

FEARNA STORAGE

Fearna Pumped Storage Hydro Scheme EIA Report

Appendix 7.6 Appraisal of THC OWESG

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Appendix 7.6: Appraisal of The Highland Council's Criteria for the Consideration of Onshore Wind Proposals

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 The Highland Council Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG)¹ details The Highland Council (THC) policy and guidance on measures to be considered for the design and assessment of onshore wind farms. In relation to landscape and visual amenity it identifies ten criteria to be used by THC as a framework and focus for assessing proposals. This Appendix provides analysis of the Proposed Development in relation to these criteria, as requested at Scoping. While these criteria are specific to wind energy development, they have been interpreted to relate to the Proposed Development.

1.1.2 The ten criteria are outlined in **Table 1**:

Table 1: OWESG Criteria for the Consideration of Onshore Wind Farm Proposals

Criterion	Threshold
Criterion 1. Relationship between Settlements / Key locations and wider landscape are respected. (the extent to which the proposal contributes to perception of settlements or key locations being encircled by wind energy development)	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where turbines are not visually prominent in the majority of views within or from settlements / key locations or from the majority of its access routes.
Criterion 2. Key Gateway locations and routes are respected. (the extent to which the proposal reduces or detracts from the transitional experience of key Gateway Locations and routes)	Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise detract from landscape characteristics which contribute the distinctive transitional experience found at key gateway locations and routes.
Criterion 3. Valued natural and cultural landmarks are respected (the extent to which the proposal affects the fabric and setting of valued natural and cultural landmarks)	The development does not, by its presence, diminish the prominence of the landmark or disrupt its relationship to its setting.
Criterion 4. The amenity of key recreational routes and ways is respected. (the extent to which the proposal affects the amenity of key recreational routes and ways (e.g. Core Paths, Munros and Corbetts, Long Distance Routes etc.))	Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of key routes and ways.
Criterion 5. The amenity of transport routes is respected. (the extent to which the proposal affects the amenity of transport routes (tourist routes as well as rail, ferry routes and local road access))	Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of transport routes.

¹ The Highland Council (2016, amended 2017) Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG) Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/file:///C:/Users/EMackenzie.ASH/Downloads/Onshore_Wind_Energy_Supplementary_Guidance_Nov2016_with_addendum_Dec2017.pdf/onshore_wind_energy_supplementary_guidance-_nov_2016

Criterion	Threshold
Criterion 6. The existing pattern of Wind Energy Development is respected. (the degree to which the proposal fits with the existing pattern of nearby wind energy development. Considerations include: • Turbine height and proportions, • density and spacing of turbines within developments; • density and spacing of developments; • typical relationship of development to the landscape; • previously instituted mitigation measures; • Planning Authority stated aims for development of area.	The proposal contributes positively to existing pattern or objectives for development in the area.
Criterion 7. The need for separation between developments and / or clusters is respected. (the extent to which the proposal maintains or affects the spaces between existing developments and/ or clusters).	The proposal maintains appropriate and effective separation between developments and/ or clusters
Criterion 8. The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected. (the extent to which the proposal maintains or affects receptors' existing perception of landscape scale and distance).	The proposal maintains the apparent landscape scale and/or distance in the receptors' perception
Criterion 9. Landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is respected. (the extent to which the landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is affected by the proposal).	Proposal relates well to the existing landscape setting and does not increase the perceived visual prominence of surrounding wind turbines.
Criterion 10. Distinctiveness of Landscape character is respected. (the extent to which a proposal affects the distinction between neighbouring landscape character types, in areas where the variety of character is important to the appreciation of the landscape).	Integrity and variety of Landscape Character Areas are maintained.

- 1.1.3 An analysis of the Proposed Development in relation to these criteria is presented in section 1.2 of this Appendix.

Loch Ness Sensitivity Study

- 1.1.4 Section 5.2 of the OWESG also includes the Loch Ness Landscape Sensitivity Study which identifies Key Views, Key Routes and Gateways as well as Landscape Character Area sensitivities and guidance. These aspects are considered in Section 1.3 of this Appendix and feed into the analysis of the criteria.

1.2 Analysis of Criteria

Criterion 1. Relationship between Settlements / Key locations and wider landscape are respected.

- 1.2.1 There are no major settlements within the study area for the Proposed Development. The closest residential properties are located at Kingie, approximately 3.5 km to the east of the Proposed Development, and Poulary, approximately 7 km to the east. There would be visibility of the Fearna dam from a limited number of properties at Kingie and Poulary, with the dam being seen on the skyline in westerly views, sometimes filtered by trees. However, the effects on these areas are predicted to be not significant (see **Appendix 7.2: Visual Assessment Tables**). There would be no visibility of any of the

permanent built structures from other settlements, and no significant short or long term visual effects are predicted for residential receptors.

- 1.2.2 Therefore, it is concluded that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Proposed Development.

Criterion 2. Key Gateway locations and routes are respected

- 1.2.3 Key Gateway locations and routes included within the OWESG would not be affected by the Proposed Development as they are generally outwith the study area, with the A87T being the only noted route falling partly within the study area. As detailed in Error! Reference source not found. below there would not be any effects on the A87T route above Loch Garry or on the panoramic views experienced from the A87 Viewpoint above Loch Garry.
- 1.2.4 Significant effects are predicted to the C1144 Minor Road to Loch Hourn during construction (see **Appendix 7.2**) but effects to users of this route are not predicted to be significant during operation.
- 1.2.5 It is therefore concluded that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Proposed Development.

Criterion 3. Valued natural and cultural landmarks are respected

- 1.2.6 Valued natural landmarks referred to under this criterion are considered to comprise geological features such as distinct mountains and lochs and other features which contribute to the Special Qualities of designated and protected landscapes. Valued cultural landmarks are considered to comprise important cultural sites and designated cultural heritage sites.
- 1.2.7 The LVIA has identified that, in the longer term, there would be localised significant effects within an area around the eastern part of Loch Quoich affecting identified qualities of designated and protected landscapes as follows:
- Wild Land Quality (WLQ) of Wild Land Area 18. Kinlochourn – Knoydart – Morar (WLA 18): *“Mountain ranges and glens of varying landform, but all arresting, with towering, steep and rugged slopes and striking physical features”* (see **Appendix 7.4**); and
 - Special Quality (SQs) of the Moidart, Morar and Glen Shiel SLA: *“Quiet, uninhabited glens and isolated peaks create a landscape experience where the sense of wildness, and tranquillity are key qualities”* (see **Appendix 7.5**).
- 1.2.8 These qualities both related to the appreciation of the wild qualities of mountains.
- 1.2.9 There would also be some significant long term visual effects on mountain views and the experience of the mountain route to Spidean Mialach, which would be diverted as described in **Appendix 7.2, Annex A: Sequential Analysis of Mountain Route to Spidean Mialach**.
- 1.2.10 Mitigation of effects on these mountain areas has been considered in relation to the shaping and positioning of dams, including a curved shape to the Fearna dam which has been pushed back slightly, reducing its prominence, and the accommodation of walkers via a diverted footpath. The accommodation of walkers would be further considered in detailed design to try to create an engaging experience where the Proposed Development can be experienced positively as part of the journey into the mountain environment.
- 1.2.11 There may also be some effects from the powerhouse and switching station in the context of the existing Quoich Dam which is a B Listed Building and may be viewed as a cultural landmark. However, detailed design of the powerhouse area, including a positive, well designed building, high quality detailing of other features (such as walls or fencing) to reflect the standards of the historic hydro scheme, and landform and planting to accommodate the site would help to offset these effects (see **Appendix 2.1: Sustainable Design Statement**).
- 1.2.12 Overall it is considered that the Proposed Development would result in some significant effects in the context of valued landmarks. However, these effects would be localised and detailed design and mitigation would be undertaken to try to minimise effects and ensure that the value of these features

would not be diminished. It is therefore concluded that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Proposed Development.

Criterion 4. The amenity of key recreational routes and ways is respected

- 1.2.13 None of the recreational routes identified within the Loch Ness Landscape Sensitivity Study are located within the study area for the Proposed Development. As a sensitivity appraisal by THC has not yet been undertaken for this area, key recreational routes and ways have not been identified. There would be some significant effects to recreational route receptors within the vicinity of the study area during construction, although most of these would reduce to non-significant levels during operation (see **Appendix 7.2**). However, a significant long term effect has been identified to the mountain route to Gleouraich / Spidean Mialach which would be partially diverted as part of the Proposed Development over the top of the Fearna dam. This is discussed in more detail in **Annex A** of **Appendix 7.2**.
- 1.2.14 These effects would be relatively localised with respect to the available recreational routes within the study area and all routes would still be able to be enjoyed with valued views remaining. It is therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded.

Criterion 5. The amenity of transport routes is respected

- 1.2.15 The 'A87T above Loch Garry' key route is located 12.5km from the Proposed Development at its closest point. It is not anticipated that there would be any effects on this route or other key routes identified within the Loch Ness Landscape Sensitivity Study. Within the study area, a significant effect has been identified for the C1144 minor road to Kinlochhourn during construction, due to widening works along a section of this route as well as close proximity to construction works relating to the powerhouse and switchyard. However, this effect would not be significant during operation (see **Appendix 7.2**).
- 1.2.16 It is therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded.

Criterion 6. The existing pattern of Wind Energy Development is respected

- 1.2.17 The Proposed Development does not comprise a wind energy development and therefore would not have any effect on the existing pattern of Wind Energy Development. The threshold for this criterion would therefore not be exceeded.

Criterion 7. The need for separation between developments and / or clusters is respected

- 1.2.18 The lower reservoir of the Proposed Development would utilise Loch Quoich, which is an existing hydro reservoir, and the Proposed Development, particularly the powerhouse and switchyard area, would often be experienced in context of the existing Quoich Dam. The Skye Overhead Transmission Line also runs north of the minor road, including three NeSTS (monopole transmission towers) located at the Quoich Dam.
- 1.2.19 The Proposed Development would therefore be in an area where existing hydro and other development already affects the landscape and would increase the clustering of development at the eastern end of the loch. However, it would be perceived as a concise cluster and would be distinct from other nearby development of this type in the wider area. The powerhouse and switchyard area have been sited partially in an existing brownfield quarry area, previously used in the construction of the Quoich Hydroelectric Scheme, and the siting of the Proposed Development in an area where previous infrastructure is already present would minimise proliferation of further development into new areas.
- 1.2.20 It is therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Proposed Development.

Criterion 8. The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected

- 1.2.21 The Proposed Development would introduce large man-made structures into this landscape and would appear prominent when viewed from certain locations. However, it is situated within a relatively large scale landscape where hydro development of a similar type is already present, and which is able to accommodate this type of change to some extent. The dams and upper reservoir would be particularly prominent when experienced from surrounding mountain summit and ridge areas including Gleouraich, Spidean Mialach and Gairich and there is some potential for the perceived height of Spidean Mialach

when seen from the other mountains to be reduced. However, from other hill summits they would often be experienced in expansive views in which they would affect a small part of the overall landscape. The powerhouse would most often be viewed from the public road where it would feature in oblique views featuring the gable end. It would only be seen in frontal views from a limited number of locations across the loch but would be seen in this context in relation to a very large scale landscape. In the long term, mitigation measures including planting and earthworks would help tie the powerhouse and switchyard into the landscape softening their appearance and scale.

- 1.2.22 It is considered that overall, the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Proposed Development because the apparent landscape scale and distance perceived by receptors would be generally maintained, other than in localised areas.

Criterion 9. Landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is respected

- 1.2.23 The Proposed Development does not comprise a wind energy development and therefore would not affect the landscape setting of any nearby wind energy developments. The threshold for this criterion would therefore not be exceeded.

Criterion 10. Distinctiveness of landscape character is respected

- 1.2.24 The Proposed Development would lead to some localised significant effects on landscape character (described in **Appendix 7.3: Assessment of Landscape Character Types** and summarised in Section 7.9 of Chapter 7), largely limited to the immediate context of the Proposed Development within LCT 239, with some temporary significant effects in the adjacent LCT 237.
- 1.2.25 LCT 239 is a very large and expansive LCT with a distinct, mountainous terrain. This mountainous terrain would remain strongly intact and would ensure that the LCT remained distinct from other neighbouring character types.
- 1.2.26 It is therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Proposed Development.

Appraisal of Loch Ness Sensitivity Study

Key Views, Key Routes and Gateways

- 1.2.27 Key Views and Routes in the Loch Ness Sensitivity Study are detailed in Table 5.2.1 and Table 5.2.2 of the OWESG. **Table 2** and **Table 3** below identify those key views and routes of potential relevance to the Proposed Development along with potential for effects.

Table 2: Appraisal of Key Views included in the Loch Ness Sensitivity Study

Key View (as noted in the OWESG: p39-41)	Appraisal	Potential Effects
A87 Viewpoint above Loch Garry <i>"Panoramic views, easily accessible by tourists. Across The Great Glen, east to the rolling uplands, west to rugged massifs and sweeping interlocking peaks mostly outwith Study area"</i>	There would be no intervisibility with the dams or powerhouse from the A87 Viewpoint above Loch Garry. During construction there may be distant views of construction traffic along the Southern Access Route (SAR) south of Loch Garry, but this would be seen within forestry, and would likely appear similar to existing forestry operations.	No

Table 1.2.2: Appraisal of Key Routes included in the Loch Ness Sensitivity Study

Key Route (as noted in the OWESG: p42-43)	Appraisal	Potential Effects
A87T above Loch Garry	There is some very limited theoretical visibility of the Fearn dam from a section of the A87 road at the very western end of Loch Garry. However, due to the distance (approximately 21 km) and intervening vegetation it is considered unlikely that the Proposed Development would be perceptible from this route. During construction there may be views of construction traffic on the SAR, south of Loch Garry, which would be accessed from the A87, but this would be seen within forestry and would likely appear similar to existing forestry operations.	No

Table 3: Appraisal of Gateways included in the Loch Ness Sensitivity Study

Gateway (as noted in the OWESG: p45-68)	Appraisal	Potential Effects
<i>"A87 – above Loch Loyne"</i> (OWESG: p51, p58, p67)	The ZTV illustrates no theoretical visibility from this location. Glimpsed views of the SAR may be possible but would be likely to be barely perceptible.	No
<i>"Invergarry - transition into great glen from Glen Garry"</i> (OWESG: p67)	There would be no view of the Proposed Development from Invergarry.	No

Landscape Character Guidance

- 1.2.28 The OWESG splits the wider Loch Ness area into 20 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs). Within the study area for the Proposed Development the LCAs are broadly consistent with the NatureScot LCTs which have been considered for the landscape assessment. Two of the LCAs cover LCTs included within the assessment. The remaining LCAs are outwith the LVIA study area.

Table 1.2.4: Comparison of OWESG LCAs and LCTs included in the Assessment

OWESG LCA	LCT
LN11 – Rocky Moorland, High ground around north and west of Glen Garry	LCT 235 – Rocky Moorland - Lochaber
LN20 - Great Glen around Loch Oich, Broad Forested Strath	LCT 237 – Broad Forested Strath

- 1.2.29 The assessment has concluded that for LCT 235 there would be a **Minor Adverse** (not significant) effect during construction and a **Negligible** effect during operation. For LCT 237 the effect would be **Moderate Adverse** (significant) during construction and **Minor – Moderate Adverse** (not significant) during operation. However, these effects would occur within parts of these LCTs which are not included the study area for the Loch Ness Sensitivity Study. There would be no significant effects within the area covered by the Loch Ness Sensitivity Study.

1.3 Summary and Conclusions

- 1.3.1 The analysis of the THC criteria for the consideration of onshore wind farm proposals has taken account of the predicted landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development detailed in Chapter 7 of the EIA Report and supporting appendices. This has concluded that although some significant effects would occur to localised parts of the landscape and visual resource, the location, design and layout of the

Proposed Development is not anticipated to result in the threshold for any of the ten THC criteria being exceeded.

- 1.3.2 The Proposed Development is therefore considered to be in broad conformity with THC's criteria for the consideration of onshore wind farm proposals.