Lochluichart Wind Farm Extension II

INFINERGY

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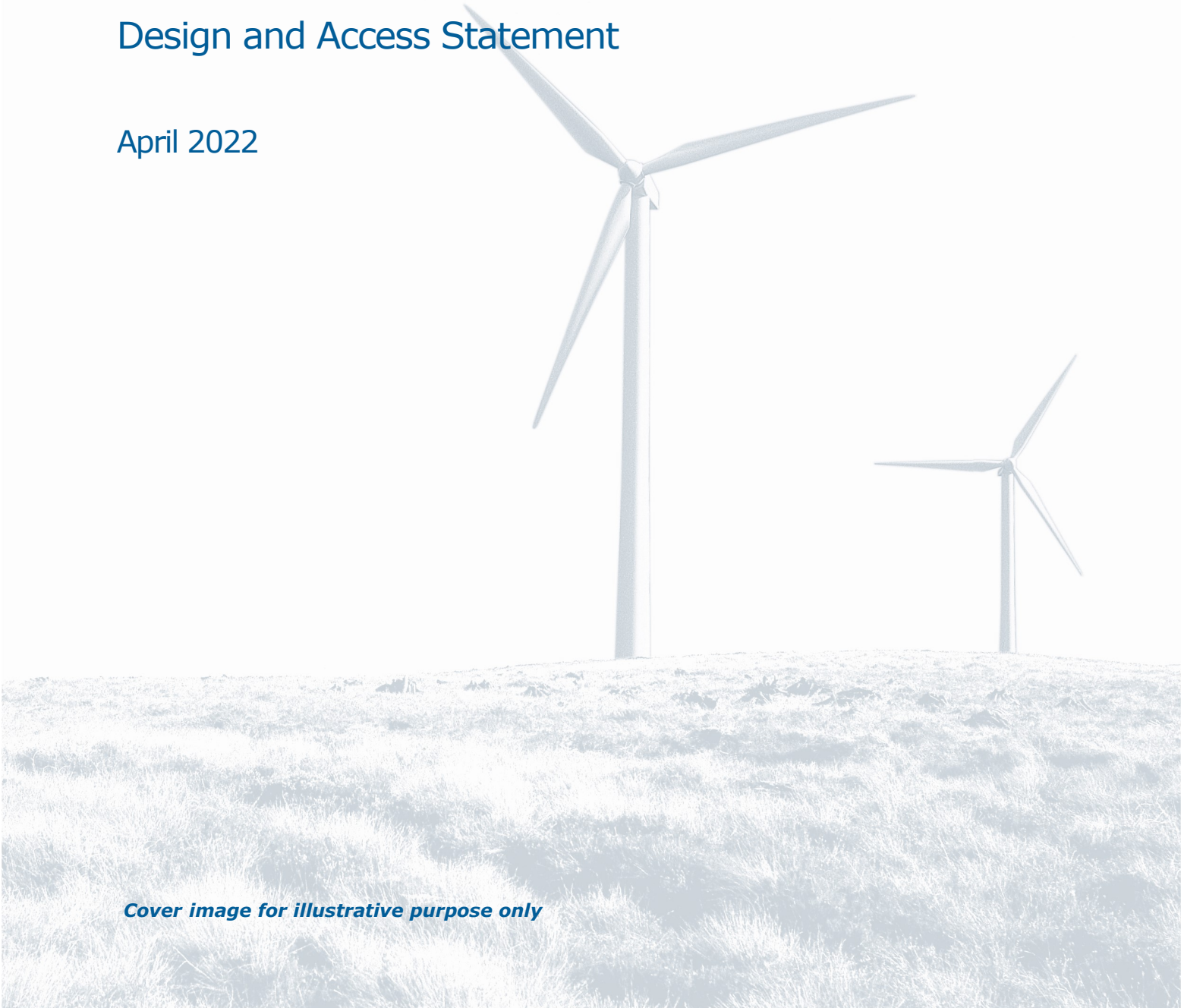
Further Environmental Information

Design and Access Statement

April 2022



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Contents

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This Design and Access Statement ('DAS') describes the design process and the resultant development proposals for the Lochluichart Wind Farm Extension II (hereafter referred to as 'the Proposed Development'), which is located immediately due south of Loch Glascarnoch and adjacent to the Lochluichart and Lochluichart Extension Wind Farms (hereafter referred to as 'the Operational Schemes'), and lies within the administrative boundary of The Highland Council ('THC') in Scotland (refer to **Figure 1.1** of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report ('EIA Report', Infinergy June 2021). The DAS accompanies the planning application submitted to THC seeking permission to construct and operate the Proposed Development.

1.1.2 The purpose of this DAS is to provide information on the principles and approach that have guided the design process. This DAS demonstrates how the site and its surroundings have been fully assessed to ensure that the final design solution is the most suitable for the site. It describes the starting point for the Proposed Development design, and subsequent alterations to the layout that were made in response to the issues that were identified through the appraisal process. Details are also provided on the access arrangements to the site.

1.1.3 This DAS should be read in conjunction with the EIA Report for the Application (Infinergy, 2021), which also contains information on the Design Evolution (Chapter 2), predicted Landscape and Visual effects (Chapter 9), and Traffic and Transport related effects (Chapter 7, EIA Report 2019).

1.1.4 The Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006, introduced a new mandatory requirement for a DAS to be prepared in support of all 'national' and 'major' developments. As the Proposed Development is expected to have a total installed capacity exceeding 20 Megawatts (MW), it will be considered a 'major' development by THC. Planning guidance notes on Design and Access Statements have been taken into consideration when preparing this DAS, notably Planning Advice Note 68 and THC's Design Statement and Design and Access Statements advice note states that the DAS should:

- illustrate how design considerations have been integral to the proposed development;
- demonstrate that the site and its surroundings have been fully appraised and that the final design solution is the most suitable for the site;
- explain how the needs of all users have been incorporated into the design process and specifically to set out in detail the proposals for access for those with disabilities;
- include:
    - background information;
    - site appraisal;
    - policy context;

- identification of the design principles;
- development of the design concept;
- the design solution;
- access to the development; and
- public consultation.

1.1.5 This DAS has also taken into consideration guidance within THC's Sustainable Design Guide (THC, 2013), noting the four key sustainable design principles:

- conserving and enhancing the character of the Highland area;
- using resources efficiently;
- minimising the environmental impact of development; and
- enhancing the viability of Highland communities.

1.2 The Applicant

1.2.1 The Applicant, Bluebell Wind Farm Limited, is a joint venture between Infinergy Limited (a renewable energy developer) and the Loch Lochluichart Estate, on which the Proposed Development is sited on.

1.2.2 The joint-venture partners secured planning permission for the Operational Schemes at the site in 2008 and 2012, and therefore the Applicant has extensive knowledge of the site and its capacity to support development of the type and scale proposed.

1.3 Planning History

1.3.1 The Proposed Development is the outcome of a review of the existing planning permissions for the Operational Schemes, both Section 36 schemes which were consented by the Scottish Government on December 22nd 2008 for the 17 turbine Lochluichart Wind Farm, and 2nd October 2012 for the 6 turbine Lochluichart Wind Farm Extension.

1.3.2 As a consequence of the belief there existed landscape capacity for additional turbines, an Extension to the Operational Schemes was progressed. Following extensive discussions with the local Distribution Network Operator (DNO), Scottish Hydro Electric Limited, it was confirmed there was the capacity to connect any proposed scheme to the grid network.

1.3.3 Since the original application for Lochluichart Wind Farm, over 10 years ago, wind turbine technology has evolved significantly. The outcome has been that technology that would have been considered innovative in 2007, has now been superseded by new technology that enables significantly more energy to be harvested from a given wind resource. The original design of the Operational Schemes was based on candidate turbines with a maximum generation capacity of 3 MW. Today, turbines with a capacity of up to 5 MW would be considered more appropriate for the wind regime at the site.

1.3.4 Since the original application for the Lochluichart Wind Farm was submitted, there has been a wealth of wind data collected adjacent to the site of the

Proposed Development, through development and operational phases, which has fed into the design and layout of the Proposed Development. As experience of operational sites has increased, design principals in relation to the optimal layout of a wind farm have also advanced, resulting in further improvements in potential energy yield.

1.3.5 Optimisation studies based on the Proposed Development site's very good wind resource, more elevated typography in relation to the Operational Schemes and current wind technology, found that contemporary turbines would significantly increase electricity output at the site and materially increase environmental benefits compared to the Operational Schemes on a per MW basis.

1.3.6 In the subsidy free world in which new onshore wind farms will be operating in, development of which forms a key part of achieving the Scottish Government's ambitious renewable energy targets, extensions to existing operational schemes where economies of scale can be achieved via utilising existing access tracks and grid infrastructure, the Proposed Development is an excellent example of a project which can work financially.

1.3.7 The Proposed Development, as a new planning application, is required under the Town and Country Planning (EIA) (Scotland) 2017 to complete an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) so it can be submitted as a planning application to be determined by THC.

1.3.8 The Applicant was granted a planning permission for Lochluichart Wind Farm Extension II, a 5-turbine scheme (of up to 133m tip height), together with associated infrastructure, on 1st July 2020 from THC (hereafter referred to as the 'Consented Development' (THC Ref: REF: 19/01284/FUL).

1.3.9 Following the granting of consent, the Applicant was informed that the proposed grid connection date when the Consented Development could connect into the National Grid, to export electricity, was to be delayed by 12 months. In addition, the turbine on which the Consented Development application was based on was no longer commercially available and there were very limited commercially available alternatives for a turbine with a 133m tip height.

1.3.10 The Applicant therefore pursued a strategy of maximising energy yield of the site by increasing the tip of heights of the turbines to 149.9m, which would allow greater capacity turbines to be considered from a wider supply base of turbine manufacturers.

1.3.11 The Proposed Development will comprise:

- 5 wind turbines up to a maximum tip height of 149.9 m, with a combined installed capacity of up to 24 MW, and associated infrastructure (foundations, external transformers and crane hardstandings);
- approximately 5km of new permanent access tracks nominally 5 m wide, including seven new water crossings;
- a substation compound, approximately 66m by 30m, comprising an electrical substation and control building;
- a temporary construction compound, approximately 100 m by 50 m, for site office, welfare facilities and material laydown area;

- an battery storage facility approximately 17m x 14m, and;
- two on-site borrow pits.

1.3.12 Full details of the Proposed Development are provided in **Chapter 3: Description of the Proposed Development** of the EIA Report (Infinergy, 2021) and are shown in **Figure 3.1**.

2. Site Description and Context

2.1 Site Description

2.1.1 The Proposed Development site boundary lies approximately 18 km north-west of Dingwall and immediately due south of the A835 and due north of the village of Lochluichart. It comprises of upland moorland located between Meall nan Caorach the west and Sìdhearn nan Cearc to the east, and is south of Loch Glascarnoch. The elevation of the site ranges from 260 m to 500 m above ordnance datum (AOD). The site occupies an area of 2.3km^2 and the central grid reference for the site is 232984 (Eastings) 868776 (Northings).

2.2 Residential Receptors

2.2.1 No buildings or structures are present on site with the closest residential property, the Aultguish Inn, approximately 2 km from the nearest proposed turbine.

2.3 Landscape

2.3.1 The Proposed Development is situated in the area covered by the Ross and Cromarty Landscape Character Area (LCA). The LCA are further sub-divided into Landscape Character Types (LCTs) by The Highland Council. Further details on the key characteristics of the LCTs is provided in EIA Report **Chapter 9: Landscape Visual Impact Assessment**.

2.3.2 The Proposed Development is comprised of upland habitats, comprising blanket bog, heathland and pockets of plantation woodland. Various waterbodies are present on site including Allt na Beinne Leìthe Bige, which runs west to east through the site with a number of minor tributaries feeding into them. Allt Giubhais Mor runs north to south through the site, eventually feeding into Loch Glascarnoch. A single lochan, Loch na Salach, is located in the south of the site.

2.4 Connections

2.4.1 The A835 is adjacent to the Proposed Development site boundary in the north, which links Inverness to Ullapool and the Far North of Scotland.

2.4.2 A purpose-built internal access track serves the Operational Schemes.

2.4.3 A Right of Way, HR46, is in close proximity to the Proposed Development site boundary.

2.5 Planning Policy Context

Landscape Designations

2.5.1 The Proposed Development is not situated in any National Scenic Area (NSA) or any Wild Land Area (WLA). The Fisherfield, Letterew, Fannichs WLA lies less than

1km to the west. While the Rhiddoroch, Beinn Dearg and Ben Wyvis WLA wraps round the Proposed Development to the north, north-east and east, with the northern boundary being the closest at approximately 3.6km from the nearest proposed turbine

Ecological Designations

2.5.2 There are no ecological designations within the site boundary. Approximately 4.1km north lies Beinn Dearg which has Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protected Area (SPA) designation, and approximately 5km west is Fannich Hills which has SSSI and SAC designation. Approximately 7.8km south-west is Achanalt Marshes, which has SSSI and SPA Designations, and Ben Wyvis 8.8km east which has National Nature Reserve, SSSI and SAC designation. More Details on the of Qualifying Features of these designations can be found in Table 11.5**, Chapter 11: Ecology**.

Historic Environment

2.5.3 There are three known heritage assets within the Inner Study Area (ISA), which comprises the Proposed Development Site Boundary. All three are undesignated and two are recorded on the HER. They comprise a possible standing stone, a probable survey post and possible chimney or borehole associated with the construction of the nearby Loch Glascarnoch Dam.

2.5.4 There is one designated asset within 5km of the turbines, it comprises the Category B Loch Glascarnoch Dam. There are five undesignated assets recorded in the HER within 2km of the Proposed Development. They comprise the former fish merchants' road between Ullapool and Contin and the remnants of the Aultguish Bridge which carried it over a stream; a building and enclosure depicted on the 1st Edition OS mapping; the site of a temporary construction camp relating to the dam, and the Aultguish Inn – still in use as a pub and hotel.

3. The Design Process

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 As part of the EIA process the development of a number of design iterations have been undertaken for both the turbine locations and the on-site infrastructure, including access tracks, construction compound and substation locations. In order to present a development layout which is considered to represent the most appropriate design; potential environmental impacts and their effects, physical and engineering constraints and health and safety were considered throughout this process.

3.1.2 Information was collated from desktop information, field surveys, scoping opinions, local planning policy and recent case law. This information provided the baseline from which site issues and sensitivities could be identified and highlighted for further detailed assessment and given priority in influencing the layout iterations of the Proposed Development. The design evolution process is described in detail below.

3.2 Site and Area Appraisal

3.2.1 The indicative turbine layout of 8 turbines included in the Scoping Report (April 2017) was based on a landscape capacity study and on contemporary information provided by the local DNO on the likely grid capacity available for connection.

3.2.2 Since then, based on further discussions and studies, there is now a greater understanding grid capacity available than was originally indicated, and hence the number of turbines has increased to 9 with a potential capacity of the Proposed Development of up to 32.4MW (based on 3.6 MW turbines).

3.2.3 Since the granting of planning permission for the Consented Development (see Section 1.1.3 of the EIA Report, the 5-turbine scheme), the Applicant has sought both to increase energy yield and the supply of suitable candidate turbines to procure by submitting this new application.

3.3 Design Principles

3.3.1 The following design principles were followed to arrive at the final design of the Proposed Development and ensure it was the most suitable for the site:

- the Proposed Development should maximise the amount renewable energy it could generate;
- the Proposed Development should complement the Operational Schemes;
- the Proposed Development should relate to the underlying landform by staying contained on the upland plateau and achieving even elevations between turbines;
- the Proposed Development should have a cohesive appearance; minimise the potential visual effects upon Ben Wyvis range, A835 Inchbea to Aultguish Inn, Old Drover's Road, Corriemoillie and Beinn a Chaisteil; and
- environmental constraints, in addition to those referred to above, and associated buffers must be recognised and respected.

3.3.2 The design of the Proposed Development has been designed bearing in mind the following key sustainable design principles:

- conserving and enhancing the character of the Highland area;
- using resource efficiently;
- minimising the environmental impact of development; and
- enhancing the viability of Highland communities.

3.3.3 References should be made to the EIA Report, in particular **Chapter 2: EIA Process**, which explains the key constraints and design opportunities of the Proposed Development site, which in turn led to the design process which is detailed below.

3.4 Proposed Development Layout Iterations

Turbines

3.4.1 An initial layout for the Proposed Development was used for the purposes of the Scoping Report, focusing on Landscape and Visual effects and some limited environmental constraints, and was developed prior to the remaining baseline environmental and technical assessments being conducted. There was already a great deal of baseline readily available from the consenting process for the Operational Schemes. Once the initial consultation was undertaken, the baseline conditions on site were collated and mapped within a comprehensive Geographical Information System (GIS) model, specific to the Proposed Development.

3.4.2 As a result of the EIA process there have been seven main design iterations to the layout of the Proposed Development in order to avoid, reduce or offset the potential environmental effects as well as to ensure that the site will produce as much renewable energy as possible within given constraints. In addition to these five main design iterations, there has been further micro-siting (i.e. movement of turbines or other infrastructure by less than 50 m, or as a result of peat surveys from areas of deep peat) to refine the design as new environmental information emerged through the EIA process.

3.4.3 Overall, changes to the Proposed Development layout were made as a result of the findings of the baseline survey work and consultation undertaken with statuary and non-statuary consultees and the public. A summary of the main turbine layout iterations for the Proposed Development is provided in Table 1 below and illustrated in **Figure 2.1** of the EIA Report.

Table 1 - Turbine Layout Iterations Summary

Design Iteration	Description	Design Principles / Reasons for Change from Previous Iteration
1 (Scoping)	8 turbines with a 133 m tip height	150m tip height turbines were first considered, but discounted due to LV capacity considerations and requirement to fit with existing Lochluichart/Corriemoillie schemes; 133m tip height was considered more appropriate, based on a Senvion 3.4M 114 turbine; Landscape Capacity Considerations from key viewpoints, amongst which includes: A835, Aultguish Inn; A835, Black Bridge; Ben Wyvis, and; 50m buffer from watercourse; Red Throated Diver were understood not to be present, hence turbines were sited adjacent to Loch na Salach;

Design Iteration	Description	Design Principles / Reasons for Change from Previous Iteration
		Minimum separation distance between turbines (avoid wind capture and maximise wind farm energy production).
2 (Design Evolution)	7 turbines with a 133 m tip height	Single turbine adjacent to Loch na Salach removed; Consultation with project ornithologist, could support 1 turbine in Loch na Salach Red Throated diver corrido.
3 (Design Evolution)	6 turbines with a 133 m tip height	Remaining turbine adjacent to Loch na Salach removed, following consultation with all stakeholder ornithologists (Eneco, Applicant) and based on initial discussions with SNH (potential impact on Red Throated Diver).
4 (Design Evolution)	9 turbines with a 133 m tip height	Input of Computation Fluid Dynamics (CFD)/Wind Resource Assessment Modelling (mapping which identifies where best wind resource is located); Adherence to a *minimum separation distance* spacing between turbines (which avoids wind capture and maximise wind farm energy production); Completion of baseline data for LXX, the turbines were micro-sited for environmental constraints including: Avoidance of Ground Water Dependent Ecosystems (GWDTEs); Slope Gradient (Constructability/Deliverability of turbine components); Phase 1 Peat Surveys; Drainage Features; Avoid Loch na Salach/Red-Throated Diver Corridor; The sensitive visual receptors, based on discussion & negotiation with statutory consultees and represented by viewpoints which were key to designing the Proposed Development turbine layout and mitigating Landscape & Visual impacts, were: Viewpoint 1: A835, Aultguish Inn; Viewpoint 2: A835, Black Bridge; Viewpoint 3: Old Drover's Road, Corriemoillie; Viewpoint 5: Ben Wyvis, and; Viewpoint 8: Beinn a Chaisteil.

Design Iteration	Description	Design Principles / Reasons for Change from Previous Iteration
5 (Final Design)	9 turbines with a 133 m tip height	Phase 2 Peat Surveys completed; Use of CFD to micro-site turbine locations; Use of key viewpoints to mitigate L&V impacts.
6 Supplementary Information	5 turbines with a 133 m tip height	Following feedback from statutory consultees, the Applicant removed turbines T2, T3, T9 & T10 and associated infrastructure from the Proposed Development application.
7 New Application	5 turbines with a 149.9m tip height	The Applicant submitted a new application (with all turbines & related infrastructure remaining in the same locations) increasing the tip heights to 149.9m based on the Nordex N133 turbine (4.8MW).

3.4.4 The layout of the turbines has aimed to minimise the environmental impacts of the Proposed Development, ensuring that the character of the landscape is maintained and the visibility of the turbines minimised where possible.

Infrastructure

3.4.5 Following the evolution of the turbine layout design, the design of the access tracks, construction compounds and substation was undertaken. The infrastructure required on the site was designed and arranged in such a way as to avoid the on-site environmental constraints identified, but to ensure technical parameters are met.

3.4.6 Access track routes were designed where possible to:

- upgrade existing tracks on the site;
- minimise water crossings;
- avoid more sensitive and intact bog habitats; and
- avoid highly dependent groundwater dependent terrestrial ecosystems.

3.4.7 The substation of the Operational Schemes is located on the south-western boundary of the site, north of turbine T5 and adjacent to the southern borrow pit. The location of the substation for the Proposed Development is adjacent to the existing access track built for the Operational Schemes.

3.4.8 The Operational Schemes had one construction compound, adjacent to the first borrow pit as you enter site in the north of the Proposed Development. For a Proposed Development of 5 turbines, and based on the construction of the Operational Schemes and after seeking internal construction advice, it was decided upon a preferred location.

3.4.9 The location and combination of the construction compound and the 'northern borrow pit'; will facilitate the management of materials and centralises the operations of the construction process. The placement of the construction

compound away from the public highway reduces the potential health and safety risks to the public and increases the safety of the site.

3.4.10 The Operational Schemes had consent for two borrow pit search areas. Following preliminary ground investigations, which involved excavation of trial pits by a local contractor to establish ground conditions, the Applicant determined that the northern borrow pits was still suitable for the extraction of material for the construction of the Proposed Development.

3.4.11 In order to minimise the local traffic impacts the Applicant proposes an additional borrow pit, the 'southern borrow pit', immediately north-west of Proposed Turbine T5. The location of the southern borrow pit was carefully considered and peat and ecology surveys have determined that it is an appropriate location.

4. Access

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 As part of the EIA the Applicant has undertaken a full traffic and transport assessment for the construction, operational and decommissioning phases of the Proposed Development. Full details are provided in **Chapter 7: Traffic and Transport** of the EIA Report (Infinergy, 2018).

4.2 Vehicular Access

4.2.1 Access to the site through all phases of the Proposed Development would be from the A835, via the existing access track constructed for the Operating Schemes.

Construction

4.2.2 The Applicant proposes that turbine components are delivered to the Port of Invergordon by marine transport, as utilised by the Operational Schemes and Corriemoillie Wind Farm. This port facility is regularly used to deliver turbine components by ship. There is a designated abnormal load exit route from the dockyard through to the trunk road network which minimises effects on local road infrastructure and other road users in the area.

4.2.3 The proposed delivery route has been based on the delivery route which has been tried and tested for the Operational Schemes. The selected route utilises the closest suitable port of entry and minimises potential effects on the road network, including the requirement for off-site works, traffic delays during abnormal load transportation and effect on other relevant sensitive receptors.

4.2.4 The abnormal loads would follow the following route which is shown in **Appendix 7.A** (Infinergy, 2018).

4.2.5 At this stage a contractor for the Proposed Development has not been identified, and information relating to the origins of general construction traffic is not available. Based on the route used by both the Operational Schemes, a preferred construction route has been identified which is covered in greater details in **Chapter Seven** of the EIA Report (Infinergy, 2018).

4.2.6 During construction, the Applicant will implement a number of measures to help mitigate the effects of the abnormal load convoys and construction traffic. These

measures will be discussed and agreed with THC and Transport Scotland prior to construction; the detailed measures shall be included within the Traffic Management Plan (TMP) for the site.

4.2.7 The TMP will be submitted for approval prior to the commencement of construction to ensure that the proposed mitigation measures are implemented successfully. Proposed measures include:

- Advance warning signs shall be installed on the approaches to the affected road network. Temporary signage advising drivers that abnormal loads and construction traffic will be operating shall be erected on the local road sections of the route.
- To further improve driver information, it shall be requested of Transport Scotland that the Variable Message Signs (VMS) are used to warn drivers of abnormal loads operating on the motorway and trunk road sections of the route to warn them of possible delays and to allow them to consider alternative routes if possible.
- An advance escort shall be required to warn oncoming vehicles ahead of the abnormal loads convoy, with one escort staying with the convoy at all times. The escorts and convoy will remain in radio contact at all times where possible.
- The abnormal load convoys shall be no more than three HGVs long, to permit safe transit along the delivery route and to allow limited overtaking opportunities for following traffic where it is safe to do so.
- A police escort shall be also be implemented, where necessary, to facilitate the delivery of the predicted loads.
- The times in which the convoys travel shall be agreed with Police Scotland, Transport Scotland and THC.
- Undertaking pre and post construction road condition surveys on the A835 to assess any detrimental effects of the movement of HGVs on the carriageway during the construction phase. Any detrimental effects which are determined by agreement with the roads authority to be attributable to the Proposed Development will be made good to at least the original carriageway condition.
- A robust dust and dirt management plan for the site access to reduce and remove debris deposited on the public roads.

4.2.8 Following the implementation of the TMP and mitigation measures outlined within it, it is considered that there will be negligible effects arising from the movement of construction traffic.

Operation

4.2.9 During the operational phase the only daily vehicle trips accessing the site will be made by one or two LGVs carrying out routine maintenance. Therefore, no effects on the local network are anticipated.

Decommissioning

4.2.10 The traffic effects associated with the decommissioning process will be lower than during the construction period due to fewer vehicle movements required. In addition, due to the time period (40 years) after which decommissioning will take place, current baseline data will be invalid; therefore, an assessment of the traffic effects of the decommissioning of the site has not been undertaken.

4.3 Recreational Access

4.3.1 There are no designated rights of way, core paths, cycle routes or bridleways within the site boundary. The Proposed Development is not located between settlements or residential properties and is therefore not used as a linking route. The site on which the Proposed Development is located forms part of what is managed as a sporting estate, and also includes a forestry plantation.

4.3.2 The Land Reform Act 2003 (Scottish Executive, 2003) provides unhindered access to open countryside across Scotland and the operation of the Proposed Development would continue to allow this across the site. Likewise, the operation of the Proposed Development would not impact on the Loch Luichart Estate stalking interests.

4.3.3 Access, both to the public and stalkers, during construction and decommissioning will be temporarily limited within the site boundary to ensure public health and safety on what will be a working construction site.

5. Consultation

5.1 Statutory Consultation

5.1.1 Consultation with statutory consultees has been undertaken throughout the design iteration and environmental assessment of the Proposed Development. Three main stages of consultation have been undertaken, Scoping, Pre-Application Consultation and Additional Consultation, as detailed below.

Scoping

5.1.2 The EIA scoping process is undertaken to identify the potentially significant environmental issues which should be considered when assessing the potential effects of the Proposed Development. An EIA Scoping Opinion may be obtained from the competent authority as to which issues should be considered within the EIA. In reaching its EIA Scoping Opinion, the competent authority consults the statutory and non-statutory stakeholders for their consideration.

5.1.3 The original plan for the Proposed Development was to submitted as a s36 application, with the Proposed Development considered to be an *Extension* to the Operational Schemes as defined by sharing:

- access, spine track and junction;
- grid infrastructure;
- same developer (the applicant, Infinergy Limited and Loch Luichart Estate);
- the same (Loch Luichart) Estate hosting the project, and;

- the project being located immediately adjacent to the Operational Schemes.

5.1.4 The Proposed Development was originally deemed as a Schedule 1 activity under the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2000 as amended (the EIA Regulations in April 2017).

5.1.5 It therefore qualified as a section 36 application to be determined by the Scottish Ministers. For this reason, in 12th April 2017, an EIA Scoping Opinion was requested from the Energy Consents Unit (ECU) in place of being requested from THC. The Applicant provided an EIA Scoping Report (refer to EIA Report Appendix 2B), as prepared by the EIA Project Team, to help inform the ECU and consultees in forming their EIA Scoping Opinion. The EIA Scoping Report contained details of the site baseline and the Proposed Development. It also proposed which environmental impacts would be assessed in the EIA, and the assessment methodologies that would be used.

5.1.6 The ECU consulted with a variety of statutory and non-statutory consultees before providing an EIA Scoping Opinion in 13th June 2017 (refer to EIA Report Appendix 4.1).

5.1.7 Since the formal Scoping Opinion from the ECU was received the applicant, on further deliberation and legal advice, decided to submit the planning application for the Proposed Development will be under Town and Country Planning (EIA) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 Application; the Scoping Opinion received from the ECU in practical terms therefore still remains valid.

The Highland Council Pre-Application Consultation

5.1.8 A 'Major Development' pre-application meeting was held on 23rd November October 2016 with THC and other consultees, to ensure that due process was adhered to with respect to scoping the content of the EIA Report.

5.1.9 THC then issued a Pre-Application Advice Pack (refer EIA Report Appendix 4.B) on 14th December 2016.

5.1.10 For the Proposed Development, following discussion with THC, the Applicant did not pursue the Major Development Pre-Application process as the baseline was the Consented Development which, apart from the increase in turbine tip heights for the Proposed Development, remains the same project in terms of the location of wind turbines and related infrastructure.

5.2 Public Consultation

5.2.1 Consultation with the general public has been conducted in accordance with the relevant legislative and policy requirements, specifically part 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Scotland) Regulations 2013, to ensure any concerns were considered during the design phase for the Proposed Development. This allows information to be gathered which may otherwise have remained unknown.

5.2.2 The planning application is accompanied by a Pre-Application Consultation Report which details the findings of this work and illustrates the ways in which community engagement has helped identify potential issues arising from the

emerging development proposal and, where appropriate, shape the final proposal which is now the subject of this planning application.

5.2.3 The public consultation for the Proposed Development has used a variety of different methods during the engagement process, including:

- face-to-face meetings and postal/email correspondence with key stakeholders, including local Community Councils;
- the establishment of a dedicated project website containing news, technical reports, exhibition materials;
- posters, leaflets and newsletters distributed in the local area to update the community about the proposal and advertise events; and
- public notices and press releases in the local media to keep the community informed.

5.2.4 A project website, www.lxxwindfarm.co.uk, was set up and is updated with new information including maps and plans of the site, progress on technical studies and information about events. The website also acts as an online community consultation portal, giving the public the opportunity to register their interest in the project and to ask questions of the applicant directly.

Public Engagement

5.2.5 A newsletter was sent to over 178 households in communities surrounding the Proposed Development, followed by two virtual Community Open Days (vCODs), on 2nd December 2020 at 2pm and 7pm.

5.2.6 In addition, a new online consultation page was developed for the website which was live from Tuesday 1st December until 4th January 2021. This gave stakeholders the flexibility to view the information presented and give feedback over a longer period than the standard public community open days.

5.2.7 Timings and platform for these events had been discussed and agreed with the Community Council in order to ensure as many stakeholders as possible had the opportunity to engage.

5.2.8 These vCODs were advertised via the newsletter, by poster locally and in the relevant local press. In addition, the Applicant attended a number of Community Council meetings, and continues to do so.

Feedback from the Community

5.2.9 Feedback mechanisms are in place via the newsletter, website, Freephone number and by either visitor survey, information request form or in person at the Virtual Community Open Days.

Incorporation of Feedback

5.2.10 Feedback gathered throughout the consultation period is considered and where appropriate incorporated into the final design of the Proposed Development.

5.2.11 A number of concerns were raised by the local community, which included visual impact the Proposed Development would have on the surrounding area and impact on ecology/hydrology, with specific reference to a recent local flooding event. The Applicant has taken these concerns into consideration in the design

of the Proposed Development, and where turbines & related infrastructure are located, as best as can be achieved and in consideration of other environmental, technical and financial factors.

5.2.12 The Applicant confirms that they will continue to liaise with the local community during the planning application process and during the construction, operational and decommissioning phases of the Proposed Development.

6. Programme

6.1 Construction

6.1.1 The estimated onsite construction period for the Proposed Development is expected to take approximately 14 months and includes a programme to reinstate all temporary working areas. Normal construction hours will be between 07:00 and 19:00 hours Monday to Friday and 07:00 to 18:00 hours at weekends. These times have been chosen to minimise disturbance to local residents.

6.1.2 The Proposed Development will be phased so that certain activities will take place concurrently and there may be periods of limited activity due to the delivery of materials and/or equipment or due to winter conditions.

6.1.3 Details of the construction programme will be provided to THC in Construction Environmental Management Plans prior to the commencement of construction of each phase; and this requirement will be addressed through separate appropriately worded planning conditions.

6.2 Operation and Decommissioning

6.2.1 This assessment assumes that the operational lifespan of the Proposed Development would be approximately 40 years, after which it would be appropriately decommissioned. It is expected that decommissioning would take approximately 12 months. The environmental effects of decommissioning are considered to be the same, or less, as during construction but over a much shorter time period.

7. Conclusion

7.1.1 The design of the Proposed Development from the Permitted Scheme has been informed by a robust EIA and design iteration process, taking into account potential environmental impacts and their effects, physical constraints, and health and safety considerations. The information used to inform the design iteration process included consultation responses received, baseline data and the impact assessment undertaken.

7.1.2 It is acknowledged that in practice every wind farm site has some local impact; however, the design has prioritised the minimisation of these where possible and mitigation is detailed within the technical chapters of this EIA Report where this has not been possible.

8. References

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