator is provided in Technical Appendix 9.4 the EIA Report (Volume 4). The calculations of total carbon dioxide (CO₂) emission savings and payback time for the Proposed Development indicates that the overall payback period will be around 1.8 years when compared to the grid fuel mix of electricity generation. This means that the Proposed Development is anticipated to take around 1.8 years to repay the carbon exchange to the atmosphere (the CO₂ debt) through construction; the site would in effect be in a net gain situation following this time period and can then claim to contribute to national emissions reduction objectives thereafter for its remaining operational life.</p> <p>It is predicted that the increased output of the Proposed Development will provide enough carbon-free electricity to meet the needs of around 45,000 UK homes and offset approximately 2.46 million tonnes of CO₂ over its lifetime (when compared to fossil fuels); and 1.20 million tonnes of CO₂ over its lifetime (when compared to a grid mix). For reference this is approximately 6,500 more UK homes powered; 0.69 million tonnes of CO₂ offset over its lifetime more than the consented development (when compared to fossil fuels); and 0.21 million tonnes of CO₂ offset over its lifetime more than the consented development (when compared to a grid mix).</p>
8. Renewable energy	<p>The site benefits from exceptional annual average wind speeds, releasing the potential to deliver some of the highest energy yield and associated capacity factor from a wind energy site in the UK. The Proposed Development aims to maximise the renewable energy yield of the site, to reach an estimated annual output of 145,000MWh, (approximately an additional 20,000MWh generated each year than the consented development) which represents an increase of circa 16% in output over the consented development.</p>

Sustainable Design Criteria	How the Proposed Development has Addressed each Criteria
9. Foul wastewater treatment	Technical Appendix 1.1: Outline Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) of the EIA Report (Volume 4) outlines good practice measures which will be employed on site throughout construction in relation to wastewater. There will be no foul wastewater created during operation and the Proposed Development would not be connected to the public sewer.
10. Flooding	Flooding is considered in Chapter 6: Hydrology of the EIA Report (Volume 2). No significant risk of flooding has been identified. Drainage from the site would include elements of SuDS design as outlined in Technical Appendix 1.1: Outline CEMP of the EIA Report (Volume 4).
11. Surface water runoff	Technical Appendix 1.1: Outline CEMP of the EIA Report (Volume 4) outlines good practice measures which will be employed on site throughout construction in relation to surface water runoff.
12. Water conservation	Technical Appendix 1.1: Outline CEMP of the EIA Report (Volume 4) outlines good practice measures which will be employed on site throughout construction in relation to water.
13. Waste and recycling	Technical Appendix 1.1: Outline CEMP of the EIA Report (Volume 4) outlines good practice measures which will be employed on site throughout construction in relation to waste and recycling.
14. Site management	Technical Appendix 1.1: Outline CEMP of the EIA Report (Volume 4) outlines good practice measures which will be employed on site throughout construction.
15. Transport	Effects on traffic and transport are provided in Technical Appendix 9.1: Transport Statement of the EIA Report (Volume 4). Construction effects on the surrounding road network would be managed through a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP), an outline of which is provided in Technical Appendix 9.2: CTMP of the EIA Report (Volume 4).
16. Pedestrians and cyclists	Technical Appendix 8.1: Preliminary Access Management Plan (AMP) of the EIA Report (Volume 4) outlines the principles and procedures which would be put in place to address any potential impacts to public access during the construction and decommissioning phases of the wind farm. It outlines provisions for public access management during the operational life of the Proposed Development, as well as aspirations for future long-term access to the wider area.
17. Efficient use of land and existing buildings	The design of the Proposed Development has taken into consideration minimisation of earthworks and reuse of soils on site. Technical Appendix 1.1: Outline CEMP of the EIA Report (Volume 4) outlines good practice measures which will be employed on site throughout construction and Technical Appendix: 6.1: Peat Management Plan provides details on the approximate predicted volumes of peat that would be excavated during construction of the permanent infrastructure, the characteristics of the peat that would be excavated, and the principles of how and where this excavated peat would be stored, reused and managed.
18. Design for flexibility	n/a
19. Private amenity space	n/a

Sustainable Design Criteria	How the Proposed Development has Addressed each Criteria
20. Accessibility of community facilities	<p>n/a</p> <p>It is noted that the Proposed Development is being brought forward with the opportunity for community shared ownership. It is proposed that the community shared ownership opportunity which has been developed for the consented development will apply to the Proposed Development, amended to suit the revised installed capacity and increased yield.</p> <p>A Community Benefit Fund would be made available to the community, offered on the basis of a payment per MW of installed capacity at the Scottish Government recommended rate at the time of commissioning the proposed wind farm. At present the recommended rate is £5,000 per MW. It is estimated that, depending on the type of investment selected, the community benefit fund alone would accrue benefits to the local economy of approximately £8.16 million over the 40 year life of the wind farm; which is £2.49 million greater than for the consented development.</p> <p>As part of its Community Benefit package and subject to agreement with the local communities, a contribution to electricity bills to residents within a distance of the turbines to be agreed could be considered over the 40 year life of the wind farm. Part of this offer also looks to entice properties and communities to increase their energy efficiency and reduce their carbon emissions by offering a capitalised lump sum to enable this.</p>

3.4 Design Rationale

62. The rationale for the amendment to the consented development is to:

- maximise the renewable energy yield, to reach an estimated annual output of 145,000MWh, (approximately an additional 20,000MWh generated each year). This represents an increase of circa 16% in output over the consented development. This increased output will provide enough carbon-free electricity to meet the needs of around 45,000 UK homes and offset approximately 2.46 million tonnes of CO₂ over its lifetime; and 1.20 million tonnes of CO₂ over its lifetime (when compared to a grid mix). For reference this is approximately 6,500 more UK homes powered; 0.69 million tonnes of CO₂ offset over its lifetime more than the consented development (when compared to fossil fuels); and 0.21 million tonnes of CO₂ offset over its lifetime more than the consented development (when compared to a grid mix);
- maximise the use of the secured grid capacity contributing further to Scottish Government net-zero emission targets³;
- ensure that the candidate turbine can be sourced and installed; and
- to reduce distance to the connection point to the national electricity grid network, following change dictated by SSEN (connection point changed from Dunvegan Grid Supply Point (GSP) to Edinbane GSP).

³ Net zero emissions of all greenhouse gases by 2045 ('Securing a green recovery on a path to net zero: climate change plan 2018–2032 – update')

3.5 Design Evolution

63. As shown on **Figure 4** and **Figure 5**, the known onsite constraints have been used to inform the design of the Proposed Development to achieve a 'best fit' within the environment of the site whilst trying to achieve maximum yield and constructability to help to meet the Scottish Government's net-zero targets⁴.
64. As was the approach throughout the development of the consented development, where potentially significant effects have been identified, all efforts have been made to avoid these through evolution of the design by positioning infrastructure out with constraints and embedding mitigation through design, including, but not limited to:
- considering the size and scale of the Proposed Development appropriate to the location;
 - sensitive siting of the proposed infrastructure incorporating appropriate buffer distances from environmental receptors to avoid or reduce effects on the environment;
 - considering the appearance, finish and colour of wind turbines and the control buildings in accordance with NatureScot Guidance 'Siting and Designing Wind Farms in the Landscape', V3a (NatureScot, 2017);
 - design of the tracks to minimise cut and fill and promote the use of existing infrastructure on site, reducing the footprint of the proposed infrastructure and mitigating the landscape and visual effects; and
 - potential for up to 50m micrositing of infrastructure during construction to ensure the best possible location is chosen based on site investigations.
65. The changes to the consented development are as follows:
- increase blade tip height for seven turbines by up to 14.9m (from 135m to 149.9m);
 - increase the rotor size for all nine turbines by up to 23m (from 115m to 138m);
 - increase spacing to improve yield and efficiency, minor adjustment to turbine locations, maximum up to 132m movement from consented positions (Ben Sca Extension turbines remain in same locations as consented) with associated adjustments to the access tracks and crane hardstanding to accommodate the new locations;
 - re-location of the onsite substation to the southern area of the site;
 - addition of second temporary construction compound adjacent to Ben Aketil Wind Farm track;
 - increase of net generation capacity from consented 37.8MW to up to 40.8MW to maximise use of the available grid connection (MWh); and
 - increase operational life from 30 years to 40 years.
66. The difference between the consented and Proposed Development site layouts is shown on **Figure 3**.

⁴ Net zero emissions of all greenhouse gases by 2045 ('Securing a green recovery on a path to net zero: climate change plan 2018–2032 – update')

3.6 Access

3.6.1 Access to the Site

67. The proposed site access is shown on **Figure 6**, with the abnormal load route to site shown on **Figure 7**.
68. There is no change proposed to the site access arrangements from those consented. Access to the site would be from the A850, west of Edinbane, using the existing site entrance constructed for the Ben Aketil Wind Farm.
69. The proposed abnormal load route required to transport turbine components to the site would also remain unchanged, and begin at the Port Kyle of Lochalsh and end on the A850 (at the site entrance). The approach to the site would be taken via the A87 trunk road and the A850-Dunvegan Road. A similar route has previously been employed for construction of the neighbouring Edinbane and Ben Aketil Wind Farms.

3.6.2 Internal Access Tracks

70. Minor realignment of the internal access tracks (and associated drainage and underground cabling) is proposed to accommodate the new turbine locations.
71. 1.8km of the existing Ben Aketil access track would be used as part of the Proposed Development. Approximately 4.5km of new access tracks with a typical 5m running width (wider on bends) and associated drainage is proposed. 167m of track is anticipated to be floating track where consistent peat depths of 1-1.5m or greater are identified along with shallow topography in the area (below 5%).
72. The access tracks would be retained throughout the operational life of the Proposed Development to enable maintenance of the turbines and replacement of any turbine components.
73. The proposed routes for the site access tracks have been designed to minimise watercourse crossings by a combination of avoidance and by using existing crossings wherever possible.

3.6.3 Public Access – Pedestrians and Cyclists

74. Public access to the Proposed Development would be restricted during the construction of the wind farm for obvious health and safety reasons due to construction activities, the movement of heavy plant and the erection of turbines. When operational, however, while no formal access arrangements would be implemented, members of the public would be able to access the site on foot or bicycle and make use of the access tracks under the provisions of the Land Reform Act.
75. During periods of maintenance, access by the public could be restricted depending on the nature of the maintenance activity.

3.6.4 Public Access – Vehicular

76. Once the Proposed Development is operational (if consent granted) vehicular access will be limited to individuals directly involved in the maintenance of the wind farm, the landowners and their agents, and emergency vehicles.

3.7 Environmental Considerations

77. The planning application is accompanied by an EIA Report which includes an assessment of the following environmental topics:
- landscape and visual;
 - ornithology;
 - ecology;
 - hydrology, hydrogeology and soils;
 - cultural heritage and archaeology;
 - socio-economics and land use;
 - transport;
 - noise and vibration; and
 - other considerations including shadow flicker, aviation, telecommunications and carbon balance.
78. **Chapter 10: Schedule of Mitigation** of the EIA Report (Volume 2) provides a schedule of mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures that have been proposed throughout the EIA Report to prevent, reduce or offset the effects of the Proposed Development on the environment. Mitigation measures have been integral to the design evolution of the Proposed Development. A series of environmental and technical constraint design reviews were undertaken to minimise potential significant environmental impacts prior to finalising the final design of the Proposed Development.
79. **Chapter 11: Summary of Effects** of the EIA Report (Volume 2) provides a clear comparison of the residual effects for each environmental topic assessed for the consented development and the Proposed Development, showing the minimal differences in conclusions reached on overall environmental effects arising from the two developments at the site.

4.0 Planning Policy Assessment

4.1 Introduction

80. The primacy of the Development Plan in determining planning applications is established by Sections 25 and 37 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended). These provisions require decision makers to determine planning applications in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
81. This section of the Planning Statement assesses the Proposed Development against the relevant provisions of the Development Plan and other relevant material considerations.
82. Section 13(2)(1) of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 amended Section 24 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 to state that the Development Plan for an area is to be taken as consisting of the provisions of the National Planning Framework (NPF) alongside any local development plan for the time being applicable to the area. For the purposes of this application, the Development Plan for the Proposed Development therefore comprises NPF4, the Highland Wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) (2012), the adopted West Highlands and Islands Local Development Plan (WestPlan) (2019) and relevant supplementary guidance including the Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG) 2016.
83. Section 24 of the 1997 Planning Act as amended by Section 13 of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 provides that in the event of any incompatibility between the provision of the NPF and a provision of the local development plan, whichever of them is the later in date is to prevail. That includes where a local development plan is silent on an issue that is now provided for in NPF4.

3.2 Development Plan Policy

3.2.1 National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)

84. NPF4 was adopted by the Scottish Government on 13 February 2023 and now forms part of the statutory Development Plan for planning applications made under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended).
85. Annex A of NPF4 details how it is to be used in decision making and makes clear that it is to be read as a whole. This was reiterated in a letter issued by the Chief Planner and Planning Minister on 08 February 2023, which recognised that conflicts between individual policies are to be expected, and that factors for and against development will be weighed up in the balance of planning judgement.
86. Eighteen national developments are identified in total in NPF4. These are defined as “*significant developments of national importance that will help to deliver our spatial strategy*”. NPF4 identifies that “*national development status does not grant planning permission for the development*” but does clarify that “*their designation means that the principle of the development does not need to be agreed in later consenting processes.*”
87. Annex B of NPF4 provides further details and Statements of Need for each of the 18 national developments. National Development 3 is for Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure, for which NPF4 states that: “*This national development supports renewable electricity generation, repowering, and expansion of the electricity grid.*”

A large and rapid increase in electricity generation from renewable sources will be essential for Scotland to meet its net zero emissions targets. Certain types of renewable electricity generation will also be required, which will include energy storage technology and capacity, to provide the vital services, including flexible response, that a zero-carbon network will require. Generation is for domestic consumption as well as for export to the UK and beyond, with new capacity helping to decarbonise heat, transport and industrial energy demand. This has the potential to support jobs and business investment, with wider economic benefits.”

88. National Development 3 is identified as being applicable to the whole of Scotland, including the North and West Coast and Islands within which the Proposed Development is located. Although Appendix B clarifies that only onshore wind farms with a capacity exceeding 50MW would qualify as being classified as of national development status under National Development 3, it is considered that the inclusion of renewable energy projects as national development, together with the more specific policies detailed below, establishes a clear needs case for the development of renewable energy projects at any scale.

NPF4 Spatial Strategy – Part 1

89. Part 1 of NPF4 is ‘A National Spatial Strategy for Scotland 2045’, removing the previously adopted spatial framework for Onshore Wind Farms and replacing it with a strategic spatial strategy which supports onshore wind energy generation and associated grid infrastructure in Scotland. The spatial strategy is to support the delivery of:
- ‘Sustainable Places’: “*where we reduce emissions, restore and better connect biodiversity*”;
 - ‘Liveable Places’: “*where we can all live better, healthier lives*”; and
 - ‘Productive places’: “*where we have a greener, fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy*”.
90. The delivery of ‘Sustainable Places’ is considered most relevant to the Proposed Development. The commentary on Page 6 of NPF4 notes that “*every decision on our future development must contribute to make Scotland a more sustainable place*” whilst also encouraging the “*expansion of renewable energy*” in order to meet greenhouse gas emissions targets.
91. NPF4 also recognises that “*nature recovery must be at the heart of future places*” and that positive biodiversity effects must be secured for future development.
92. A key point to note is the foundation role that the climate emergency and nature recovery have in the NPF. Tackling both issues are crucial to the outcome of many of the NPF4 policies. As echoed by Policy 1 of NPF4 (discussed in further details in **Table 3**), the climate emergency and nature recovery are to be given significant weight when determining proposals. This represents a fundamental shift in planning policy response to climate change. It provides clarity to decision makers on the amount of weight that should be applied to these crucial topics when determining planning applications and this policy also recognises the inter-related nature of these twin issues.

NPF4 – National Planning Policy – Part 2

93. Part 2 of NPF4 sets out national planning policies by topic related to the three themes of sustainable, liveable and productive places. In terms of development management and the application of national level policies, NPF4 states:

“The policy sections are for use in the determination of planning applications. The policies should be read as a whole. Planning decisions must be made in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. It is for the decision maker to determine what weight to attach to policies on a case by case basis. Where a policy states that development will be supported, it is in principle, and it is for the decision maker to take into account all other relevant policies”.

94. Page 36 of NPF4 introduces the ‘sustainable places’ policies which are the policies most applicable to the Proposed Development. The principal policies to consider for the proposed wind energy development are **Policy 1: Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises** and **Policy 11: Energy**.
95. Policies 1 and 11 are considered first in this section, with other relevant policies then considered in numerical order thereafter.
- Policy 1: Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises**
96. This policy represents a fundamental change in Scottish planning policy and prescribes the amount of weight that should be applied to the global climate and nature crises in assessing development proposals; these issues must now form priorities for the decision maker. As stated in Page 8 of NPF4, significant weight is to be given to *“the global climate emergency in order to ensure that it is now recognised as a priority in all plans and decisions.”*
97. Renewable energy is one of the best tools available to tackle the global climate crisis and given the nature of the Proposed Development and its potential contribution towards Scottish Government targets, significant weight should be given to this policy in the overall assessment of whether the Proposed Development accords with the Development Plan.
98. The natural environment on which the Proposed Development is to be located has been a key consideration in the design of the proposed amendments to the consented wind farm and the final design has sought to balance competing environmental and technical considerations. Given the extent of peatland habitat on site, it has not been possible to avoid this habitat, however, informed by a comprehensive peat probing exercise and iterative design process, the development has sought to position turbines and infrastructure on areas of shallower peat, avoid flush habitats and sensitive bog habitats as far as possible.
99. To compensate for the loss of peatland and associated heathland habitat, an OHMP has been proposed (**Technical Appendix 5.3**) which aims to restore an area of degraded habitat, increase habitat connectivity with adjoining habitat management areas of adjacent Wind Farms and adjacent bog/heath habitats. The OHMP proposes to expand upon the area of forest to bog restoration for the consented development and improves connectivity with the HMP areas for the proposed Balmeanach Wind Farm and Ben Aketil Repowering Wind Farm.
100. On this basis, it is considered that Proposed Development can draw strong policy support from NPF4 Policy 1.

Table 3: Analysis of NPF4 Policy 1 against the Proposed Development

Relevant Policy Text	Analysis
<p><i>“When considering all development proposals significant weight will be given to the global climate and nature crises.”</i></p>	<p>The Proposed Development would produce an average of approximately 145,000 Mega Watt hours (MWh) of electricity annually (which corresponds to a capacity factor of 40.6%) which is approximately an additional 20,000MWh generated each year. This equates to the power consumed by approximately 45,000 average UK households. This is approximately 6,500 more UK homes powered and 0.69 million tonnes of CO₂ offset over its lifetime more than the consented development (when compared to fossil fuels); and 0.21 million tonnes of CO₂ offset over its lifetime more than the consented development (when compared to a grid mix).</p> <p>It is anticipated that the wind farm would be connected to the grid in 2028 and would therefore make a meaningful contribution to the Scottish Government target for a minimum installed capacity of 20GW of onshore wind by 2030 and net zero by 2045, key timescales for the Scottish Government.</p> <p>The carbon calculator which accompanies the EIA Report as Technical Appendix 9.4 predicts that the Proposed Development would displace 2.46 million tonnes of CO₂ over the lifetime of the wind farm (assumed to be 40 years). It is expected that the overall payback time of a wind farm of the scale and high level of efficiency of the Proposed Development would be approximately 1.8 years when compared to a fossil fuel mix of energy generation. This means that the Proposed Development is anticipated to take around 1.8 years to repay the carbon exchange to the atmosphere (the CO₂ debt) through construction; the site would in effect be in a net gain situation following this time period and can then claim to contribute to national emissions reduction objectives thereafter for its remaining operational life.</p> <p>With regard to the ‘nature crises,’ the findings of the EIA Report related to Ecology and Ornithology are relevant. The Ornithology assessment has concluded that subject to mitigation measures and best practice techniques being implemented on site, there would be no significant effects upon ornithological receptors during the construction, operation or decommissioning of the Proposed Development.</p> <p>With regard to ecology, a programme of peatland restoration has been proposed (Technical Appendix 5.3: OHMP) in order to compensate for the habitat loss of peatland and heathland habitat as a result of the Proposed Development as well as to provide for significant biodiversity enhancement. It takes into consideration the previous consented OHMPs and proposes additional habitat restoration and management measures in relation to the Proposed Development, which would remain in place for the lifetime of the scheme.</p> <p>The habitat management area is proposed on an area considered to be degraded habitat (due to inappropriate tree planting on peatland) and would be adjacent to the proposed habitat management area for the Balmeanach Wind Farm providing a significant area of restored bog with habitat connectivity with other bog / heath habitats.</p>

Relevant Policy Text	Analysis
	The OHMP for the Proposed Development relates primarily to blanket bog, however it also includes management goals aimed at providing habitat for breeding and foraging waders, raptors and passerine and recommendations for a flexible programme ornithological monitoring to be coordinated with the adjacent the adjacent consented Glen Ullinish Wind Farm and the proposed Balmeanach, Ben Aketil Repowering and Glen Ullinish II Wind Farms if consented in due course.

Policy 11: Energy

101. The 'policy principle' for Policy 11 is *"to encourage, promote and facilitate all forms of renewable energy development onshore and offshore. This includes energy generation, storage, new and replacement transmission and distribution infrastructure and emerging low-carbon and zero emissions technologies including hydrogen and carbon capture utilisation and storage (CCUS)."*
102. The Proposed Development is a renewable energy development for the generation of electricity and as such supports the principle of Policy 11.
103. The 'policy outcome' i.e. the desired outcome of Policy 11 is the *"expansion of renewable, low-carbon and zero emissions technologies."*
104. Policy 11(a) provides in-principle support for all forms of renewable development proposals, including wind farms. The Proposed Development, being a renewable energy development, therefore has in-principle support in terms of policy 11(a).
105. Policy 11(e) sets out that the project design and proposed mitigation will address how a number of environmental impacts have been addressed. It goes on to state that in considering these impacts in the overall planning balance, significant weight will be placed on the contribution of the proposal to renewable energy generation targets and on greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets. This is a reiteration of the degree of weight that is to be afforded to contributions that the Proposed Development can make to renewable energy targets and greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets, both of which would be contributed to by the Proposed Development and have been discussed in further detail in **Section 2.10** In respect of Policy 11(e), the EIA Report sets out a robust assessment of the likely potential impacts that will arise from the proposed development.
106. Policy 11(e)(ii) recognises that significant landscape and visual impacts are to be expected for some forms of renewable energy. Given the nature of wind turbines and their visibility in the landscape, this is an important consideration in the decision-making process with regard to potential landscape and visual impacts arising from this form of energy generation. The policy goes on to state that *"where impacts are localised and/ or appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they will generally be considered to be acceptable."* This is a significant policy departure from Scottish planning policy pre-NPF4 and provides a strong stance for commercial scale wind energy developments where landscape and visual impacts are often inevitable.
107. Significant impacts are predicted on three viewpoints within the Landscape and Visual Assessment. As Policy 11(e)(ii) recognises the potential for significant landscape and visual effects for certain types of renewable energy development, it is considered that for the purposes of Policy 11, the Proposed Development has strong policy support. No other significant impacts are predicted on the other environmental elements assessed in relation to Policy 11 in **Table 4**.
108. For the reasons set out in **Table 4** the Proposed Development is considered to be acceptable in relation to all of Policy 11's environmental and technical topic criteria.

Table 4: Analysis of NPF4 Policy 11 against the Proposed Development

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis
<p>Policy 11(a) <i>Development proposals for all forms of renewable, low-carbon and zero emissions technologies will be supported. These include:</i></p> <p>i) <i>wind farms including repowering, extending, expanding and extending the life of existing wind farms;</i></p>	<p>The principle of the Proposed Development, a wind farm which generates renewable energy from a low carbon and zero emission technology, is supported by this policy.</p>
<p>Policy 11(b) <i>Development proposals for wind farms in National Parks and National Scenic Areas will not be supported.</i></p>	<p>The Proposed Development is not located in a National Park or National Scenic Area.</p>
<p>Policy 11(c) <i>Development proposals will only be supported where they maximise net economic impact, including local and community socio-economic benefits such as employment, associated business and supply chain opportunities.</i></p>	<p>Chapter 8: Socio-economics and Land Use of the EIA Report sets out the predicted socio-economic benefits of the Proposed Development, as detailed in Section 2.10. Key points include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Proposed Development is being brought forward with the opportunity for community shared ownership. The preferred model for shared ownership in the project is through revenue (profit) sharing. • It is estimated that, assuming a maximum project scale of 40.8MW, depending on the type of investment selected, the Community Benefit Fund alone would accrue benefits to the local economy of approximately £204,000 per annum over the 40 year life of the Proposed Development, based on a figure of £5,000 per annum per MW. This would be index linked from the commencement of operation over the 40 years using the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The proposed opportunity for the local community to invest in the wind farm, and hence share the profits resulting from its operation, supports the Scottish Government’s ambition to deliver lasting economic and social benefits to communities from renewable energy development in Scotland. The Applicant is already in discussions with the local communities regarding the opportunity for investment (assisted by Local Energy Scotland), with the final model to be agreed in due course.

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As part of this benefit package, it is proposed that a Near Neighbours Electricity Contribution scheme be created. • Development income derived from both the community benefits scheme and shared ownership could, depending on the choices made by the communities, have a positive effect on the physical and mental well-being of local residents as well as economic benefits. The long term nature of the income would allow the community to plan ahead, to draw in other sources of match funding to maximise the benefits, and investment projects could be designed to match local priorities. • The choice of investment priorities for the Community Trusts is not yet known, although they are likely to be based on existing community priorities such as those identified in An Atlas of Edinbane (published by the Edinbane Community Company) and the Skye Local Area Action Plan 2017⁵. • The construction period is expected to last approximately 18 months and would benefit the local economy through expenditure on purchases of accommodation, food, drink, fuel, etc. that are needed to sustain the construction workforce. These beneficial effects would be experienced mainly by businesses within the tourism sector, or those that are partly dependent on tourism for their income e.g. the retail sector. • In order to manage the effects of construction worker accommodation on the local tourism economy (including with other wind farm developments), the outline CEMP (Technical Appendix 1.1) includes provision for an Accommodation Strategy to be agreed with THC prior to construction commencing to ensure that sufficient accommodation capacity would be available at peak times to avoid displacement of tourism visitors.

⁵ [An Atlas of Edinbane | Edinbane Community Company](#)

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is expected that there could be between three and four direct jobs and between seven and nine indirect jobs created in the operational and maintenance supply chain for the Proposed Development located within the Wider Study Area (WSA). In terms of the local direct and indirect jobs creation, the overall total number of full time equivalent jobs that could be created in THC area is between 10 and 13. Given that there are around 128,000 jobs located in the WSA, this stimulus to local job creation is judged to be negligible and not significant. • Gross Value Added (GVA) with a gross total of £2.2 million is predicted to be generated by the project in the economy of the WSA (The Highland Council area of administration) during the development, construction, and commissioning phase. This is equivalent to £1.4 million per annum over the construction period. • With respect to employment, a total of 32 person-years of net additional temporary employment is predicted to be generated in the WSA economy during the construction phase of the proposed project (averaging 21 p.a.). • The Applicant is committed to employing good practice measures with regard to maximising local procurement such as those set out in the Renewables UK Good Practice Guidance 2014: 'Local Supply Chain Opportunities in Onshore Wind' (RenewablesUK, 2014). As part of its Local Contractor Policy, the Applicant intends to establish a presence on Skye long before construction starts so that local suppliers are aware of opportunities. A number of 'Meet the Supplier' events would be organised well in advance of the main tender process commencing to ensure that local businesses are aware of opportunities to bid for contracts.

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis
<p>Policy 11(e)(i) <i>In addition, project design and mitigation will demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed:</i> i. <i>impacts on communities and individual dwellings, including, residential amenity, visual impact, noise and shadow flicker;</i></p>	<p>Given that previous Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA) studies for the consented development have considered properties within 3.5km of the consented development in detail, an RVAA for the Proposed Development (Technical Appendix 3.4 of the EIA Report) has taken account of the findings of those studies to consider effects on residential amenity on: Upper Edinbane (south and central), Upper Glen and Coishletter Lodge (which is financially involved in the project). Overall, it concludes that effects on Upper Glen would be unchanged from the consented development, as the blade tip heights and positions of the two extension turbines (which are closest to the property) would remain unchanged, and effects on Upper Edinbane (south and central) and Coishletter Lodge would not exceed the RVA threshold. As such, effects would not be of a nature and/or magnitude that could potentially affect living conditions at any property to the point it becomes an unattractive place to live, when judged objectively in the public interest.</p> <p>Visual impact is addressed in relation to Policy 11(e)(ii) below.</p> <p>Chapter 9: Other Considerations of the EIA Report summarises the findings of the noise impact assessment for the Proposed Development, reported in Technical Appendix 9.3. The assessment concludes that wind turbine noise emission levels do not exceed the consented noise limits and thereby, the effects would be not significant.</p> <p>Potential shadow flicker effects for the Proposed Development have been considered within Chapter 9: Other Considerations of the EIA Report. No significant shadow flicker effects from the Proposed Development would be experienced by residential receptors This conclusion is in accordance with the previous conclusions of the consented development.</p>
<p>Policy 11(e)(ii) <i>In addition, project design and mitigation will demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed:</i> ii. <i>significant landscape and visual impacts, recognising that such impacts are to be expected for some forms of renewable energy. Where impacts are localised and/or appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they will generally be considered to be acceptable;</i></p>	<p>Technical Appendix 3.3 of the EIA Report sets out the Viewpoint Assessment of the Proposed Development. Significant adverse effects have been identified at three viewpoints: Edinbane, Kildonan and Flashader, all of which lie within 6km of the Proposed Development. This is in comparison to predicted significant effects at four viewpoints for the consented development. The increased tip height has the effect of creating an array of more even appearance in views from the southwest and northeast and significant effects remain localised to within 6km of the Proposed Development.</p>

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis
	<p>Overall, the viewpoint assessment reported in Chapter 3: Landscape and Visual concludes that the visual effects of the Proposed Development would be limited by the context, particularly in relation to operational and consented wind farms. As with effects on landscape character, changes to views would be moderated by the existing presence of operational wind farms. Effects would be greatest to the northeast as Ben Aketil is mostly screened by terrain in views from this direction and the Proposed Development spans across the elevated skyline in views from lower lying settlements and roads.</p> <p>The landscape and visual assessment acknowledges that there would be some adverse effects experienced within parts of Greshornish Special Landscape Area (SLA), but that these effects would not be significant and would not affect the integrity of the SLA.</p> <p>There would be no significant effects on landscape character arising from the Proposed Development. This arises as a result of the relatively low sensitivity of the host character type (LCT 359 Upland Sloping Moorland) and the existing influence on nearby Edinbane and Ben Aketil Wind Farms on the host character type and landscape character in the surrounding area.</p> <p>The cumulative assessment reported in Chapter 3 considers the Proposed Development in combination with operational and consented wind development, repowering/replacement schemes, the proposed Balmeanach Wind Farm and the proposed Waternish Wind Farm. In general, the effects of adding the Proposed Development to the schemes included in each of the scenarios would remain much the same as for the Proposed Development in addition to the baseline, the only changes to significant effects would be that effects on visual receptors at Kildonan and Flashader would reduce to become not significant in the context of a consent for Ben Aketil Repowering Wind Farm or Edinbane Repowering Wind Farm (or both).</p>

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis
	<p>As with the consented development, the local landform of the surrounding undulating moorland would help to restrict views of the Proposed Development maintaining significant effects to only localised viewpoints within 6km of the site. An appropriate design that relates well to the underlying topography and the other wind farm schemes in close proximity ensures that there would also be a relationship with the operational Ben Aketil and Edinbane Wind Farms meaning the Proposed Development would be located within the space between them and would be seen in the same part of the view, rather than increasing the overall extent occupied by wind farms.</p>
<p>Policy 11(e)(iii) <i>In addition, project design and mitigation will demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed:</i> <i>iii. public access, including impact on long distance walking and cycling routes and scenic routes;</i></p>	<p>Chapter 3: Landscape and Visual of the EIA Report includes an assessment of the visual effects that would be experienced by people when travelling along roads within the area and undertaking recreation within the study area. A viewpoint assessment has been carried out (Technical Appendix 3.3) from a selection of representative viewpoint locations to inform the assessment of the likely magnitude of change and level of landscape and visual effects arising as a result of the Proposed Development.</p> <p>The assessment for the consented development looked at potential views from core paths within the study area, from hill walking within the Duirinish Peninsula, walking within the Trotternish Peninsula and along Skye Trail and within the Cuillins. The assessment also considered boat users within the Lochs of Dunvegan, Bracadale, Greshornish and Snizort Beag. It concluded that, with the exception of boat users within Loch Greshornish, no significant impacts are predicted on recreational users of the site and study area. With regard to boat users within Loch Greshornish, potential impacts would vary with location, with potential for significant effects towards the southern end of the Loch. Potential effects on users of the Uig – Lochmaddy/ Tarbet Ferry Route was also undertaken and concluded that potential effects would be minor and not significant. A potential link path from the proposed tracks to the nearby existing Edinbane Wind Farm access tracks would provide an accessible circular route from the settlement of Edinbane and help improve local public access facilities (an Access Management Plan including the link path is included in Condition 20 of the planning permission for the Ben Sca Wind Farm 20/00013/FUL).</p> <p>The 18 viewpoints agreed for previous assessments of the consented development were also used for the Proposed Development assessment. The following viewpoints are not assessed in detail:</p>

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Viewpoints that were provided as wireline only (3, 4, 9, 13, 16, 17) and/or previously agreed to be scoped out (10 and 11) in the previous assessments; and Viewpoints where effects are judged to be negligible scale (4, 10 and 14-18). <p>Effects were assessed as not significant including effects on the following receptors: A850, B884 and Colbost, Macleod's Tables, A863 and A87.</p>
<p>Policy 11(e)(iv) <i>In addition, project design and mitigation will demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed:</i> <i>iv. impacts on aviation and defence interests including seismological recording</i></p>	<p>The topic of aviation is dealt with in Chapter 9: Other Considerations of the EIA Report.</p> <p>The consented development was the subject of discussion with NATS Safeguarding regarding the potential visibility of the wind turbines to their radar on Tiree; as they believed that without suitable mitigation an adverse impact would result on their air traffic operations. An agreement has been entered into between NATS (En-Route) Plc, NATS (Services) Ltd (NATS) and Ben Sca Wind Farm Limited (the Applicant) dated 19 October 2020 for the design and implementation of an identified and defined mitigation solution in relation to the consented development that will be completed under agreement. NATS has further confirmed that this agreement would cover the Proposed Development and therefore no significant adverse effects on their air traffic operations are predicted.</p> <p>It is accepted that the planning conditions relating to aviation and infra-red lighting for the consented development would be employed for the Proposed Development. Consultation with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has confirmed that the potential for proposed turbines 1 and 2 to create a physical obstruction to low flying aircraft operating within Low Flying Area 14 (LFA 14), an area within which fixed wing aircraft may operate as low as 250 feet or 76.2 metres above ground level to conduct low level flight training, can be addressed by fitting turbines with aviation safety lighting and that sufficient data is submitted to ensure that structures can be accurately charted to allow deconfliction. It is considered that planning conditions relating to aviation and infra-red lighting for the Proposed Development could be employed to ensure no significant effects.</p> <p>Highlands and Islands Airports Limited (HIAL) has confirmed that there is no impact to the Benbecula Instrument Flight Procedures and no objection to the Proposed Development by HIAL is anticipated.</p> <p>Given the location of the Proposed Development, there is no impact on the Eskdalemuir seismological array.</p>

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis
<p>Policy 11(e)(v) <i>In addition, project design and mitigation will demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed:</i> <i>v. impacts on telecommunications and broadcasting installations, particularly ensuring that transmission links are not compromised;</i></p>	<p>During the iterative design process for the consented development, turbines have been moved in order to ensure that there would be no interference to identified transmission links as a result of the Proposed Development. Consultation was also with key stakeholders to identify relevant microwave links and Ultra High Frequency (UHF) telemetry links in the vicinity of the site. No issues were identified by any link operators for the consented Ben Sca Wind Farm during pre-application consultation or during the determination of the application. Further consultation exercises were undertaken in September 2021 for the Ben Sca Wind Farm Extension and again in 2023 for the proposed Balmeanach Wind Farm which confirmed that no fixed links pass through the site. No new links have been identified for the Proposed Development and therefore there is not anticipated to be any interference with telecommunications links.</p>
<p>Policy 11(e)(vi) <i>In addition, project design and mitigation will demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed:</i> <i>vi. impacts on road traffic and on adjacent trunk roads, including during construction;</i></p>	<p>The potential effects of the original Ben Sca Wind Farm application (20/00013/FUL) as a result of increased traffic flows was reported in Chapter 12 of the Ben Sca Wind Farm EIA Report EIA Report, concluded that all effects resulting from the additional traffic would not be significant.</p> <p>A Transport Assessment for the Proposed Development is presented in Technical Appendix 9.1 and summarised in Chapter 9: Other Considerations. This assessment reviews the Proposed Development against the consented development.</p> <p>As per the consented development, the Proposed Development would be accessed via the existing Ben Aketil Wind Farm track, a purpose-built track linking into the site from the A850 and so the access arrangements will not change from that already consented.</p> <p>The changes to the traffic generation during the construction phase due to the Proposed Development would not change the assessment of the effects or the conclusions for the consented development and, therefore, no significant effects are predicted related to site access, traffic and transport. It also concludes no significant negative cumulative effects on the A850.</p> <p>A Framework Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) has been prepared as Technical Appendix 9.2 of the EIA Report which outlines mitigation measures recommended to be implemented during the construction phase to ensure that any impacts will be managed.</p>

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis
	<p>The Framework CTMP will be supplemented with additional information as appropriate by the Applicant's appointed contractor(s), prior to commencement of construction activities. Should consent be granted, the Framework CTMP would be updated to a CTMP, the content of which would be agreed with THC through consultation and enforced via a planning condition. The CTMP would be used during the construction phase of the Proposed Development to ensure traffic to, from and on the site is properly managed. It is possible that a collaborative approach with the assessed cumulative sites, and the projects which are understood will be submitted over the next year may be incorporated as part of the CTMP at a later date.</p>
<p>Policy 11(e)(vii) <i>In addition, project design and mitigation will demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed:</i> <i>vii. impacts on historic environment;</i></p>	<p>The historic environment is discussed in further detail under Policy 7 below (Table 9).</p>
<p>Policy 11(e)(viii) <i>In addition, project design and mitigation will demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed:</i> <i>viii. effects on hydrology, the water environment and flood risk;</i></p>	<p>Chapter 6: Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Soils of the EIA Report has assessed potential effects arising from construction and operation of the Proposed Development within 1km of the site boundary.</p> <p>A review of baseline (site) conditions regarding soils, geology, and the water environment since the EIA reports were prepared for the consented development has been undertaken. Where relevant, the requirements of updated National Planning Policy (NPF4), have been made and the Proposed Development considered in the context of the confirmed baseline conditions.</p> <p>The embedded mitigation is the same as was agreed for the consented development, including measures to control the rate and quality of runoff specified in the Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) at the detailed design stage of the project.</p> <p>The assessment concludes that as a result of safeguards and embedded mitigation, no significant effects are likely to occur with respect to soils (inc. peat), geology and the water environment during the construction and operational phases of the Proposed Development which is in accordance with the conclusions of the assessment undertaken for the consented development.</p>
<p>Policy 11(e)(ix)</p>	<p>Biodiversity is discussed in further detail under Policy 3 below (Table 5).</p>

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis
<p><i>In addition, project design and mitigation will demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed:</i> ix. biodiversity including impacts on birds;</p>	
<p>Policy 11(e)(x) <i>In addition, project design and mitigation will demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed:</i> x. impacts on trees, woods and forests;</p>	<p>Trees, woods and forests are discussed in further detail under Policy 6 below (Table 8).</p>
<p>Policy 11(e)(xi) <i>In addition, project design and mitigation will demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed:</i> xi. proposals for the decommissioning of developments, including ancillary infrastructure, and site restoration;</p>	<p>It is proposed that the Proposed Development would be operational for a period of 40 years, subject to planning consent. At the end of its operational life, the Proposed Development and ancillary infrastructure would be decommissioned unless an application is submitted and approved to extend the operational period or to repower the site. The ultimate decommissioning protocol would be agreed with THC and other appropriate regulatory authorities in line with best practice guidance and requirements of the time. This would be done through the preparation and agreement of a Decommissioning and Restoration Plan (DRP). Financial provision for the decommissioning would be provided. It is anticipated that the DRP would be the subject of a planning condition and the decommissioning period would be expected to take up to one year.</p>
<p>Policy 11(e)(xii) <i>In addition, project design and mitigation will demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed:</i> xii. the quality of site restoration plans including the measures in place to safeguard or guarantee availability of finances to effectively implement those plans;</p>	<p>Proposals for site restoration post construction are set out in Technical Appendix 1.1 (CEMP). It is anticipated that most of the soil resources within areas directly affected by construction activities would be able to be stored and reinstated as close as possible to where they were excavated in accordance with best practice; so that the site would be restored with minimal movement of material from its original location.</p>

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis
	<p>Site restoration at the end of the operational life of the wind farm has been discussed in relation to Policy 11(e)(xi). It is expected that a Decommissioning Restoration Plan (DRP) would be prepared in liaison with THC and regulatory authorities at the time of decommissioning and that a financial provision for decommissioning would be provided. It is expected that a planning condition would be applied to any planning consent in this regard.</p>
<p>Policy 11(e)(xiii) <i>In addition, project design and mitigation will demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed:</i> <i>xiii. cumulative impacts.</i></p>	<p>In accordance with the EIA Regulations, the assessment has considered ‘cumulative effects’ in relation to the topics of landscape and visual, noise, traffic and transport, ornithology and cultural heritage.</p> <p>A list of cumulative developments is provided in Table 1-2 in Chapter 1: Introduction and Project Description of the EIA Report. No significant cumulative effects have been identified arising from the Proposed Development along with other operational, consented, application and relevant scoping developments assessed.</p>

Policy 3: Biodiversity

109. Policy 3 plays an important role in ensuring that development will secure positive effects on biodiversity. It seeks to rebalance the planning system in favour of conserving, restoring and enhancing biodiversity and promotes investment in nature-based solutions, benefiting people and nature.
110. Policy 3(a) states that:
“Development proposals will contribute to the enhancement of biodiversity, including where relevant, restoring degraded habitats and building and strengthening nature networks and the connections between them. Proposals should also integrate nature-based solutions, where possible.”
111. Policy 3(b) states that:
“Development proposals for national, major or Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) development will only be supported where it can be demonstrated that the proposal will conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity, including nature networks, so they are in a demonstrably better state than without intervention.”
112. Part (b) continues and sets five criteria that development proposals for such development proposals will be required to meet. These criteria are considered in **Table 5**.
113. The Scottish Government has announced (as noted in Scottish Government Biodiversity: draft planning guidance, November 2023), following the adoption of NPF4 in February 2023, that an adapted version of Natural England’s Biodiversity Metric 4.0 will be used to support the delivery of biodiversity net gain (BNG) as part of all significant development proposals in Scotland, although this is not yet available for use at the time of this planning submission. Although Scotland has not imposed a legal requirement for BNG, the Scottish Government aims to achieve BNG through NPF.
114. In consideration of the Proposed Development against Policy 3(b), it should be noted that at the time of writing, no specific quantitative metric is available for use on Scottish development sites. In the Chief Planner letter dated February 2023, it states that:
“currently there is no single accepted methodology for calculating and / or measuring biodiversity ‘enhancement’ – we have commissioned research to explore options for developing a biodiversity metric or other tool, specifically for use in Scotland.”
115. The Scottish Government’s Biodiversity: draft planning guidance (November, 2023) notes that:
“NatureScot will shortly commence work to develop an adapted biodiversity metric suitable for use in supporting delivery of NPF4 policy 3b. Further information will be provided on this work in due course. In the meantime, the absence of a universally adopted Scottish methodology/tool should not be used to frustrate or delay decision making, and a flexible approach will be required. Wherever relevant and applicable, and as indicated above, information and evidence gathered for statutory and other assessment obligations, such as EIA, can be utilised to demonstrate those ways in which the policy tests set out in NPF4 have been met.”
116. Timescales for the release of a Scottish metric methodology are still unclear at the time of writing and in its absence the EIA for the Proposed Development has sought to demonstrate how the site’s habitats and environmental conditions have been

- taken into account to ensure that “significant biodiversity enhancements” can be achieved in terms of policy 3(b).
117. The ecological and ornithological assessment of the Proposed Development has been based on a suite of desk-based research and field based surveys for the consented development, updated in 2023 and 2024 for the Proposed Development, field surveys having been undertaken over a period of years to understand the site’s ecological characteristics and context. Assessment of the Proposed Development on ecological receptors has been based on information gleaned from this comprehensive desk-based and field-based research and survey.
118. The EIA Report states that following mitigation, there would be no significant residual effects upon ecological or ornithological receptors. In line with the mitigation hierarchy, the Proposed Development has been subject to a number of design iterations in response to the constraints identified as part of the baseline studies, further detail of which is available in **Chapter 1: Introduction and Project Description** of the EIA Report. Where effects were unavoidable, the next stages in the EIA process involved minimising identified effects and restoring damaged habitats before looking to offset any adverse residual effects.
119. **Chapter 5: Ecology** of the EIA Report predicts that, during the construction phase, up to 11.16ha of bog habitats (Annex 1 blanket bog) and up to 2.49ha of heath habitats (Annex 1 dry heath and wet heath) would be permanently lost (worst case assumption including indirect loss) as result of the Proposed Development.
120. In order to compensate for the habitat loss, a 64.73ha area, approximately five times the size of the area of habitat to be lost, would be targeted for peatland restoration, as detailed in **Technical Appendix 5.3 (Outline Habitat Management Plan)**.
121. The original proposed Peatland Restoration Area for the consented development was 38.53ha. As stated above the proposed Peatland Restoration Area for the Proposed Development would result in the restoration of 64.73ha, which is a 26.2ha increase, which results in a significant enhancement when compared with the consented development. The additional area of peatland restoration would provide direct connectivity with the consented HMP area and has been selected as the most appropriate area due to the poor growth of the trees to ensure effective enhancement potential.
122. Furthermore, the proposed Peatland Restoration Area for the Proposed Development (which includes the consented HMP area) is situated directly adjacent to the proposed peatland restoration area for the proposed Balmeanach Wind Farm (approximately 77.75ha) (SLR, 2023b), which will result in a total area of 142.48ha of peatland restoration, which constitutes a significant positive cumulative benefit due to habitat connectivity.
123. As there is limited opportunity for enhancement within the site, the OHMP seeks to restore peatland habitat within the afforested area to the northwest of the site, providing connectivity to the adjacent consented Habitat Management Areas (HMAs) for Ben Sca Wind Farm and Ben Sca Wind Farm Extension. The area proposed for peatland restoration is considered to be a degraded habitat due to inappropriate tree planting in the past. This level of peatland restoration is considered to be sufficient to compensate for the loss of peatland habitat as a result of the Proposed Development. It is also considered to provide a sufficient level of additional biodiversity enhancement (i.e. over and above offsetting) to satisfy the requirements of NPF4 Policy 3.

124. It is proposed that further details of this peatland restoration and enhancement would be provided in a detailed HMP which would be produced and agreed post consent with THC, in consultation with NatureScot, prior to the commencement of development. The agreement of this detailed HMP by planning condition can ensure that a suitable biodiversity compensation and enhancement is provided by the Applicant.
125. It should also be noted that as a renewable energy development, the Proposed Development would principally make a contribution to reducing climate change by facilitating the move away from fossil-fuel based energy generation. By its very nature, the Proposed Development would therefore make a contribution to net zero which would in turn benefit biodiversity, the focus of this policy.
126. Overall, it is therefore considered that the Proposed Development would bring about biodiversity enhancement through the HMP that would leave the environment in a demonstrably better state than without intervention and is therefore in accordance with Policy 3.

Table 5: Analysis of NPF4 Policy 3 against the Proposed Development

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis
<p><i>a) Development proposals will contribute to the enhancement of biodiversity, including where relevant, restoring degraded habitats and building and strengthening nature networks and the connections between them. Proposals should also integrate nature-based solutions, where possible.</i></p> <p><i>b) Development proposals for national or major development, or for development that requires an Environmental Impact Assessment will only be supported where it can be demonstrated that the proposal will conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity, including nature networks so they are in a demonstrably better state than without intervention. This will include future management. To inform this, best practice assessment methods should be used. Proposals within these categories will demonstrate how they have met all of the following criteria:</i></p> <p><i>i) the proposal is based on an understanding of the existing characteristics of the site and its local, regional and national ecological context prior to development, including the presence of any irreplaceable habitats;</i></p> <p><i>ii) wherever feasible, nature-based solutions have been integrated and made best use of;</i></p> <p><i>iii) an assessment of potential negative effects which should be fully mitigated in line with the mitigation hierarchy prior to identifying enhancements;</i></p>	<p>Chapter 5: Ecology and Chapter 9: Ornithology of the EIA Report have been compiled following a desk based and field-based survey of the Proposed Development site. The desk-based assessment provided information on the local, regional and national ecological context which was further supplemented by field-based surveys and consultation.</p> <p>Ecological field-based surveys undertaken for the consented development and the Proposed Development include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UK Habitat Classification Survey • National Vegetation Classification (NVC) Survey • Fish Habitat Assessment • Mammal Survey • Bat Survey <p>Ornithological field-based surveys undertaken include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flight activity surveys • Breeding wader surveys • Breeding raptor surveys • Lochan surveys for breeding divers <p>The ecological and ornithological assessment of the Proposed Development has been based on a suite of desk-based research and field based surveys for the consented development, updated in 2023 and 2024 for the Proposed Development, field surveys having been undertaken over a period of years to understand the site's ecological characteristics and context.</p>

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis
<p>iv) <i>significant biodiversity enhancements are provided, in addition to any proposed mitigation. This should include nature networks, linking to and strengthening habitat connectivity within and beyond the development, secured within a reasonable timescale and with reasonable certainty. Management arrangements for their long-term retention and monitoring should be included, wherever appropriate; and</i></p> <p>v) <i>local community benefits of the biodiversity and/or nature networks have been considered.</i></p> <p>d) <i>Any potential adverse impacts, including cumulative impacts, of development proposals on biodiversity, nature networks and the natural environment will be minimised through careful planning and design. This will take into account the need to reverse biodiversity loss, safeguard the ecosystem services that the natural environment provides, and build resilience by enhancing nature networks and maximising the potential for restoration.</i></p>	<p>In line with the mitigation hierarchy, the Proposed Development has been subject to an extensive design iteration process in response to the constraints identified as part of baseline studies undertaken on the site. This has included revising the location of turbines and infrastructure to avoid areas of deeper peat and areas considered to be ecologically sensitive. Further detail is available in Chapter 1: Introduction and Project Description of the EIA Report.</p> <p>Due to the majority of the site comprising Annex 1 habitat, it was not possible to avoid these areas during the design of the Proposed Development however, flush habitats, watercourses, areas of deepest peat and sensitive bog pool habitat have been avoided as far as possible and track length was minimised as far as possible to minimise land take.</p> <p>Nevertheless, a significant negative effect has been predicted from construction of the Proposed Development related to the permanent loss of 11.16ha of bog habitats (Annex 1 blanket bog) and 2.49ha of heath habitats (Annex 1 dry heath and wet heath). The outline HMP (Technical Appendix 5.3) includes for up to 64.73ha of peatland habitat which would offset (compensate) for this habitat loss as well as providing additional significant biodiversity enhancement alongside the HMAs for Ben Sca and Extension Wind Farms, to satisfy the requirements of this policy. The effectiveness of the restoration (to achieve both offsetting and enhancement) would be monitored to establish if any remedial action is required. This would ensure that the adopted habitat enhancement actions are measurable against biodiversity gain.</p>

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis
	<p>With regard to ornithology, the assessment of effects concluded that, with the implementation of good practice measures, there would be no significant effects predicted on Important Ornithological Features (IOFs) as a result of the Proposed Development. Good practice measures would be employed to reduce the possibility of damage and destruction (and disturbance in the case of sensitive species such as breeding raptors and waders), to occupied bird nests during the construction phase. The conclusions of the assessment for the Proposed Development reported in Chapter 4: Ornithology are in accordance with the assessment for the consented development.</p> <p>A programme of post-construction bird monitoring (including collision monitoring, flight activity surveys, breeding raptor surveys and carcass searching) is proposed in liaison with the adjacent consented wind farms to gather valuable data. It is also proposed that a close collaboration with the Highland Raptor Study Group is established in order to facilitate a research programme aimed at furthering understanding of white-tailed eagle and golden eagle population prospects in the light of an increasing number of renewable energy projects on the Isle of Skye.</p>

Policy 4: Natural Places

127. This policy provides the basis for assessing developments against the natural environment, including European designations, national designations such as national parks and local designations.
128. Through a review of this policy against the Proposed Development (**Table 6**), it can be considered that the Proposed Development accords with this policy. No significant impacts are predicted as a result of the Proposed Development on the 'natural places' referred to in this policy.

Table 6: Analysis of NPF4 Policy 4 against the Proposed Development

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis / Where Addressed in EIA Report
<p><i>“a) Development proposals which by virtue of type, location or scale will have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment, will not be supported.”</i></p> <p><i>“b) Development proposals that are likely to have a significant effect on an existing or proposed European site (Special Area of Conservation or Special Protection Areas) and are not directly connected with or necessary to their conservation management are required to be subject to an “appropriate assessment” of the implications for the conservation objectives.”</i></p> <p><i>“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></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>i) The objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the areas will not be compromised; or</i> <i>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.”</i> <p><i>“d) Development proposals that affect a site designated as a local nature conservation site or landscape area in the LDP will only be supported where:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>i) Development will not have significant adverse effects on the integrity of the area or the qualities for which it has been identified; or</i> <i>ii) Any significant adverse effects on the integrity of the area are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of at least local importance.”</i> 	<p>Potential effects on SACs and SSSIs have been scoped out of assessment as the features that these sites have been designated for are not predicted to be impacted by the Proposed Development. Further information on this is available in Chapter 4: Ecology and Chapter 5: Ornithology of the EIA Report.</p> <p>The site is not located with a National Park and the study area for the Proposed Development does not include a National Park.</p> <p>The nearest nationally designated landscapes are Trotternish National Scenic Area (NSA), located approximately 18km to the northeast and Dunvegan Castle Garden and Designed Landscape (GDL) which is located 7km to the west as illustrated by Figure 3.2 of the EIA Report. There are also two locally designated Special Landscape Areas (SLA) within 5km of the site; Greshornish SLA is located 3.5km to the north and North West Skye SLA is located 4.7km to the west.</p> <p>Figure 3.3 of the EIA Report provides a comparative ZTV of the Proposed Development with the consented development and designated sites and identifies that there would be no effects on Nationally designated landscapes. The only locally designated landscape which would be affected by the Proposed Development would be the Greshornish SLA, where views of the proposed turbines alongside operational Ben Aketil and Edinbane Wind Farms would give rise to moderate, adverse and not significant effects as a result of small changes to the special qualities of ‘Historic landscape’ and ‘Contrasting geology, enclosure and exposure’. These changes would not affect the integrity of the SLA.</p> <p>An Cleireach SSSI which has been designated for its geological features (Tertiary Igneous) is adjacent to the site. There will however be no impacts on this SSSI.</p> <p>No non-statutory designated sites for nature conservation were identified within a 5km radius of the site and were considered not to be affected by the Proposed Development.</p>

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis / Where Addressed in EIA Report
<p><i>“f) Development proposals that are likely to have an adverse effect on species protected by legislation will only be supported where the proposal meets the relevant statutory tests. If there is reasonable evidence to suggest that a protected species is present on a site or may be affected by a proposed development, steps must be taken to establish its presence. The level of protection required by legislation must be factored into the planning and design of development, and potential impacts must be fully considered prior to the determination of any application.</i></p> <p><i>g) Development proposals in areas identified as wild land in the Nature Scot Wild Land Areas map will only be supported where the proposal:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>i) will support meeting renewable energy targets; or,</i> <i>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.</i> <p><i>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.”</i></p>	<p>As set out in Chapter 4: Ecology and Chapter 5: Ornithology, with the imposition of recommended mitigation measures, no significant adverse effects on protected species are predicted as a result of the Proposed Development.</p> <p>The site is not located within a NatureScot Wild Land Area (WLA). As the Proposed Development is located outwith any wild land area this is not considered to be a ‘significant consideration’; the assessment on wild area for the consented development did not predict any significant effects and therefore no wild land assessment is provided in the EIA Report for the Proposed Development. NatureScot have not provided any comment in relation to wild land and the EIA Report for the consented development concluded that the Proposed Development would not have a significant effect on the two WLAs within the wider study area, Duirinish and Cuillin.</p>

Policy 5: Soils

129. The policy intent of Policy 5 is to “*protect carbon-rich soils, restore peatlands and minimise disturbance to soils from development.*”
130. Policy 5(c) introduces a list of developments which will be supported on carbon-rich and priority peatland habitat of which renewable energy generation sources are included. It is therefore considered that the principle of the Proposed Development on peatland habitat, which extensively covers the Proposed Development site, is supported and the development is in compliance with Policy 5(c)(ii).
131. A comprehensive suite of peat probing data, covering peat depth and peat stability have formed a key consideration for the positioning and layout of turbines and associated infrastructure for the consented development and Proposed Development. This has resulted in a proposed layout that has sought to minimise the amount of disturbance to areas of deep peat or areas at risk of peat slide.
132. Notwithstanding the above, the Proposed Development would lead to the permanent loss of up to 11.16ha of bog habitats (Annex 1 blanket bog) and 2.49ha of heath habitats (Annex 1 dry heath and wet heath).
133. The restoration of approximately 64.73ha of peatland habitats (see **Technical Appendix 8.5: OHMP** of the EIA Report) is proposed to provide offsetting (compensation) for this habitat loss as well to provide for significant biodiversity enhancement of 26.2ha above the restoration agreed for the consented development.
134. Through the application of the mitigation hierarchy to the design of the Proposed Development around peat and soils and the proposals for compensation and enhancement related to peatland including best practice measures during construction, not to mention the contribution of the Proposed Development to carbon-emissions reductions, the Proposed Development is considered to be in compliance with Policy 5 as set out in **Table 7**.

Table 7: Analysis of NPF4 Policy 5 against the Proposed Development

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis / Where Addressed in EIA Report
<p><i>“a) Development proposals will only be supported if they are designed and constructed:</i></p> <p><i>i) In accordance with the mitigation hierarchy by first avoiding and then minimising the amount of disturbance to soils on undeveloped land; and</i></p> <p><i>ii) In a manner that protects soil from damage including from compaction and erosion, and that minimises soil sealing.”</i></p> <p><i>“c) Development proposals on peatland, carbon-rich soils and priority peatland habitat will only be supported for:</i></p> <p><i>i) Essential infrastructure and there is a specific locational need and no other suitable site;</i></p> <p><i>ii) The generation of energy from renewable sources that optimises the contribution of the area to greenhouse gas emissions reductions targets;</i></p> <p><i>iii) Small-scale development directly linked to a rural business, farm or croft;</i></p> <p><i>iv) Supporting a fragile community in a rural or island area; or</i></p> <p><i>v) Restoration of peatland habitats.</i></p> <p><i>d) Where development on peatland, carbon-rich soils or priority peatland habitat is proposed, a detailed site specific assessment will be required to identify:</i></p> <p><i>i) the baseline depth, habitat condition, quality and stability of carbon rich soils;</i></p> <p><i>ii) the likely effects of the development on peatland, including on soil disturbance; and</i></p> <p><i>iii) the likely net effects of the development on climate emissions and loss of carbon.</i></p>	<p>The entire site is underlain by Class 1 priority peatland which is considered potentially nationally important carbon rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitats, and are likely to be of high conservation value. A maximum recorded thickness of just over 3.5m on the flatter areas and peat presence, thickness and stability has formed a key consideration in the design of the consented development and the Proposed Development.</p> <p>An extensive programme of peat probing has been undertaken across the site to assess the depth and stability of carbon rich soils. Detailed site visits and walkover surveys have been undertaken by SLR, in addition to those undertaken for the consented development, on the following dates, the following update surveys were undertaken for the Proposed Development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September 2023: additional peat depth probing and characterisation survey focusing on the Proposed Development infrastructure; and • February 2024: additional peat depth probing and watercourse crossing survey. <p>This has been supplemented by a walk-over survey and a thorough inspection of digital terrain mapping and aerial photography. An ecological assessment of peat and its associated habitats has also been completed.</p> <p>At various points during design development for the consented development and the Proposed Development, fieldwork has been undertaken to provide feedback to the project team with regards to peat depth and stability at locations of proposed infrastructure which fed into the iterative design of the Proposed Development.</p>

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis / Where Addressed in EIA Report
<p><i>This assessment should inform careful project design and ensure, in accordance with relevant guidance and the mitigation hierarchy, that adverse impacts are first avoided and then minimised through best practice. A peat management plan will be required to demonstrate that this approach has been followed, alongside other appropriate plans required for restoring and/ or enhancing the site into a functioning peatland system capable of achieving carbon sequestration.</i></p>	<p>In accordance with the mitigation hierarchy and the inability to totally avoid peat, the design principle followed for the Proposed Development has been to try to avoid any areas of peat greater than 1m (with no infrastructure proposed within areas of 1.5m peat depth or greater) with the aim to position the majority of the infrastructure within areas less than 0.5m depth. The depth of peat at the proposed turbine locations varies from 0.3m to 1.2m. An updated Peat Management Plan for the Proposed Development is provided in Technical Appendix 6.1 and an updated Peat Landslide Hazard and Risk Assessment (PLHRA) is provided in Technical Appendix 6.2. Measures have been proposed to ensure the stability of peat and carbon rich soils and that peat and soils that would be disturbed by the Proposed Development can be safeguarded and beneficially re-used on site.</p> <p>An assessment of the likely impacts of the Proposed Development on peat is contained within Chapter 6: Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Soils of the EIA Report. It concludes that subject to best practice construction techniques being implemented, impacts on soils are not considered to be significant. An outline CEMP is provided in Technical Appendix 1.1.</p> <p>The results of the carbon calculator conclude that the Proposed Development is expected to have an overall net positive impact over its 40 year lifespan and is expected to generate over 38 years of carbon-free energy which would result in 2.46 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions savings compared to a fossil fuel mix of electricity generation (or 1.20 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions savings compared to a grid mix). For reference this is approximately 6,500 more UK homes powered and 0.69 million tonnes of CO₂ offset over its lifetime more than the consented development (when compared to fossil fuels); and 0.21 million tonnes of CO₂ offset over its lifetime more than the consented development (when compared to a grid mix).</p> <p>In addition, restoration and enhancement of peatland habitats is proposed as part of the Proposed Development. Habitat restoration proposals involve the restoration of 64.73ha of peatland habitat, through conifer plantation felling and peatland restoration and management activities (details are provided within Technical Appendix 8.5: Outline HMP of the EIA Report).</p>

Policy 6: Forestry, Woodland and Trees

135. The policy intent of Policy 6 is to *“protect and expand forests, woodland and trees.”*
136. As part of the Proposed Development, it is intended to remove up to 64.73ha of woodland to allow for restoration to peatland habitat. **Technical Appendix 5.4** of the EIA Report has assessed the suitability of additional woodland (in addition to that included as part of the consented HMP for the consented development) for conversion from forest to bog as part of the proposed OHMP for the Proposed Development and concluded that due to the low yield, poor growth rates and the presence of a large number of dead trees, that the site is deemed unsuitable for productive forestry.
137. In accordance with Scottish Forestry's agreement to the woodland to be felled for the consented HMP without restocking, in assessing the woodland removal against the requirements of the Scottish Government's Control of Woodland Removal Policy (2009) (CoWRP) and Forestry Commission guidance 'Deciding future management options for afforested deep peatland' (2015), it was considered that restoration (enhancing priority habitats, in this case blanket bog and its connectivity to surrounding priority habitats), indicate that the proposal to fell without the need for restocking is appropriate at this site.
138. It is considered that the ecological benefits of woodland removal to facilitate peatland restoration and provide associated biodiversity mitigation and enhancement measures for the site are an important consideration, particularly on sites that are deemed as “less suitable for second rotation forestry.” (Forestry Commission, 2015). On this basis, it is considered that these benefits justify the loss of woodland and thereby the Proposed Development is considered to comply with Policy 6 as set out in **Table 8**.

Table 8: Analysis of NPF4 Policy 6 against the Proposed Development

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis / Where Addressed in EIA Report
<p><i>a) Development proposals that enhance, expand and improve woodland and tree cover will be supported.</i></p> <p><i>b) Development proposals will not be supported where they will result in:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>i) Any loss of ancient woodlands, ancient and veteran trees, or adverse impact on their ecological condition;</i> <i>ii) Adverse impacts on native woodlands, hedgerows and individual trees of high biodiversity value, or identified for protection in the Forestry and Woodland Strategy;</i> <i>iii) Fragmenting or severing woodland habitats, unless appropriate mitigation measures are identified and implemented in line with the mitigation hierarchy;</i> <i>iv) Conflict with Restocking Direction, Remedial Notice or Registered Notice to Comply issued by Scottish Forestry.</i> <p><i>c) Development proposals involving woodland removal will only be supported where they will achieve significant and clearly defined additional public benefits in accordance with relevant Scottish Government policy on woodland removal. Where woodland is removed, compensatory planting will most likely be expected to be delivered.</i></p> <p><i>d) Development proposals on sites which include an area of existing woodland or land identified in the Forestry and Woodland Strategy as being suitable for woodland creation will only be supported where the enhancement and improvement of woodlands and the planting of new trees on the site (in accordance with the Forestry and Woodland Strategy) are integrated into the design.</i></p>	<p>There are no areas of ancient woodland, ancient or veteran trees within the Proposed Development site.</p> <p>There are no native woodlands, hedgerows and individual trees of high biodiversity value, or identified for protection in the Forestry and Woodland Strategy within the Proposed Development site.</p> <p>It is proposed that up to 64.73ha of woodland could be removed from the site to allow for restoration to peatland habitat (an additional 43.94ha from the consented development). Technical Appendix 5.4 of the EIA Report has looked at the suitability of additional woodland for conversion from forest to bog as part of the proposed Outline Habitat Management Plan for the Proposed Development.</p> <p>It was identified that the compartments proposed for restoration have particularly low yield class for their species due to the high exposure and the fact that they are mostly located on nutrient poor unflushed blanket bog where peat depths regularly exceed 0.5m and in many areas are more than 1m.</p> <p>In assessing the proposed woodland removal against the requirements of the Scottish Governments Control of Woodland Removal Policy (2009) (CoWRP) and Forestry Commission guidance 'Deciding future management options for afforested deep peatland' (2015), it was considered that the very low yield class of the trees, the depth of peat on site and the clear benefits of restoration (enhancing priority habitats, in this case blanket bog and its connectivity to surrounding priority habitats), indicate that the proposal to fell without the need for restocking is appropriate at this site.</p> <p>In addition, the CoWRP sets out a list of woodlands that there is a strong presumption against removal, none of which are applicable to the woodland to be removed from the development site.</p>

Policy 7: Historic Assets and Places

139. The policy intent of Policy 7 is to protect and enhance historic environment assets and places, and to enable positive change as a catalyst for the regeneration of places.
140. **Chapter 3: Landscape and Visual** and **Chapter 7: Cultural Heritage and Archaeology** of the EIA Report have assessed the potential impact of the Proposed Development on historic environment assets and places within the study area of the Proposed Development.
141. It has been concluded that all effects identified are consistent with the lowest level of effect identified within the SNH (NatureScot) and HES EIA Handbook 2018. There are no predicted significant effects on cultural heritage assets resulting from the construction or operation of the Proposed Development. It is considered that the Proposed Development is compliant with Policy 7 as set out in **Table 9**.

Table 9: Analysis of NPF4 Policy 7 against the Proposed Development

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis / Where Addressed in EIA Report
<p><i>“a) Development proposals with a potentially significant impact on historic assets or places will be accompanied by an assessment which is based on an understanding of the cultural significance of the historic asset and/or place. The assessment should identify the likely visual or physical impact of any proposals for change, including cumulative effects and provide a sound basis for managing the impacts of change.”</i></p> <p><i>Proposals should also be informed by national policy and guidance on managing change in the historic environment, and information held within Historic Environment Records.</i></p> <p>h) Development proposals affecting scheduled monuments will only be supported where:</p> <p><i>i) direct impacts on the scheduled monument are avoided;</i></p> <p><i>ii) significant adverse impacts on the integrity of the setting of a scheduled monument are avoided; or</i></p> <p><i>iii) exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated to justify the impact on a scheduled monument and its setting and impacts on the monument or its setting have been minimised.</i></p> <p><i>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.</i></p> <p><i>j) Development proposals affecting nationally important Historic Battlefields will only be supported where they protect and, where appropriate, enhance their cultural significance, key landscape characteristics, physical remains and special qualities.</i></p>	<p>Chapter 7: Cultural Heritage and Archaeology of the EIA Report assesses the direct effects of construction and operation of the Proposed Development on the cultural heritage assets of the site.</p> <p>There is potential for a direct impact on four non-designated cultural heritage assets within the site boundary although these have been avoided through careful design. Figure 5 provides an illustration of the location of the assets in relation to proposed infrastructure. It should be noted that these assets are considered to be of low/negligible cultural significance and with mitigation in the form of fencing off during construction, no effects would result.</p> <p>The assessment for the consented development determined that there would be no direct or indirect impacts on Scheduled Monuments with no significant adverse effects on the integrity of the setting of any Scheduled Monuments. As a result, these were scoped out of assessment in agreement with HES during scoping consultation.</p> <p>Effects on nationally important Gardens and Designed Landscapes have not been undertaken for the Proposed Development. Dunvegan Castle and Garden fall outwith the ZTV (as it did for the consented development) and the Proposed Development is not anticipated to be visible from this asset.</p> <p>There are no Historic Battlefields within the study area for the Proposed Development. They have been scoped out of assessment on this basis.</p>

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis / Where Addressed in EIA Report
<p><i>o) Non-designated historic environment assets, places and their setting should be protected and preserved in situ wherever feasible. Where there is potential for non-designated buried archaeological remains to exist below a site, developers will provide an evaluation of the archaeological resource at an early stage so that planning authorities can assess impacts. Historic buildings may also have archaeological significance which is not understood and may require assessment.</i></p>	

Policy 14: Design, Quality and Place

142. Policy 14 sits within the 'Liveable Places' section of NPF4 with the policy intent of encouraging, promoting and facilitating "*well designed development that makes successful places by taking a design-led approach and applying the Place Principle.*"
143. The Proposed Development has been designed to make best use of the available wind resource on the site by maximising the available grid capacity while also taking important environmental considerations into account. A PAMP has been developed for the Proposed Development and accompanies the EIA Report as **Technical Appendix 8.1** to promote provisions for public access management during the operational life of the Proposed Development, as well as aspirations for future long-term access to the wider area. Other criteria listed under Policy 14 are not considered to be relevant. Overall, it is concluded that the Proposed Development is in accordance with this policy in so far as it is relevant (**Table 10**).

Table 10: Analysis of NPF4 Policy 14 against the Proposed Development

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis / Where Addressed in EIA Report
<p>a) <i>Development proposals will be designed to improve the quality of an area whether in urban or rural locations and regardless of scale.</i></p> <p>b) <i>Development proposals will be supported where they are consistent with the six qualities of successful places:</i></p> <p>Healthy: <i>Supporting the prioritisation of women’s safety and improving physical and mental health.</i></p> <p>Pleasant: <i>Supporting attractive natural and built spaces.</i></p> <p>Connected: <i>Supporting well connected networks that make moving around easy and reduce car dependency</i></p> <p>Distinctive: <i>Supporting attention to detail of local architectural styles and natural landscapes to be interpreted, literally or creatively, into designs to reinforce identity.</i></p> <p>Sustainable: <i>Supporting the efficient use of resources that will allow people to live, play, work and stay in their area, ensuring climate resilience, and integrating nature positive, biodiversity solutions.</i></p> <p>Adaptable: <i>Supporting commitment to investing in the long-term value of buildings, streets and spaces by allowing for flexibility so that they can be changed quickly to accommodate different uses as well as maintained over time.</i></p> <p><i>Further details on delivering the six qualities of successful places are set out in Annex D.</i></p> <p>c) <i>Development proposals that are poorly designed, detrimental to the amenity of the surrounding area or inconsistent with the six qualities of successful places, will not be supported.</i></p>	<p>A Preliminary Access Management Plan (PAMP) has been developed for the Proposed Development and accompanies the EIA Report as Technical Appendix 8.1.</p> <p>Whilst the primary purpose of the PAMP is to outline how the Applicant would manage public access during the construction, operation and decommissioning of the Proposed Development, it is envisaged that the PAMP would provide a means for discussion with landowners and consultees in order to create opportunities for informal recreational use of the site by local communities whilst also providing opportunities to appreciate the natural environment in which the Proposed Development is located.</p> <p>Outline examples are provided within the PAMP of proposals to facilitate public access to the wind farm site including use of interpretation boards, potential new routes of access within the area and management of access. It is envisaged that the PAMP would be finalised into the form of an Access Management Plan (AMP) following consultation with landowners and stakeholders, should the Proposed Development be consented.</p>

Policy 23: Health and Safety

- 144. The policy intent of Policy 23 is to “*protect people and places from environmental harm, mitigate risks arising from safety hazards and encourage, promote and facilitate development that improves health and wellbeing.*” It also sits within the ‘Liveable Places’ section of NPF4.
- 145. The considerations of this policy which are considered relevant to the Proposed Development relate to positive health effects arising from opportunities for enhanced informal recreation on the wind farm site. It is also considered that noise is a relevant consideration of this policy.
- 146. The analysis set out in **Table 11** is considered to demonstrate the Proposed Development complies with the relevant sections of Policy 23.

Table 11: Analysis of NPF4 Policy 23 against the Proposed Development

Relevant Policy Text (summarised where necessary)	Analysis / Where Addressed in EIA Report
<p><i>a) Development proposals that will have positive effects on health will be supported. This could include, for example, proposals that incorporate opportunities for exercise, community food growing or allotments.</i></p> <p><i>e) Development proposals that are likely to raise unacceptable noise issues will not be supported. The agent of change principle applies to noise sensitive development. A Noise Impact Assessment may be required where the nature of the proposal or its location suggests that significant effects are likely.</i></p>	<p>As set out in Table 9, a PAMP has been developed for the Proposed Development.</p> <p>It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development, subject to agreement of the PAMP, would facilitate positive effects on health by incorporating access tracks that provide opportunities for exercise.</p> <p>Chapter 9: Other Considerations of the EIA Report summarises the findings of the noise impact assessment for the Proposed Development, reported in Technical Appendix 9.3. The assessment concludes that wind turbine noise emission levels do not exceed the consented noise limits and thereby, the effects would be not significant. No unacceptable effects in terms of noise would be introduced by the Proposed Development.</p>

NPF4 Conclusions

- 147. Policy 11 is the key topic specific policy for the assessment of the Proposed Development. In principle it is supportive of a wind farm on this site given it is not with a National Park or National Scenic Area. The identified significant landscape and visual impacts are localised and contained whilst the design of the project has sought to minimise the impacts of a wind farm in this location as far as possible. It is therefore considered that these impacts fall with the parameters of part (e) section (ii) of Policy 11. The Proposed Development is also considered to be in compliance in relation to all of Policy 11’s other environmental and technical topic criteria, with the contribution of the Proposed Development towards 2030 renewable energy generation and greenhouse gas emissions targets drawing significant support from this policy. These benefits are also of particular relevance in drawing support from Policy 1, which gives significant weight to the global climate crisis. The intent of Policy 1 is to encourage, promote and facilitate development that addresses the global climate crisis, and this proposal would contribute to that objective.
- 148. Overall, it is considered that Proposed Development would accord with relevant policies of NPF4, and with NPF4 when read as a whole.

3.2.2 The Local Development Plan

149. The Local Development Plan for the Proposed Development comprises the adopted Highland Wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) (2012), the adopted West Highlands and Islands Local Development Plan (WestPlan) and relevant supplementary guidance, including the Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG) (2016).
150. While the OWESG still forms part of the Development Plan, NPF4 has now removed the previously adopted spatial framework for Onshore Wind Farms and replaced it with a strategic spatial strategy which supports onshore wind energy generation and associated grid infrastructure in Scotland.
151. Although the OWESG does not provide any new or separate policy tests to those in the HwLDP, it does provide a clear indication of the approach of THC towards the assessment of onshore wind energy proposals. In particular, it provides a methodology for judgement to be made on the likely impact of a development on assessed “thresholds” in order to assist in the application of HwLDP Policy 67. An appraisal of how the Proposed Development meets with the thresholds set out in the criteria is included in **Appendix A** of this report.
152. As NPF4 has now been adopted and forms part of the Development Plan, it is noted by THC that this will likely reduce the number and range of policies that they require in their new Local Development Plan. THC contributed into the preparation of NPF4 and now expect to take forward review of the HwLDP under the new arrangements for Local Development Plans (LDPs) with a focus on land allocation through the spatial strategy and interpreting national policy in a local context, with formal work starting in Spring 2023.
153. Currently therefore, the adopted HwLDP is considered to be the relevant LDP, however, NPF4 is clear that where there is any incompatibility between the National Planning Framework and a provision of the LDP that whichever of them is the later in date is to prevail.
154. There are no site-specific policies relating to the site in WestPlan, the plan only being relevant to the Proposed Development from a broad policy perspective. Consequently, the primary Development Plan policy for assessment of the Proposed Development is Policy 67 of the HwLDP which specifically relates to renewable energy. This policy is therefore considered first in this assessment followed by a consideration of other relevant policies in the HwLDP.

3.2.3 HwLDP Policy 67

155. HwLDP Policy 67 requires consideration to be given to the contribution of the development towards renewable energy targets; positive and negative effects on the local and national economy; and other material considerations, including proposals able to demonstrate significant benefits by making effective use of existing and proposed infrastructure and facilities. Within this framework the policy states that the Planning Authority will support proposals where it is satisfied that they are located, sited, and designed in such a way as to ensure that they will not be significantly detrimental overall, either individually or cumulatively with other developments. It states that in this regard specific consideration is to be given to the following criteria:
- Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage;
 - Species and Habitats;

- Landscape and Visual Impact;
 - Amenity at Sensitive Locations;
 - Safety and Amenity of Individuals and Individual Properties;
 - The Water Environment;
 - Safety of Airport, Defence and Emergency Service Operations;
 - The Operational Efficiency of Other Communications;
 - Public Access;
 - Other Tourism and Recreation Interests; and
 - Traffic and Transport.
156. The wording of HwLDP Policy 67 provides that if THC is satisfied that there will be no significant detrimental impact overall, then the application will accord with the Development Plan.
157. It is however considered that Policy 67 is incompatible with the provisions of NPF4 particularly with regard to landscape and visual impact as NPF4 states that “*where (landscape and visual) impacts are localised and/ or appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they will generally be considered to be acceptable*”. Policy 11(e)(ii) now makes it clear that there is an expectation for landscape and visual impacts arising from certain forms of renewable energy development, of which this development is considered to apply. Rather than making a judgement call on the acceptability of impacts arising from a Proposed Development (from a landscape and visual perspective), should landscape and visual impacts be considered localised and / or deemed to have incorporated appropriate mitigation, the scheme should be considered acceptable. This conclusion is in accordance with recent appeal decisions, for example for Meall Buidhe Wind Farm (PPA-270-2277).
158. The contribution of the Proposed Development towards meeting renewable energy generation targets and the positive effects that the Proposed Development would have on the local and national economy are set out in **Section 4.2** of this Planning Statement. Other ecological, public access and socioeconomic benefits that the Proposed Development would have, are also summarised in **Section 2.9**. As identified in **Section** Error! Reference source not found. of this Planning Statement, the Proposed Development would make effective use of the existing Ben Aketil access tracks.
159. As NPF4 represents the most up-to-date policy position, an assessment against each of the topics set out in HwLDP Policy 67 has been undertaken as part of an assessment of the Proposed Development against NPF4 and indication of where these assessments have been set out in this document are set out in **Table 12**. A review of the other relevant policies of the HwLDP and where they are assessed in this Statement are set out in **Table 13**.

Table 12: Location of Assessment Topics related to HwLDP Policy 67

HwLDP Policy 67	
Criteria	Location of Analysis
Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage	Ecology & Ornithology: Table 4 and Table 5 Natural Places: Table 4 and Table 6 Soils: Table 4 and Table 7 Forestry, woodland & trees: Table 4 and Table 8 Archaeology & Cultural Heritage: Table 4 and Table 9
Species and Habitats	Ecology & Ornithology: Table 4 and Table 5 Natural Places: Table 4 and Table 6 Soils: Table 4 and Table 7 Forestry, woodland & trees: Table 4 and Table 8
Landscape and Visual Impact	Table 4 and Table 6
Amenity at Sensitive Locations	Table 4
Safety and Amenity of Individuals and Individual Properties	Table 4
The Water Environment	Table 4 and Table 7
Safety of Airport, Defence and Emergency Service Operations	Table 4
The Operational Efficiency of Other Communications	Table 4
Public Access	Table 4
Other Tourism and Recreation Interests	Table 4
Traffic and Transport	Table 4

Table 13: Assessment of the Proposed Development Against Other HwLDP Policies

Policy Principle	Policy Summary and Assessment
Policy 28: Sustainable Design	<p>Policy 28 sets out the requirement for all development to be designed in the context of sustainable development and climate change. The policy sets out criteria which development proposals are to be assessed against. The position with regard to these is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Proposed Development would make the most of the site’s excellent wind resource and utilise existing infrastructure wherever possible and is therefore considered to be in accordance with criterion 3 which requires that developments maximise energy efficiency in terms of location, layout and design. • Impacts upon residential amenity have been assessed in relation to NPF 4 Policy 11 and are considered to be acceptable (Table 4 of this report). The Proposed Development would therefore be in accordance with criterion 7. • The impact of the Proposed Development upon the resources listed in criterion 9 has been assessed in relation to NPF Policy 3 and 11 and is considered to be acceptable (Table 3 and Table 4 of this report). The Proposed Development would therefore be in accordance with this criterion. This is considered with regard to proposed compensation and enhancement measures as set out for peatland restoration related to NPF Policy 3. • Criterion 10 requires sensitive siting and high-quality design. As set out in the assessment of Policies 4, 7, 11 and 14 of NPF 4, the Proposed Development has been sensitively sited and its design would not result in any significantly detrimental effects overall upon local character, the historic environment or the natural environment. • The Proposed Development would contribute positively to the local and wider economy and is therefore considered to be in accordance with criterion 10. <p>Other criteria listed under Policy 28 are not considered to be relevant. Overall, it is concluded that the Proposed Development is in accordance with this policy in so far as it is relevant.</p>
Policy 51: Trees and Development	<p>Trees and development have been assessed under Policy 6 of NPF4. It is considered that the ecological benefits of woodland removal to facilitate peatland restoration and provide associated biodiversity mitigation and enhancement measures for the site are an important consideration. It is considered that these benefits justify the loss of woodland and thereby the Proposed Development is considered in compliance with Policy 51.</p>
Policy 55: Peat and Soils	<p>Peatland habitats and peat have been addressed in detail with reference to NPF 4 Policy 5 (Table 7). The Proposed Development is considered to be in accordance with this policy as it would avoid unnecessary disturbance, degradation and erosion of peat and soils, and a Peat Management Plan would be put in place to establish how peat during the construction of the development would be managed to allow the valid re-use of peat and to avoid, or minimise, the generation of waste peat. Furthermore, peat restoration is proposed as part of the OHMP. The Proposed Development is therefore considered to be in accordance with this policy.</p>



Policy Principle	Policy Summary and Assessment
Policy 56: Travel	Policy 56 seeks to ensure that development is sustainable in terms of travel and requires that development proposals must consider likely on and off-site transport implications. The Proposed Development is considered to be in accordance with Policy 56 as mitigation measures would be put in place to ensure that it would not result in any significant adverse effects on the transport network, local road users or road safety during construction or operation.
Policy 57: Natural, Built & Cultural Heritage	Impacts of the Proposed Development upon the features of the natural, built and cultural heritage identified have been assessed in detail with reference to Policy 7 of NPF 4 (Table 9). The Proposed Development is therefore considered to be in accordance with this policy.
Policy 58: Protected Species	Policy 58 is a multi-criterion-based policy which applies to development proposals that may affect protected species. Impacts upon protected species have been addressed in relation to NPF 4 Policy 3 (Table 5). With the implementation of the proposed mitigation measures which can be secured via planning conditions, no unacceptable impacts upon any protected species are predicted. The Proposed Development is therefore considered to be in accordance with this policy.
Policy 59: Other Important Species	Policy 59 identifies other important species which THC will generally seek to protect. No detrimental effects on any such species are predicted to occur and therefore the Proposed Development is considered to be in accordance with this policy.
Policy 60: Other Important Habitats	Policy 60 identifies other important habitats which THC will generally seek to protect. A programme of peatland restoration is proposed which will provide compensation for the loss of blanket bog and heathland habitat. The area proposed for peatland restoration is considered to be a degraded habitat due to inappropriate tree planting in the past. Restoration of this peatland habitat would present an opportunity to compensate for the predicted loss of habitat as well as provide additional biodiversity enhancement, whilst also sustaining nature networks.
Policy 61: Landscape	Policy 61 seeks to ensure that new development is compatible with landscape characteristics and that relevant Landscape Character Assessments have been taken into account in development design. Overall, it is concluded that the landscape has the capacity to accommodate the Proposed Development successfully. The Proposed Development is therefore considered to be in accordance with this policy.
Policy 66: Surface Water Drainage	The Proposed Development incorporates good practice drainage design during construction and operation, using a sustainable drainage system (SUDS) approach to control the rate, volume and quality of run-off. The Proposed Development is therefore considered to be in accordance with this policy.
Policy 68: "Community" Renewable Energy Developments	Policy 68 provides that where a community wishes to take a share in a larger project, and where it is the only community significantly impacted by the proposal, that this policy is to be a material consideration. This is the case for the Proposed Development, where an element of community shared ownership has been offered and as demonstrated in the EIA Report and this Planning Statement the Proposed Development



Policy Principle	Policy Summary and Assessment
	<p>would not have a significant impact beyond the community it is situated within.</p> <p>Whilst the same tests of acceptability apply for community renewable energy projects as those under Policy 67 for commercial proposals, Policy 68 provides that when this policy is engaged that THC may grant consent for renewable energy development with greater impacts upon the amenity of that community's area as a place in which people reside or work than would normally be the case. In other words, a higher threshold of effect upon that community may be acceptable. Other than some localised landscape and visual impacts which are to be expected for a commercial wind farm development (as now set out in Policy 11 of NPF4), there are no other residual significant effects. It is therefore considered that the Proposed Development draws additional support from this policy.</p>

4.2 Climate Change and Renewable Energy Policy Considerations

- 160. The UK and Scottish Governments have made multiple international and domestic commitments in respect of reducing emissions of greenhouses gas to combat climate change and commitments to renewable energy generation.
- 161. The framework of international agreements, obligations, legally binding targets and climate change advisory reports is the foundation upon which national energy policy is based. This sets out the need case for renewable energy which provides strong support for onshore wind in principle. In addition, NPF4 (discussed in **Section 3.2.1** of this Planning Statement) sets out in policy that decision makers must give significant weight to the global climate emergency and nature crises.

4.2.1 Scottish Energy Strategy 2017 (SES)

- 162. The SES was published in December 2017, in the context of lower greenhouse gas emissions targets set initially under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. The SES sets out the Scottish Government vision for the future energy system in Scotland for the period through to 2050. The SES identifies that Scotland's long-term climate change targets will require the near complete decarbonisation of our energy system by 2050, with renewable energy meeting a significant share of our needs.
- 163. The SES set a target for the equivalent of 50% of the energy for Scotland's heat, transport and electricity consumption to be supplied from renewable sources by 2030. This 50% target roughly equates to of 17GW of installed capacity in 2030. In addition to setting energy targets, the SES also sets out six strategic priorities These include:
 - *“System security and flexibility – we should have the capacity, the connections, the flexibility and resilience necessary to maintain secure and reliable supplies of energy to all of Scotland's homes and businesses as our energy transition takes place.*
 - *Renewable and low carbon solutions – we will continue to champion and explore the potential of Scotland's huge renewable energy resource, and its*



ability to meet our local and national heat, transport and electricity needs – helping to achieve our ambitious emissions reduction targets.”

164. The SES advises that onshore wind energy development is essential to Scotland’s transformation to a fully decarbonised energy system by 2050 and brings opportunities which underpin our vision to grow a low carbon economy and build a fairer society.

4.2.2 Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009

165. The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 initially established long term statutory targets for Scotland of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% of 1990 levels by 2050, with an interim target of reducing emissions by at least 42% by 2020. The Act also placed climate change duties on Scottish public bodies and included provisions on climate change including adaption, forestry, energy efficiency and waste reduction.

4.2.3 Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019

166. In May 2019 the Scottish Government formally declared a climate emergency. This resulted in the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019, which amends the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and commits the Scottish Ministers to a new target of net zero emissions of all greenhouse gases by 2045, with interim targets for reductions of at least 56% by 2020, 75% by 2030 and 90% by 2040. These amended greenhouse emissions targets, and the series of annual targets towards them, represent a substantial increase over the targets set in the previous Act.
167. To help ensure delivery of the long-term targets, the framework includes statutory annual targets for every year to net zero. Up to 2020 the annual percentage reduction required is 1%, but this immediately leaps for each year between 2020 to 2030. It increases to 1.9% for each year between 2020 and 2030, a near doubling of the response.
168. Part 4, Section 44 of the 2009 Act places climate change duties on Scottish public bodies. It states that a *"public body must, in exercising its functions, act: in the way best calculated to contribute to the delivery of set targets (i.e. Scotland's climate change targets); in the way best calculated to help deliver any programme laid before the Scottish Parliament (i.e. Scotland's Update to the Climate Change Plan, last updated by the 2018-2032 update 'Securing a Green Recovery on a Path to Net Zero' published in 2020); and in a way that it considers most sustainable"*. This means that all public sector organisations, including Scottish Ministers and local authorities, are obliged in exercising their functions to do so in a manner which is consistent with meeting the net zero climate change target.

4.2.4 Onshore Wind Policy Statement (OWPS) 2022

169. The Scottish Government published the OWPS in December 2022. The OWPS 2022 set a new ambition for the deployment of onshore wind in Scotland: a minimum installed capacity of 20GW of onshore wind in Scotland by 2030. This 20GW ambition will help support the rapid decarbonisation of the energy system and the sectors which depend upon it, aligning with a just transition to net zero.
170. Chapter 1 of the OWPS 2022 contains specific acknowledgement of the need to further the speedy deployment of onshore wind. It states *"We must now go further and faster than before. We expect the next decade to see a substantial increase*



in demand for electricity to support net zero delivery across all sectors, including heat, transport, and industrial processes". As a result of the policy ambition for a minimum installed capacity of 20GW by 2030. If the policy ambition of a minimum of installed capacity of 20GW of onshore wind in Scotland by 2030 is to be achieved, consents need to be granted to allow deployment as quickly as possible. Paragraph 2.4.2 states that "Onshore wind will play a crucial role in delivering our legally binding climate change targets." The Proposed Development is anticipated to be connected to the grid in 2028 therefore being able to contribute to the 2023 target.

171. In paragraph 3.6.1, the OWPS also recognises that meeting the 2030 target will require "*taller and more efficient turbines. This will change the landscape*". This statement echoes that of Policy 11(e)(ii) of NPF4 which sets an expectation for significant landscape and visual effects arising for some forms of renewable energy developments.
172. In paragraph 3.6.2 of OWPS the Scottish Government's position on the construction of new wind farms and their effect on the landscape further is further clarified as "*The only areas where wind energy is not supported are National Parks and National Scenic Areas. Outside of these areas, the criteria for assessing proposals have been updated, including stronger weight being afforded to the contribution of the development to the climate emergency, as well as community benefits*" in accordance with NPF4.

4.2.5 Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan 2023

173. On 10 January 2023, the Scottish Government published the Draft version of its 'Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan - delivering a fair and secure zero carbon energy system for Scotland'. This plan outlines the key ambitions for Scotland's energy future, with an even greater focus on renewable energy. It is predicted that these policies would result in a net jobs gain across the energy production sector and will increase renewable energy exports whilst also reducing exposure to future global energy market fluctuations.
174. The Plan outlines several of the government's targets to reach a net zero Scotland, with the main milestones and dates outlined as:
- to substantially increase Scotland's renewable electricity generation capacity from the current level of 13.4 Gigawatts (GW) with an additional 20GW resulting in an overall capacity of at least 33.4GW by 2030;
 - aims to have 8-11GW of installed offshore, and an additional 12GW of installed onshore wind capacity by 2030;
 - for renewable and low-carbon hydrogen power to provide 5GW (the equivalent of 15% of Scotland's current energy needs) by 2030, increasing to 25GW by 2045; and
 - to phase out the necessity for new petrol and diesel cars by 2032, and to reduce total car kilometres by 2030.
175. The plan also outlines general commitments made by the Government to assist with the transition to net zero, which include the following:
- to establish a national public energy agency – 'Heat and Energy Efficiency Scotland';



- to increase the contributions of solar, hydropower and marine energy within Scotland's energy mix;
- to accelerate the decarbonisation of domestic industry, transport and heat in buildings;
- to generate surplus electricity – allowing for the export of electricity and renewable hydrogen to support decarbonisation across Europe.;
- to create energy security – through the development of Scotland's resources and additional energy storage;
- to allow for a just transition by maintaining or increasing employment in Scotland's energy production sector against a decline in North Sea production; and
- to maximise the use of Scottish manufactured components in the energy transition, ensuring high-value technology and innovation.

4.2.6 Onshore Wind Sector Deal

176. On 21 September 2023, the Scottish Government published 'The Onshore Wind Sector Deal'. The deal sets out the commitments from the Scottish Government and the onshore wind farm industry to deliver 20GW of onshore wind energy by 2030. The Government and the onshore wind farm industry's commitments within the deal include:

- support the enhancement of current skills and training provisions through further higher education and training to focus on delivery of the needs of the wind industry;
- continue to collaborate with local communities, building on good practices to enhance its existing 'good neighbour' approach through engagement at all stages of the project's lifecycle and offering impactful community benefits and practical routes to shared ownership;
- new onshore wind projects will enhance biodiversity and optimise land use and environmental benefits;
- reduction in time taken to determine section 36 applications for onshore wind farm projects by increasing skills and resources by streamlining approaches to scoping EIA Reports;
- develop evidence to support a more strategic approach to delivering the investment in our electricity network and to inform a coordinated approach to the transportation of wind turbine components across Scotland's road network; and
- deliver cooperative coexistence between onshore wind deployment and safe aviation operations.

177. It is considered that the Proposed Development would contribute to the 20GW of onshore wind energy which could be connected to the grid network by 2030.

4.2.7 Progress Towards Targets

178. **Table 14** and **4-2** and **Graphs 4-1** and **4-2** set out how Scotland has made progress towards the renewable energy and greenhouse gas targets set by the Scottish Government. Since renewable energy targets are not yet being met it is



considered that the Proposed Development would make a valuable contribution to trying to achieve these ambitious targets.

Table 14: Progress Against Renewable Energy Targets

Year	Target	Achieved/Progress
2020	Equivalent of 100% of all electricity used in Scotland to come from renewable sources ⁶ .	No - equivalent of 98.6% of all electricity used in Scotland came from renewable sources ⁵ .
2021	Equivalent of 100% of all electricity used in Scotland to come from renewable sources (continuation of 2020 target as target was not met).	No - equivalent of 85.2% of all electricity used in Scotland came from renewable sources (Graph 2-1).
2030	To increase the installed onshore wind capacity in Scotland to 20GW ⁷ .	Latest figures published in December 2023 (most recently available) show that the installed onshore wind capacity in Scotland in September 2023 was 9.4GW ⁸ .
2030	To generate 50% of Scotland's overall energy consumption from renewable sources ⁹ .	Final figures for 2021 indicate that the equivalent of 23.7% of total Scottish energy consumption came from renewable sources. (Graph 2-2). ¹⁰
2050	To have decarbonised the energy system almost completely ¹¹ .	Future target and difficult to gauge progress against.

Table 15: Progress Against Greenhouse Gas Emissions Targets

Year	Current Target ¹² (% Reduction of Emissions relative to 1990)	Recommended Revised Target ¹³ (% Reduction of Emissions relative to 1990)	Achieved/Progress
2020	56%	n/a	Achieved – GHG account reduced by 59% between the baseline period and 2020 ⁹ . As detailed in the Scottish Emissions Targets – First Five-Yearly Review (December 2022): “ <i>The fall in emissions in 2020 was largely due to the travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic and it is unlikely the target</i>

⁶ Scottish Government (2011) *2020 Renewable Routemap for Renewable Energy in Scotland Update 2011*

⁷ Scottish Government Onshore Wind Policy Statement 2022

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/onshore-wind-policy-statement-2022/documents/>

⁸ Scottish Government Scottish Energy Statistics Hub Operational Renewable Capacity 2001 Q1 - 2023 Q2

<https://scotland.shinyapps.io/Energy/?Section=RenLowCarbon&Subsection=RenElec&Chart=RenElecCapacity>

⁹ Scottish Government (2017). *The future of energy in Scotland: Scottish energy strategy 20 December 2017*

¹⁰ Scottish Government Energy Statistics for Scotland – Q2 2023

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/energy-statistics-for-scotland-q2-2023/pages/progress-towards-energy-targets/>

¹¹ Scottish Government (2017). *The future of energy in Scotland: Scottish energy strategy. 20 December 2017*

¹² Scottish Government (2009) *Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009*; and *Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019*

¹³ Independent Climate Change Committee (2022). *Scottish Emissions Targets – First Five-Yearly Review*



Year	Current Target ¹² (% Reduction of Emissions relative to 1990)	Recommended Revised Target ¹³ (% Reduction of Emissions relative to 1990)	Achieved/Progress
			<i>would have been achieved without the impacts of the pandemic.”</i>
2021	57.9%	51.1%	Not achieved – GHG account reduced by 49.9% ¹⁴ between baseline period and 2021.
2022	59.8%	53.8%	Most recent data available is 2021 figure.
2023	61.7%	56.4%	Most recent data available is 2021 figure.
2024	63.6%	59.1%	Most recent data available is 2021 figure.
2025	65.5%	61.7%	Most recent data available is 2021 figure.
2026	67.4%	64.4%	Most recent data available is 2021 figure.
2027	69.3%	67.0%	Most recent data available is 2021 figure.
2028	71.2%	69.7%	Most recent data available is 2021 figure.
2029	73.1%	72.3%	Most recent data available is 2021 figure.
2030	75%	75%	Most recent data available is 2021 figure.
2040	90%	90%	Most recent data available is 2021 figure.
2050	100%	100%	Most recent data available is 2021 figure.

Graph 4-1: Renewable Electricity Generation in Scotland



Source: Energy Statistics for Scotland Q3 2022

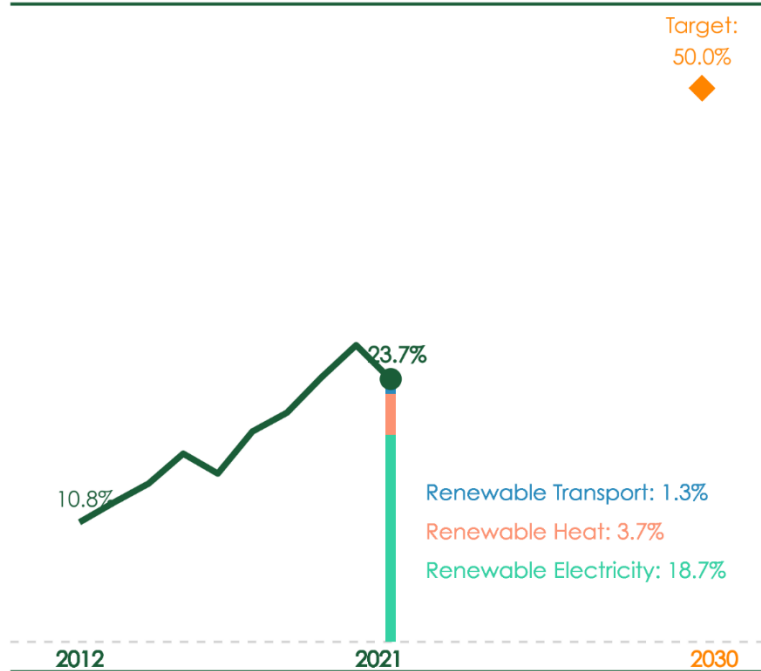
¹⁴ Scottish Government (2021). Scottish Greenhouse Gas Statistics 2021



Graph 4-2: Progress Against Renewable Energy Targets

Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption

Scotland, 2012 - 2021



Source: BEIS, Energy Saving Trust, DfT

Available at: <https://scotland.shinyapps.io/Energy/?Section=WholeSystem&Chart=RenEnTgt>



5.0 Conclusions

179. The broad policy context is strongly supportive of the urgent need for additional renewable energy generation capacity. The drivers behind this support can be summarised as follows:
- the need to address climate change and avoid / mitigate against the worst projected effects;
 - the growing demand for electricity and the increased need for renewable energy generation that will be required to meet this need; and
 - the need for Scotland (and the UK) to reduce its dependency on imported oil and gas and to source more of its energy domestically.
180. The highly supportive policy and planning framework has resulted in ambitious renewable energy and climate change targets, however it is clear, as set out in **Section 4.2.6** of this Planning, Sustainable Design and Access Statement, that Scotland and the UK is not on course to meet these targets.
181. Overall, given the urgency of the renewable energy and climate change targets set by the Scottish Government (and UK Government), the additional 20,000MWh per year of green electricity than the Proposed Development would produce (in comparison to the consented development) demonstrates the vital role that renewable energy developments such as the Proposed Development can play in meeting these targets. This should be afforded substantial weight in the planning balance during determination of this application.
182. With regard to planning policy, NPF4 represents a fundamental shift in response to climate change. This has significantly strengthened the planning policy support for renewable energy developments by virtue of the weight of significance that must now be applied to the climate and nature crises when considering development proposals.
183. Policies 1 and 11 of NPF4 provide a supportive and unambiguous basis for decision makers assessing this planning application. This means that significant weight must be attached to the contribution of the Proposed Development to meeting renewable energy generation and greenhouse gas emissions reductions targets with a connection date before 2030.
184. Policy 11 of NPF4 clearly sets out support for onshore wind development and the Proposed Development is considered to accord with this Policy Outcome which is the “*expansion of renewable, low-carbon and zero emissions technologies.*” It is also important to note that there is a recognition in this policy of the potential for significant landscape and visual effects arising from certain types of renewable energy development. It is accepted that a development of a commercial wind farm of this nature will inevitably give rise to landscape and visual effects. The Proposed Development, which for the most part would be read in conjunction with other wind farms, would give rise to localised landscape and visual effects, as was the case for the consented development.
185. An OHMP (**Technical Appendix 5.3**) has been prepared and as previously discussed, it sets out a number of measures for restoration of peatland habitat as well as ornithological monitoring measures. These measures, on what is considered to be a degraded habitat, would enhance priority peatland habitats within and adjacent to the site and would provide further beneficial effects by improving habitat connectivity with the habitat management areas linked to the



- already consented HMP areas and the proposed Balmeanach Wind Farm HMP area. It is considered that the peatland restoration proposed is sufficient to both compensate for the loss of peatland habitat that would occur as a result of the Proposed Development as well as providing for a sufficient level of additional biodiversity enhancement, by providing an additional 43.94ha of restoration when compared to the consented development, to satisfy the requirements of NPF4 Policy 3. Overall, it is therefore considered that the Proposed Development would bring about biodiversity enhancement through the HMP that would leave the environment in a demonstrably better state than without intervention in accordance with NPF4 Policy 3.
186. It is considered that the Proposed Development can draw strong policy support from NPF4 for the role it can play in tackling the twin crises of climate emergency and nature crises.
187. **Chapter 11: Summary of Effects** of the EIA Report provides a clear comparison of the residual effects for each environmental topic assessed for the consented development and the Proposed Development. The only identified significant environmental effects arising from the Proposed Development relate to landscape and visual effects. Given all other material factors related to the application and the localised nature of effects, particularly with regard to Policy 11(e)(ii) of NPF4, these potential adverse effects can be considered acceptable, as was previously considered acceptable for the consented development.
188. The Proposed Development accords with the provisions of the development plan, made up of NPF4 and the LDP. There are no material considerations which would outweigh the Proposed Development's compliance with the development plan and, in fact, there are material considerations that provide significant weight in favour of the Proposed Development. Planning permission should be granted for the Proposed Development.



