REPORT

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Knocknagael Site, Essich, Inverness

Client: Field Knocknagael Ltd

Reference: PC3506-RHD-07-XX-RP-Z-0001

Status: Final/1

Date: 25 June 2024

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Document title: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Subtitle: Knocknagael Site, Essich, Inverness
Reference: PC3506-RHD-07-XX-RP-Z-0001
Status: Final/1
Date: 25 June 2024
Project name: Knocknagael
Project number: PC3506
Author(s): ME

Drafted by: ME

Checked by: EW

Date: 24/06/2024

Approved by: JP

Date: 25/06/2024

Classification
Project related

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1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) undertaken by DRaW (UK) Limited. The LVIA considers the following potential environmental effects during construction and operational phases of the Proposed Development:

- direct impact to physical landscape features;
- direct and indirect effects on landscape character; and
- effects on views, as experienced by a range of receptors within the study area.

This chapter also provides:

- a summary of the planning policy context relevant to landscape and visual effects;
- the methodology used for the LVIA;
- a description and identification of the existing landscape characteristics and baseline views, including identification of sensitive landscape and visual receptors;
- a description of the proposed mitigation measures;
- an assessment of residual effects, taking into account proposed mitigation; and
- a summary of findings, including significant landscape and visual effects, where identified.

The LVIA chapter is supported by the following Appendices:

- **Appendix 01** Drawings:
  - Drawing 01 Study Area & Photographic Locations.
  - Drawing 02 Landscape Constraints & Designations.
  - Drawing 03 Landscape Character Areas.
  - Drawing 04 Topography.
  - Drawings 05 – 08 Zone of Theoretical Visibility.
  - Drawing R01 Proposed Landscape Restoration.
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- **Appendix 02:** Representative Viewpoint Assessment Tables.
- **Appendix 03:** Viewpoint Photographs and Photomontages.
  - Viewpoint Photographs (Existing Views, Drawings VP01 to VP05)
  - Photomontage Views (Drawings P01, P02 & P03)
- **Appendix 04:** LVIA Methodology.

1.1 About the Author

The chapter was prepared by DRaW (UK) Limited, a Registered Practice of the Landscape Institute. The assessment was undertaken by Mike Estell, BA (Hons) DipLA CMLI a Chartered Landscape Architect and Director of DRaW, with 28 years' experience as a company director. He has undertaken LVIAs for major development across the UK, including Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects.

1.2 Background

This report provides a LVIA in relation to the construction and operation of a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) with associated infrastructure, access and ancillary works, including landscaping and biodiversity enhancement (the Proposed Development) on land located to the west of the existing Knocknagael substation, approximately 8 kilometres (km) southwest of the town of Inverness, Scotland.

1.3 Site Description

The site is located at Essich on agricultural land approximately 3 kilometres (km) south of Inverness within the Highland Council administrative area. The planning application red line boundary (refer to **Appendix 01**, Drawing 01 Study Area & Photographic Locations) covers approximately 43 hectares (ha) and includes the existing Knocknagael Substation and adjoining areas of land that are required to accommodate the underground electricity cable connection to the Proposed Development.

The focus of the LVIA is the main built form of the Proposed Development (comprising two BESS compounds and a Substation compound) occupying approximately 6 ha of pastureland between Essich Road and Biorraid Road, located to the west of Knocknagael Substation.

1.4 Proposed Development

The Proposed Development principally comprises a BESS that will charge and discharge electricity from the adjacent, existing Knocknagael substation. It includes two battery compounds comprising battery storage units arranged into rows, MV skids and associated ancillary equipment, a substation compound which accommodates high-voltage grid transformers, switchgear and a control building, as well as site-wide supporting infrastructure including underground cabling, access tracks, fencing, attenuation basins, and landscaping measures. Whilst the exact specifications are subject to detailed design, the principal components described form the basis of the planning application to allow environmental assessments and mitigation to be appropriately scoped.

2 Assessment Methodology

The LVIA methodology (**Appendix 04**) adopts the following best practice guidance:

- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Assessment and Management, 2013);
- Technical Guidance Note 02/21 Assessing landscape value outside national designations (Landscape Institute, 2021);
- Technical Guidance Note 2/19 Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (Landscape Institute, March 2019); and,
- Technical Guidance Note 06/19 Visual Representation of Development Proposals (Landscape Institute September 2019).

2.1 Consultation

A summary of LVIA related consultation is included in **Table 1**.

Table 1 Summary of Consultation

Consultation	Consultee Response
21st February 2024. Informal email to the Highland Council (THC) landscape officer seeking guidance or agreement on '*the extent of the study area.., numbers and locations of representative views, photomontage requirement / numbers and LVIA methodology*'.	22nd February 2024 reply from THC, Planning North: '*We would only normally be able to provide formal advice through the Council's Major Preap Service... However, there are not many slots still available in the coming months. A 2 km LVIA study area may be acceptable going forward for such an application, but I would be reluctant to comment further without more details of the scale of the development proposed*'.
The Highland Council, Pre-application Advice for Major Developments (24/00184/PREMAJ, 11th June 2024)	*Summary of key issues (abridged):* Concern regarding the clustered location adjacent to the existing Knocknagael Substation could give rise to adverse cumulative visual and landscape impacts, particularly experienced by people on the nearby road network and closest properties to the south east of the site. The landscape and visual impacts are key issues that will inform our position in relation to this proposal. Careful consideration is required to mitigate the landscape and visual impacts on closest surrounding properties and recreational receptors using Essich Road and the roads either side of the Knocknagael Substation. The LVIA landscape must include an up-to-date assessment of the cumulative effects of the proposal with other similar proposals covering an appropriately sized study area.

Consultation	Consultee Response
The Highland Council, Pre-application Advice for Major Developments (24/00184/PREMAJ, 11th June 2024)	*THC Landscape Officer (abridged):* Permanent screening earthworks will only be acceptable if the earthworks themselves can be designed to fit in with the landscape character of the area. Bunds with constant depth, height and slope are unlikely to achieve this, so detailed design to ensure that earthworks do not read as an obvious landform intervention will be required. Planting or other measures may be advisable to ameliorate the appearance of the development from the minor road between the development and the Knocknagael Substation and to blend the earthworks in with the wider landscape character. Successful establishment of tree and shrub planting will be essential, and applicants should ensure that species selection, planting method and establishment maintenance is tailored to the locality. The visualisations should include the scheme at completion and following 10 years of landscaping establishment. The viewpoint locations suggested appear appropriate but the scale of mapping and lack of ZTV information mean no more definitive response cannot be given at this stage. A ZTV of the development with the proposed viewpoints should be shared with the Council for further consideration.
17th June 2024. Informal email to THC landscape officer seeking clarification of points raised in the Pre-application Advice. Draft ZTVs, LVIA viewpoints and photomontage locations were issued with the email (as requested by the landscape officer). Queries related to the location of other development in the area that THC may wish to include in the LVIA cumulative assessment and the use of Landscape Institute methodology to produce visualisations.	*No response at the time of writing.*

Points raised in THC Pre-application Advice for Major Developments are incorporated or addressed in the LVIA.

2.2 Study Area

The study area adopted for the LVIA is shown on Drawing 01 (**Appendix 01**). The study area was derived from Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) mapping, site observation and review of published information.

Potential for significant effects on landscape and visual receptors will not be expected beyond a 3 km zone of the Proposed Development and therefore this forms the main focus of the assessment.

The techniques outlined below were used to inform the LVIA.

2.3 Zone of Theoretical Visibility Mapping

ZTV maps (refer to **Appendix 01**, Drawings 05-08) have been prepared to assist in identifying the area within which the Proposed Development is likely to be visible and help determine the locations of landscape and visual receptors that may be affected.

The ZTV is computer generated using a digital terrain model (DTM) of the study area (using Ordnance Survey 'Terrain 05' data, at 5 m resolution) with analysis points based upon the heights of the tallest structures. This assessment includes a series of ZTVs, generated to show the varying degree of visibility for selected infrastructure within the Proposed Development.

- Drawings 05 & 06 are ZTVs based on 'bare earth' models; the DTM includes existing buildings as exclusion zones but not existing woodland or other substantial areas of vegetation.
- Drawings 07 & 08 are ZTVs with the DTM including both buildings & woodland as exclusion zones.

2.4 Assumptions and Limitations of ZTV Mapping

Woodland and other significant areas of vegetation are incorporated into the DTM using online aerial mapping and site observation. Buildings are incorporated into the DTM model using digital OS data. Heights used for both vegetation and building modelling are generic heights and considered to be conservative estimates. ZTV mapping cannot incorporate the myriad of varying features and heights of those features.

The ZTV output is based on analysis points set to the tops of tallest proposed structures and does not differentiate between the full extent of a proposed structure being visible or only the very top section being visible. ZTV maps are not 'distance sensitive' in that they do not take account the effect of increasing distance on visibility of a Proposed Development. Perceived changes in a view toward a Proposed Development at 100 m distance will differ markedly from perceived changes in views from 2 km distance.

Mapping is assumed to present a 'worst case' scenario and is used as a guide only for site-based survey to enable the selection of representative viewpoint locations and determine the possible extent of landscape areas affected.

2.5 Representative Viewpoint Assessment and Photography

The assessment of predicted visual effects is based on a series of 'representative viewpoints'. The viewpoint locations are indicated on Drawing 01 (**Appendix 01**) and viewpoint photographs VP1 to VP9 (**Appendix 03**). Viewpoints were selected to represent the predicted experience of different types of visual receptor, including users of public rights of way, residential properties, transport routes, and heritage and recreational sites. Selected viewpoints may include specific locations that are popular vantage points or tourist destinations. Viewpoints may also be used to illustrate landscape character effects or discuss cumulative effects of the proposed scheme.

2.6 Photomontage Visualisations

To illustrate the appearance of the Proposed Development, computer generated photomontages were produced from viewpoints 1, 3 and 4 (**Appendix 03**, Drawings P01, P02 and P03). The process involves a rendered image, generated from a 3D computer model of the Proposed Development, being digitally aligned

and superimposed onto the existing (baseline) viewpoint photograph. Each photomontage is shown alongside the corresponding baseline photograph to aid comparison.

2.7 Baseline Survey

Information relevant to the LVIA has been gathered through a combination of desktop research and field study. Desktop research included a review of the following information:

- National Planning Framework 4, December 2023;
- Highland-Wide Local Development Plan (HLDP) (Adopted 2012)
- Scottish Natural Heritage, National Landscape Assessment, 2019;
  - Landscape Character Type (LCT) 0 Urban
  - LCT 223 Flat Moorland Plateau with Woodland
  - LCT 225 Broad Steep-Sided Glen
  - LCT 228 Rolling Farmland and Woodlan
- The Multi-Agency Geographical Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) database;
- OS 1:25,000 scale site-centred digital raster map; and,
- Aerial photography: Google Maps (http://maps.google.co.uk/) and Google Earth.

Field studies were undertaken in March 2024 to:

- verify existing landscape character and condition;
- verify the extent of the ZTVs taking account the screening effect of buildings and vegetation;
- identify and photograph key viewpoints; and,
- conduct a viewpoint assessment from each viewpoint.

Field study is restricted to publicly accessible locations within the study area (roads, footpaths, public open spaces, etc.).

2.8 Assessment of Potential Significance of Effects

The significance criteria for the LVIA is based on the general recommendations set out in Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition, LI & IEMA, 2013 (GLVIA3). The guidelines set out a general approach that should be tailored to the specific circumstances of the project that is being assessed. The method for identifying potentially significance effects for this assessment is set below.

2.8.1 Criteria for Evaluating Landscape Value and its Susceptibility to Change

Landscape value is defined as the 'value attached to the landscape by society' (Paragraph 5.19 of GLVIA3).

Landscape susceptibility is defined as "*the ability of the landscape (whether it be the overall character or quality/condition of a particular landscape type or area, or an individual element and/or feature, or a particular aesthetic and perceptual aspect) to accommodate the Proposed Development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and/or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies*" (Paragraph 5.40 of GLVIA3).

The criteria for evaluating landscape value and its susceptibility to change are set out in **Table 2**.

Table 2 Criteria for Evaluating Landscape Value and its Susceptibility to Change

	Landscape Value	Susceptibility of the Landscape to Change
High	**Natural Heritage:** Landscape with clear evidence of ecological, geological,	**Pattern, complexity and physical susceptibility to change:**

	Landscape Value	Susceptibility of the Landscape to Change
	geomorphological or physiographic interest. **Cultural Heritage:** Landscape with clear evidence of archaeological, historical or cultural interest. **Landscape condition:** Landscape in a good physical state. **Associations:** Landscape which is connected with notable people, events and the arts. **Distinctiveness:** Landscape has a strong sense of identity. **Recreational:** Landscape offering recreational opportunities and good access. **Perceptual (Scenic):** Landscape that appeals to the senses, primarily visual sense. **Perceptual (Wildness and tranquillity):** Landscape with a strong perceptual value notably wildness, tranquillity and/or dark skies. **Functional:** Landscape performs a clearly identifiable and valuable function.	A strongly patterned/ textured or a simple but distinctive landscape and/or with high value features and essentially intact. **Visual susceptibility to change:** An open or exposed landscape with extensive inter-visibility and no or very limited visual filtering or enclosure. Prominent visual landmarks may be present, and inter-visibility with designated landscapes may occur. **Experiential susceptibility:** A very tranquil, wild or remote landscape with little or no sense of visual or aural intrusion. A landscape which contains very few light sources and provides dark skies.
Medium	**Natural Heritage:** Landscape with limited evidence of ecological, geological, geomorphological or physiographic interest. **Cultural Heritage:** Landscape with limited evidence of archaeological, historical or cultural interest. **Landscape condition:** Landscape in a moderate physical state. **Associations:** Landscape has limited connections with notable people, events and the arts. **Distinctiveness:** Landscape has a moderate sense of identity. **Recreational:** Landscape offering limited recreational opportunities or limited access **Perceptual (Scenic):** Landscape has limited appeal to the senses. **Perceptual (Wildness and tranquillity):** Landscape of limited perceptual value in terms of wildness, tranquillity and/or dark skies.	**Pattern, complexity and physical susceptibility to change:** A landscape with mostly intact pattern and/or with a degree of complexity and with features mostly in reasonable condition. **Visual susceptibility to change:** A partially enclosed landscape with some visual containment and filtering, possible limited inter-visibility with visual landmarks and designated landscapes. **Experiential susceptibility:** A partially tranquil landscape with limited visual and/or aural intrusion, some relationship with built development/ infrastructure may be present. A landscape which contains some light sources.

	Landscape Value	Susceptibility of the Landscape to Change
	Functional: Landscape has limited function.	
Low	**Natural Heritage:** Landscape with no evidence of ecological, geological, geomorphological or physiographic interest. **Cultural Heritage:** Landscape with no evidence of archaeological, historical or cultural interest. **Landscape condition:** Landscape in a poor physical state. **Associations:** Landscape has no connections with notable people, events and the arts. **Distinctiveness:** Landscape has a no sense of identity. **Recreational:** Landscape offering no recreational opportunities or with no access **Perceptual (Scenic):** Landscape has no appeal to the senses. **Perceptual (Wildness and tranquillity):** Landscape of no perceptual value in terms of wildness, tranquillity and/or dark skies. **Functional:** Landscape has apparent function.	**Pattern, complexity and physical susceptibility to change:** A simple, monotonous and/or degraded landscape with common/ indistinct features and minimal variation in landscape pattern. **Visual susceptibility to change:** A very enclosed landscape which contains or strongly filters views, with an absence of visual landmarks and a lack of inter-visibility with designated landscapes. **Experiential susceptibility:** A landscape with prominent visual and/or aural intrusion and close relationship with large scale built development/ infrastructure. A landscape which contains many light sources and essentially suffers from light pollution.

2.8.2 Criteria for Assessing the Value of a View and Susceptibility of the Viewer

"*An assessment of visual effects deals with the effects on views available to people and their visual amenity. Assessing how the surroundings of individuals or groups of people may be specifically affected by changes in the content and character of views as a result of the change or loss of existing elements of the landscape and/or introduction of new elements*" (Para 6.1 GLVIA3).

Criteria used for assessing the 'value' (importance) of a view and the 'susceptibility' of the viewer (visual receptor) is set out in **Table 3.**

Table 3 Criteria for Assessing the Value of a View and Susceptibility of the Viewer

	Value (Importance of the View)	Susceptibility (Type/Activity of the Receptor)
High	The view is valued at a national or regional level. The view is of high scenic quality, (often protected by planning designations).	Communities or residents at home, where views contribute to the setting or visual amenity of the house or settlement.

	Value (Importance of the View)	Susceptibility (Type/Activity of the Receptor)
	It is a visitor destination, or heritage asset, where views of the surrounding are an important contributor to the experience. There are references to the view in literature or art, or the view appears in guidebooks or on tourist maps. It is a strategic location or viewpoint which attracts large number of viewers.	Travellers on public rights-of-way that are recognised scenic routes, where awareness of views is likely to be high. People who are engaged in outdoor recreation, whose attention or interest is likely to be focussed on the landscape, or on particular views.
Medium	The view is valued at a local level. The visitor numbers are low and/or is mostly frequented by local people. The view is not published and is commonplace in the region. There are some detracting features in the views.	Travellers on road, rail, or other transport routes (including local paths) for which views are not the primary focus, although they do contribute to the setting of the route.
Low	The view is of limited local value. The view is of low aesthetic quality and may detract from the surroundings. It is not a publicly accessible location.	People engaged in activity which does not involve or depend upon appreciation of views of the surrounding landscape. People at their place of work or sport, whose attention may be focussed on their activity, rather than their surroundings and where the setting is not important to the quality of life.

2.8.3 Criteria for Assessing Landscape Sensitivity

In relation to Paragraphs 5.39 – 5.47 of GLVIA3, landscape sensitivity (as a whole, or components of it), is defined by correlating landscape value with its susceptibility to change, using **Table 4** as a guide.

Table 4 Criteria for Assessing Landscape Sensitivity

Susceptibility of the Landscape	Landscape Value		
	Low	Medium	High
High	Medium	High	High
Medium	Low	Medium	High
Low	Low	Low	Medium

2.8.4 Criteria for Assessing the Magnitude of Landscape Effect

In accordance with the approach advocated in Paragraphs 5.48 – 5.52 of GLVIA3, the magnitude of landscape effect considers the size and scale of the change, the geographical extent over which each landscape effect would be felt and their duration and reversibility, categorised as High, Medium, Low or Negligible.

Criteria used to define the magnitude of landscape effects is set out in **Table 5**.

Table 5 Criteria for Assessing the Magnitude of Landscape Effect

Magnitude of Landscape Effect	Key Determining Criteria
High	**Size and/or scale:** the extent and relative proportion of the existing landscape to be changed would be large and/or the landscape element(s) lost or created make a key contribution to landscape character and/or value. Introduction of new landscape elements would be perceived as a dominant characteristic. Large scale alteration to the aesthetic and perceptual characteristics of the landscape. **Geographical extent:** effects would be discernible across a large majority or the entirety of the landscape designation or character area. **Duration and reversibility:** effects of new landscape features would be long-term i.e. will last for over 15 years or will be permanent. Loss of landscape features that are irreplaceable or can only be replaced in the long-term, or creation/ restoration of landscape elements which are long-term or permanent.
Medium	**Size and/or scale:** the extent and relative proportion of the existing landscape element(s) to be changed would be moderate and/or any landscape elements lost or created make a moderate contribution to landscape character and/or value. Introduction of new landscape elements that would be perceived as a prominent landscape characteristic. Moderate scale alteration to the aesthetic and perceptual characteristics of the landscape. **Geographical extent:** effects would be discernible across a moderate proportion of the landscape designation or character area. **Duration and reversibility:** effects of the introduction of new landscape features would be medium-term i.e. will last for between 5 and 15 years. Loss or

Magnitude of Landscape Effect	Key Determining Criteria
	creation of landscape elements that can be fully replaced within the same time period.
Low	**Size and/or scale:** the extent and relative proportion of the existing landscape element(s) to be changed would be minor and/or any landscape element(s) lost or created make only a minor contribution to landscape character and/or value. Introduction of new landscape elements that would be perceived as a small-scale landscape characteristic. Small scale alteration to the aesthetic and perceptual characteristics of the landscape. **Geographical extent:** effects would be discernible across a small proportion of the landscape designation or character area and/or restricted to the close vicinity of the development site. **Duration and reversibility:** effects of the introduction of new landscape features would be short-term i.e. will last for between 2 and 5 years. Loss or creation of landscape elements that can be fully replaced within the same time period.
Negligible	**Size and/or scale:** the extent and relative proportion of the existing landscape element(s) to be changed would be barely perceptible and/or any landscape element(s) lost or created make a minimal or no contribution to landscape character and/or value. Introduction of new landscape elements that will be imperceptible. Minimal alteration to the aesthetic and perceptual characteristics of the landscape. **Geographical extent:** effects would only be discernible within the development site or immediately alongside it. **Duration and reversibility:** effects of the introduction of new landscape elements would last for less than 2 years. Any loss of landscape elements can be fully replaced in the short term.

2.8.5 Criteria for Assessing the Magnitude of Visual Effect

In accordance with Paragraph 5.48 GLVIA3 the magnitude of visual effect is defined by the size/ scale of change, the geographical extent of the view affected and by the duration and reversibility of the change caused by the development/ operation proposed. Categorised as High, Medium, Low or Negligible.

Criteria used to define visual effects is set out in **Table 6**.

Table 6 Criteria for Assessing the Magnitude of Visual Effect

Magnitude of Effect	Determining Criteria
High	**Size and/or Scale:** A complete or very substantial change or obstruction of the view. **Geographical Extent:** Extensive receptors affected. Close proximity to the viewer and/or unrestricted direct line-of-sight.

Magnitude of Effect	Determining Criteria
	Duration and Reversibility: Change will be permanent or would last over 15 years.
Medium	**Size and Scale:** An obvious, immediately apparent change or obstruction of the view. **Geographical Extent:** Multiple receptors affected. Medium distance view and/or partially restricted line-of-sight. **Duration and Reversibility:** Long term change that will be visible for between 5 and 10 years and would be theoretically reversible.
Low	**Size and Scale:** A perceptible change or obstruction of the view. **Geographical Extent:** Small number of receptors affected. Distant view and/or restricted, oblique line-of-sight. **Duration and Reversibility:** A change that will last between 2 and 5 years and would be wholly or partially reversible.
Negligible	**Size and Scale:** A barely perceptible or intermittent change or obstruction of the view. **Geographical Extent:** Occasional or isolated receptor affected. Far distance view and/or largely restricted line-of-sight. **Duration and Reversibility:** Short term change that will last for less than 2 years and would be reversible.

2.8.6 Method for Determining the Significance of Landscape and Visual Effects

The level of significance (landscape or visual) is determined by correlating the sensitivity of the receptor with the magnitude of effect. The evaluation is based on professional judgement using **Table 7**. as a guide.

Table 7 Significance of Landscape and Visual Effects

Magnitude of change	Sensitivity of receptor		
	Low	**Medium**	**High**
High	Moderate effect	Moderate major effect	Major effect
Medium high	Minor moderate effect	Moderate effect	Moderate major effect
Medium	Minor effect	Minor moderate effect	Moderate effect
Low medium	Minor negligible effect	Minor effect	Minor moderate effect
Low	Negligible effect	Minor negligible effect	Minor effect
Negligible	Negligible effect	Negligible effect	Minor negligible effect

The intermediary categories of minor negligible, minor moderate and moderate major will be used where the significance of effect is considered to fall between the broad definitions outlined below; the intermediate category of 'Moderate major' indicates the assessment is less than a major effect but greater than a moderate effect.

For the purposes of the LVIA, major, moderate major and moderate significance of effects may be considered as significant effects in terms of EIA Regulations.

The identified significance of an effect carries forward the beneficial or adverse nature of the effect identified in the assessment of magnitude of impact.

2.8.7 Definition of Significance

Table 8 sets out the definitions for the level of significance.

Table 8 Definition of the Level Significance

Level of Significance	Definition
High	Large scale changes in landscape or visual conditions, affecting high sensitivity receptors.
Moderate	Noticeable changes in landscape or visual conditions, likely to be affecting high or medium sensitivity receptors.
Minor	Small changes in landscape or visual conditions, affecting any receptors.
Negligible	Insignificant changes in landscape or visual conditions, affecting any receptors.

3 Planning policy

This section sets out planning policy relevant to the landscape and visual context of the Proposed Development.

3.1 National Planning Policy

3.1.1 National Planning Framework 4

The National Planning Framework 4 ('NPF4') was adopted on 13 February 2023. NPF4 sets out the Scottish Ministers' policies and proposals for the development and use of land until 2045.

Under the heading 'Natural places' Policy 4 states:

a) Development proposals which by virtue of type, location or scale will have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment, will not be supported. …

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

i. The objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the areas will not be compromised; or

ii. Any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of national importance.

Under the heading '**Forestry, woodland and trees' Policy 6** states:

a) Development proposals that enhance, expand and improve woodland and tree cover will be supported.

b) Development proposals will not be supported where they will result in:

i. Any loss of ancient woodlands, ancient and veteran trees, or adverse impact on their ecological condition;

ii. Adverse impacts on native woodlands, hedgerows and individual trees of high biodiversity value, or identified for protection in the Forestry and Woodland Strategy;

Under the heading '**Blue and green infrastructure'' Policy 20** states:

b) Development proposals for or incorporating new or enhanced blue and/or green infrastructure will be supported. Where appropriate, this will be an integral element of the design that responds to local circumstances.

3.2 Local Planning Policy and Supplementary Guidance

3.2.1 Highland-wide Local Development Plan (Adopted April 2012)

The HLDP is the land-use plan which the Highland Council employ to guide development and investment in the area over a twenty-year period.

Policy 28 Sustainable Design supports development that '*promote and enhance the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the people of Highland*'. Proposed Development will be assessed by the council on the extent they impact on a variety of factors including 'landscape'. All development proposals must demonstrate compatibility with the Sustainable Design Guide: Supplementary Guidance, that requires all development should conserve and enhance the character of the Highland and minimise environmental impact.

Policy 36 Development in the Wider Countryside states that;

> *Outwith Settlement Development Areas, development proposals will be assessed for the extent to which they (abridged text):*
>
> *• are acceptable in terms of siting and design; …*
> *• are compatible with landscape character and capacity;*
> *• avoid incremental expansion of one particular development type within a landscape whose distinct character relies on an intrinsic mix/distribution of a range of characteristics.*

The proposed site access is located within land defined as the Wider Countryside

Policy 51 Trees and Development, seeks to support development that promotes protection of existing hedges, trees and woodlands on and around development sites. A woodland management plan may be required to secure management of an existing resource. The Council will also secure additional tree/hedge planting within a tree planting or landscape plan to compensate removal and to enhance the setting of any new development.

Policy 57 Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage identifies that for features of local/regional importance developments may be allowed if it can be satisfactorily demonstrated that they '*will not have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment, amenity and heritage resource'*.

The proposed site is located within land defined as being of local/regional importance.

Policy 61 Landscape recognises the importance of landscape and scenic value in Highland, both within and outwith designated areas, with many landscapes of high quality offering striking views. The policy further states:

> *"New developments should be designed to reflect the landscape characteristics and special qualities identified in the Landscape Character Assessment of the area in which they are proposed. This will include consideration of the appropriate scale, form, pattern and construction materials, as well as the potential cumulative effect of developments where this may be an issue. The Council would wish to encourage those undertaking development to include measures to enhance the landscape characteristics of the area."*

The Highland-wide Local Development Plan also defines natural, built and cultural heritage features that are of either international, national or local / regional importance. Those features relevant to the LVIA that may be affected by the Proposed Development, are discussed in this report.

The Highland Council Supplementary Guidance includes Trees, Woodland & Development (adopted 2013). The purpose of the guidance is to ensure that planning applicants '*effectively consider and subsequently manage existing trees and woodlands, as well as identifying opportunities for planting and management of new trees and woodlands'*.

The expectation for larger development is that a Landscape Plan is produced to provide for woodland, tree, shrub or hedgerow planting and its maintenance and long term management. The Proposed Development will require planting to screen the site from local receptors, aide assimilation of the site within its landscape setting and enhance local landscape character.

Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) are regionally valuable landscapes identified to protect and enhance landscape qualities and promote their enjoyment. HLDP policy safeguards these areas and is accompanied by a background paper "The Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas". Loch Ness and Duntelchaig Special Landscape Area is located approximately 3.1 km to the southwest of the site at its closest point.

4 Baseline Condition

This section describes the baseline landscape and visual conditions for the site and its surroundings, against which the potential effects of the development were assessed. Baseline conditions are considered under the following sub-headings:

- Application site and its immediate surroundings;
- Landscape context, including physical characteristics, landscape character; and
- Visual analysis including factors which influence both the character and availability of views to the site (e.g. visual detractors, local horizons etc.).

The baseline description should be read in conjunction with Drawings 01 to 04 (**Appendix 01**).

4.1 The Application Site and its Immediate Surroundings

The Proposed Development is located within an area of undulating pasture farmland at approximately 190 metres Above Ordnance Datum (mAOD), on topography that falls gently to the north. A dense block of coniferous woodland defines the southern site boundary and forms a strong, local visual horizon. Large, rectilinear tracts of coniferous plantations are present within the immediate area and form abrupt visual horizons, often seen high in the skyline. There are extensive open views to the north towards Inverness and the Moray Firth, seen in the distance. The overall landscape is attractive and strongly rural in character although the extensive Knocknagael Substation and tall electricity pylons seen high in the skyline to the northeast area a highly prominent source of local visual intrusion. Biorraid Road defines the eastern site boundary and Essich Road (General Wade's Military Road) the western boundary.

4.2 Wider Study Area Context

The study area encompasses low lying urban areas of Inverness to the north and the steep valley of The Great Glen to the northwest; a natural travelling route through the Scottish Highlands linking Inverness to Fort William on the west coast. The southern and eastern study area includes large areas of coniferous plantations and the undulating Essich Moor and plateau margins of Drummossie Muir.

4.3 Topography and Watercourses

The Great Glen is a defining geological feature of the highlands landscape, cut through by the River Ness; the primary watercourse within the study area at approximately 7 mAOD. The northern study area comprises flatter areas of topography that include the southern margins of Inverness and lead out to the Inner Moray Firth (refer to **Appendix 01**, Drawing 04 Topography).

The eastern flank of The Great Glen lies within the central and southern study area, rising to approximately 238 mAOD. Plateau moorland areas to the east of the study area rise to 236 mAOD.

The northern boundary of the main site area associated with Proposed Development lies at 149 mAOD and the southern boundary at an average of 190 mAOD. The site area also falls in elevation from east to west with median values of ~177 mAOD to ~160 mAOD.

Two secondary watercourses include Essich Burn which runs alongside the west of Essich Road and Big Burn which lies to the east of Knocknagael Substation.

4.4 Vegetation Cover

The site is located on Essich Moor, a largely open landscape with scattered areas of scrub, predominantly comprising gorse and birch. A well-established conifer plantation defines the southern site boundary. Heathland and commercial conifer plantations are dominant features across the southern and eastern study area. The central study comprises pasture and arable farmland.

4.5 Transport Corridors

The main transport corridors are the B861 and B862, that head north towards Inverness and located approximately 2 km to the east and west of the Proposed Development respectively. Set on the lower flank of the River Ness valley, there are no views towards the site from the B862 road.

The existing agricultural accesses onto the Proposed Development site are off Biorraid Road to the north and east of the site. The narrow, single track lane includes passing places. Essich Road (also referred to as General Wade's Military Road) is a narrow single lane that runs alongside the western site area.

4.6 Landscape Character

The assessment is informed by published landscape character assessments (LCAs) that exist at a national, regional or local level, supplemented by field observation (refer to Drawing 03 Landscape Character Areas).

4.6.1 NatureScot Landscape Character Assessment

Scotland has a digital map-based national LCA, published in 2019. The LCA identifies 390 LCTs (i.e. areas of consistent and recognisable landscape character) across the country.

The site is mainly located within LCT 228 Rolling Farmland and Woodland and occurs in one broad band which forms a rural backdrop to the west, south and east of Inverness. A small area of the southern site boundary and the remaining southern study area lies within LCT 223 Flat Moorland Plateau with Woodland. Refer to Drawing 03 (**Appendix 01**).

Key characteristics of LCT 228 Rolling Farmland and Woodland of most relevance to the study area include the following:

- Varied landform of rolling, north-facing hill slopes and plateaux.
- Diverse mix of landcover and fairly even balance of open agricultural land and woodlands.
- Varying patterns of openness and enclosure created by woodlands and hedgerows mixed with open fields and dense conifer forests with dark linear edges.
- Diversity added by open broadleaf woodlands along stream gorges, river banks, small woodlands, trees, hedgerows and designed landscapes.
- Settled landscape, mostly of small farms and isolated houses, interconnected by a network of major and minor roads.
- Other scattered settlements of old buildings in traditional layout, associated with road junctions and bridging points.
- Clusters of farm buildings and open fields are generally set against a wooded backdrop.
- Minor roads follow the geometric edges of field enclosures and conifer forests.
- Large number of relic prehistoric settlements and burial cairns indicating a continuing focal point of settlement.
- Sense of history and tradition around estates, due to stone walls, beech hedging and parkland.
- Limited visibility in wooded areas, focusing attention upon foreground detail.

- Distant views northwards over the firths in open areas on the upper slopes.
- An active, busy landscape, particularly in the vicinity of adjoining urban areas and major transport routes.

LCT 223 Flat Moorland Plateau with Woodland occurs in one area south of Inverness, consisting of a flat to gently undulating and inclined plateau. It is a transitional landscape merging gradually with the lower Rolling Farmland and Woodland in the north and the higher Farmed and Wooded Foothills to the south. Key characteristics of most relevance to the study area include the following:

- Flat to gently undulating and inclined, large-scale plateau with a predominantly horizontal landform and skyline.
- Landcover of either heather moorland and heathland scrub or large-scale conifer forests, with occasional trees and fragments of broad leaved woodlands.
- Largely uninhabited, with settlements in no distinct pattern, mainly along outer edges.
- Man-made structures including pylons and poles are highly visible in the open landscape.
- A few historic landscape features from prehistoric to 19th Century periods.
- Vast and very exposed plateau top with unrestricted panoramic distant views, away from forests.
- Uniform ground cover and simple landscape with little diversity and few structures, making orientation and determination of distance and scale often difficult.
- Conifer forests create defined edges, enclosures and shapes contrasting with the openness and uniformity of their moorland surroundings.
- General lack of activity, artefacts and land management, in central areas and restricted visibility of adjoining settled lowlands creates an unexpected perception of remoteness.

4.7 Statutory and Non-Statutory Designations

Landscape designations and protected features within the study area are shown on Drawing 02 (**Appendix 01**), Landscape Constraints and Designations. Designated features identified within the study area are summarised below in **Table 9** and the following section.

The application site and study area are not subject to any statutory or non-statutory landscape designations. The site is not within a National Park, National Scenic Area or Special Landscape Area.

Table 9 Landscape Designations and Protected Features

Designation or Feature	Present within the site boundary	Present within 3 km of the site
Landscape designations		
National Park	No	No
National Scenic Areas	No	No
Special Landscape Area	No	No. Loch Ness and Duntelchaig SLA is located approximately 3.2km from the site boundary.
Protected heritage and nature conservation features		
World Heritage Site	No	No

Designation or Feature	Present within the site boundary	Present within 3 km of the site
Scheduled Monument	No	Yes (refer to summary text below)
Conservation Area	No	No
Listed Building	No	Yes (refer to summary text below)
Inventoried Gardens and Designed Landscapes	No	Yes (refer to summary text below)
Historic Battlefield	No	No
Special Protection Area	No	No
Special Area of Conservation	No	No
Ramsar site	No	No
Site of Special Scientific Interest	No	No
Ancient Woodland	No	No
Access		
National / Regional Walking or Cycling Route	No	Yes (refer to summary text below)
Core Paths	No	Yes (refer to summary text below)

There are no landscape related planning designations, protected heritage assets or other landscape constraints within the site or its immediate setting. The following designated features are present within the 3 km study area:

- Seven Scheduled Monuments; the closest being Carn Glas, a neolithic chambered cairn burial site, located approximately 440 m south of the site.
- Two listed buildings, Grade B and C are located approximately 2.5 km and 2.3 km north of the site, within the southern fringe of Inverness.
- Leys Castle Garden and Designed Landscape, a country estate with 19th century castle, formal gardens and parkland is located approximately 2.6 km northeast of the site.

Loch Ness and Duntelchaig SLA is located outside of the study area. Bare earth ZTV studies indicate no intervisibility between the SLA and Proposed Development. The area is not considered further in the LVIA.

National / regional walking and cycling routes within the study area are limited to:

- Core Path IN12.06 approximately 1.5 km south of the site, the path navigates through the Drumashire Plantation to the west of the site and links directly to Essich Road. Core Path IN12.06 also provides a direct link to Core Path IN12.02 to the west.

- Core Path IN12.02 approximately 1.3 km west of the site which navigates north-south through the Drumashire Plantation.
- Core Path IN12.07 approximately 1 km northwest of the site, forms direct links with Core Path IN12.02 and the National Cycle Network Route 78.
- National Cycle Network Route 78 approximately 2 km west of the site; the route follows an unnamed single track road before joining the B862 for approximately 1.5 km. The route then joins Torbreck Road which leads into the urban centre of Inverness.
- Several Core Path routes approximately 2.4 km to the north which link the urban fringe to the urban centre of Inverness.

5 Landscape and Visual

5.1 Landscape Value and Susceptibility to Change

Landscape value is defined as the 'value attached to the landscape by society'. Landscape susceptibility is the ability of the landscape to accommodate the Proposed Development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and/or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies. **Table 10** summarises the value of landscape attributes.

Table 10 Landscape Value of the Proposed Site and Environs

Aspect	Description	Value
Natural heritage	Landscape has clear evidence of geological interest; the geology of the area is defined by the Great Glen Fault, the most palpable physical features of Scotland, visible from space.	High
Cultural heritage	Landscape with clear evidence of archaeological, historical and cultural interest. The flat moorland plateau landscape to the eastern and southern study area includes large numbers of relic prehistoric settlements and chambered cairns. There is a sense of history and tradition around estates, due to stone walls, beech hedging and parkland. Drummossie Muir is closely associated with the Battle of Culloden, itself the subject of poems and literature.	High
Landscape quality (condition)	The proposed site is in good physical condition managed for pasture. Boundaries are fenced with post and wire mesh. Natural, rolling and varied topography is retained.	High
Associations	Landscape has some connection with notable people, and historical events.	Medium
Distinctiveness	Landscape has a strong sense of identity.	High
Recreation value	The Great Glen and Inverness are major recreational and tourist assets.	High
Scenic quality	There are highly attractive and panoramic views of moorland, coastal and mountain landscapes. The Knocknagael Substation and associated tall pylons are a significant source of visual intrusion and detract from local view quality.	Medium

Aspect	Description	Value
Wildness and tranquillity	There is a sense of remoteness and tranquillity. Minor lanes have very little traffic. Inverness and the neighbouring substation are strongly urbanising features. Rectilinear conifer plantations detract from a sense of wildness.	Medium
Functional	Landscape performs a clearly identifiable and valuable function.	High

The landscape includes both high and medium value attributes. High value landscape features across the wider study area include attributes more closely associated with The Great Glen. The glen is topographically distinct and relatively self-contained. Landscape across the wider study area is generally considered to be of high value, however, landscape areas within the site and its environs (that would be most affected by the Proposed Development) is considered to be **medium value** overall.

In terms of susceptibility to change, the landscape is essentially intact with a defined pattern and degree of complexity. The proposed site is partially enclosed by a combination of rising, varied topography and dense conifer plantations. There is no intervisibility with high sensitivity, designated landscapes. In terms of experiential susceptibility, the landscape has a certain sense of remoteness and tranquillity but is significantly adversely affected by the presence of urbanising features including electricity infrastructure and nighttime lighting across Inverness.

The assessment concludes that the susceptibility to change attached to both the site and environs is judged to be **medium**.

5.1.1 Sensitivity

The landscape within the site and its environs is of **medium value** and **medium susceptibility** to change and therefore assessed as being of **medium sensitivity to change**.

5.2 Visual Context

The ZTV illustrated on Drawings 05-08, **Appendix 01** is limited in extent due to the combined effect of topography and large-scale plantations located within proximity to the Proposed Development. The site is located on a ridge of land that extends to the northeast, falling in elevation towards Inverness. To the southwest topography rises along the ridge (also the alignment of General Wade's Military Road) to approximately 238 mAOD at the outer extent of the study area.

Land to the northwest of the site falls relatively steeply towards the River Ness valley floor. Slopes are also densely wooded which prevents potential intervisibility from a large tract of the study area. Pockets of land to the northwest of the River Ness are shown to fall within the ZTV, although actual views towards the site are further limited by scattered areas of gorse and other vegetation.

To the southeast, beyond Knocknagael Substation, land falls to the wooded Big Burn, rising to a heathland plateau, beyond which are extensive tracts of conifer plantation within Drummossie Muir.

Visual receptors are people who live or work in the area, visit the area for a specific reason or pass through the area on foot, cycle, car, etc. Key visual receptor groups that may obtain views towards the Proposed

Development are summarised below. The location of 'representative viewpoints' used in this assessment are indicated on Drawing 01 (**Appendix 01**) and the viewpoint photographs VP1 to VP9 at **Appendix 03**.

5.2.1 Views Towards the Site

There are a limited number of receptors within proximity to the Proposed Development. Settlement pattern is sparse within the 2 km zone around the site and comprises scattered, isolated properties and farmsteads. Core paths are mostly located within plantations on west facing valley flanks and typically do not obtain views towards the Proposed Development.

5.2.2 Views from residential properties

Essich Farm Cottage is in closest proximity to the Proposed Development, located just beyond the northern boundary (Viewpoint 3 is representative of existing view character). The property is orientated in an easterly direction, away from the site, although the grounds extend to the boundary with Biorraid Road and allow open views south towards the Proposed Development site. Tall electricity pylons and metal conductor rods at Knocknagael Substation are prominent in the skyline to the southeast and detract from the view.

Achvraid Farm and Horseshoe Cottage are located to the southwest of the site. The farm is slightly elevated on rising ground to the west of Essich Burn. The property is orientated to the northeast with potential oblique views towards the site. Intervening vegetation along the burn and Essich Road may partially filter or screen outward views. The neighbouring cottage complex is at slightly lower elevation and existing vegetation is predicted to provide more effective screening of views towards the site. Tall pylons and infrastructure within Knocknagael Substation is prominent in the skyline (refer to Viewpoint 4).

Existing conifer plantations are effective in screening views towards most of the main development area from Achvraid House, a relatively recent development located to the west of Essich Road. The property orientates to the north and the grounds allow an open view towards the western margins of the site that slope downwards to the north.

Across the wider study area to the east two properties (Balvonie Farmhouse and Balvonie Cottage) orientate to the northwest with slightly oblique views towards the site. Views from the cottage appear to be screened by dense garden boundary vegetation and intervening gorse scrubland. Views from the farmhouse are also partly filtered by garden boundary vegetation, allowing glimpsed or filtered views across the wooded, Big Burn valley towards the site. Knocknagael Substation and associated tall pylons are also prominent in views, partially screening views to the proposed site.

ZTV analysis indicates some limited intervisibility with the southern residential areas of Inverness, approximately 2.5 km away to the northeast. Ground observation indicates that potential views are in fact more restricted by a combination of falling / varied topography, relatively abundant woodland and trees and the screening effect of other intervening buildings.

Viewpoint 8 illustrates a worst case view from the outer south-eastern margins of Inverness at Torbreck. The view is across rolling arable farmland, rising steeply to a middle distant ridgeline comprising woodland, plantations and field boundary hedgerows. Electricity pylons and overhead lines can be seen clearly in the elevated skyline to the south.

5.2.3 Views from recreational routes / public rights of way

At its closest point the site is located 2 km from the River Ness and adjoining Caledonian Canal, part of The Great Glen, a famous travelling route through the Highlands, between Fort William on the west coast and Inverness on the northeast coast. The Caledonian Canal and lochs are also a major navigational passage for yachts and other recreational vessels.

The Great Glen Way (opened 2002) is a long-distance route for cyclists, canoeists, and walkers and one of Scotland's Great Trails. It lies outside of the study area and there is no intervisibility with the proposed site. Outward views from core paths alongside the canal and waterways are also restricted by dense belts of vegetation and woodland on eastern flanks of the valley.

Viewpoint 5 represents a view from core path IN12.06; the closest to site that falls within a worst case 'bare earth' ZTV. The viewpoint illustrates a view towards the site although established conifer plantations effectively screen direct views of the site itself.

Core paths in the northern study area do not obtain views to the site; views are screened or substantially filtered by intervening vegetation and buildings.

There are no significant or sensitive views towards the Proposed Development from National Cycle Network, Route 78.

5.2.4 Views from heritage assets

There are no significant views towards the Proposed Development from heritage assets. Leys Castle Garden and Designed Landscape is located approximately 2.5 km to the northeast of the site. There is no public access to the gardens and dense woodland along the south-western garden boundary screens outwards views toward the site. Viewpoint 7 from the B861 represents a worst case view in proximity to the gardens.

Viewpoint 9 is located on the margin to Drummossie Muir, an area of landscape associated with the 1746 Battle of Culloden that ended the Jacobite rising. The view is across a plateau of gorse heathland towards wooded hills of Craig Leach and Dunain Hill and rocky moorland hills of Carn a' Bhdaich and Doire Mhor. Most of the proposed site ground plane is concealed in the view due to the middle distant ridgeline. There is a glimpsed, distant view to the southern site area with the dark belt of conifer plantation on the southern boundary seen to contrast against the backdrop of hills. Electricity infrastructure is also prominent and detracts from the view.

5.2.5 Views from recreational facilities

There are no specific recreational visitor facilities within the study area. The area does support a number of holiday lets and camping facilities.

5.2.6 Views from road corridors

Essich Road defines the western site boundary and Biorraid Road the eastern boundary. Biorraid Road obtains open views across the site (Viewpoints 1 and 2). Essich Road allows views across the western site margins, although the relatively steep rising ground forms a middle distant horizon and prevents views to the eastern area of the site.

The B861 road is located approximately 2 km to the east of the site. Views towards the site are often made intermittent due to roadside vegetation (Viewpoints 6 and 7). The site is hard to distinguish in transitory views obtained by travelling road users. Tall electricity pylons in proximity to Knocknagael Substation are often prominent and detract from the view.

The A82 is located outside of the study area to the west of the Caledonian Canal on elevated grounds. Views towards the site are typically intermittent or screened entirely by intervening woodland and gorse scrub. Where distant glimpsed views are possible electricity pylons in proximity to Knocknagael Substation can also be seen against the skyline and detract from the view.

5.3 Visual Receptor Sensitivity

Visual receptor sensitivity at each viewpoint is summarised in the Representative Viewpoint Analysis Tables (refer to **Appendix 02**). The most sensitive visual receptors are considered to be local residents and recreational users of local lanes.

5.3.1 Landscape Receptors

The site is predominantly located within LCT; 228 Rolling Farmland and Woodland. The southern margin of this LCT adjoins 223 – Flat Moorland Plateau with Woodland a small fraction of which is located within the southern tip of the proposed site boundary.

5.3.2 Visual Receptors

The visual assessment draws upon the ZTV, representative viewpoint analysis and computer-generated visualisations to determine the potential effects of the proposed scheme on views experienced by a range of receptors within the study area. Visual receptors are people who live or work in the area, visit the area for a specific reason or pass through the area on foot, cycle, car, etc. Key visual receptor locations used in this assessment are summarised in **Table 11**.

Table 11 Representative Viewpoints

Viewpoint	Location	Type of Receptor/ Reason for Selection	Distance from Site Boundary	Type of Image
VP1	Looking northwest from Biorraid Road on the eastern site boundary	The lane has scenic value and is used by cyclists.	Adjacent	Photomontage
VP2	Looking west from Biorraid Road on the eastern site boundary	The lane has local scenic value and is used by cyclists.	Adjacent	90° Photograph
VP3	Looking south from Essich Road / Biorraid Road junction, near Essich Farm Cottage	The lane has local scenic value and is used by cyclists.	10 m	Photomontage

Viewpoint	Location	Type of Receptor/ Reason for Selection	Distance from Site Boundary	Type of Image
VP4	Looking east from Essich Road, near properties Achvraid Farm / Horseshoe Cottage	Representative of potential views from residents and road users including cyclists.	10 m	Photomontage
VP5	Looking northeast from a Core Path (IN12.06).	High sensitivity recreational footpath users.	1.5 km	90° Photograph
VP6	Looking southwest from the B861 near access to properties Braeton Steading and Braeton of Leys	Representative of potential views from residents and road users including cyclists.	2.1 km	90° Photograph
VP7	Looking southwest from the B861 near Leys Castle (Garden & Designed Landscape).	Representative of potential views from grounds to Leys Castle and road users including cyclists.	2.6 km	90° Photograph
VP8	Looking south from access lane to Torbreck.	Representative of potential views from residents on the southern margins of Inverness.	1.7 km	90° Photograph
VP9	Looking west from the B861 road near Black Wood of Leys.	Representative of potential views from road users including cyclists. Also an area of cultural heritage interest.	2.7 km	90° Photograph

5.4 Future Baseline

Significant changes to the future baseline of the site and its environs may be derived from the proposed extension of Knocknagael Substation (planning reference 23/05657/SCRE), subject to gaining planning permission.

5.5 Proposed Development

Key buildings and structures of relevance to LVIA are summarised below and form the basis of the assessment. General heights of structures above proposed ground levels are approximate. The site comprises three main development compounds; two accommodate battery and transformer units and the most northerly includes the 132kV Substation Compound, Switch Room, Substation and Welfare facilities. Drawing R01 at **Appendix 01** illustrates the Proposed Development layout.

The site is located on a hillside that falls in elevation to the north. Each of the development platforms require cut and fill to create finished surfaces with regular cross falls. The battery storage compounds fall at a gradient of 1 in 25 and the 132kV Compound at 1 in 100. The approximate median height of Southern

BESS Compound is 185 mAOD, the Western BESS Compound 177 mAOD and the 132kV Substation compound at 170 mAOD.

The tallest structures are associated with the 132kV Compound equipment. These include:

- Switch Room at 7.57 m above finished floor level (FFL);
- High Level Post Insulators at 7.1 m above FFL;
- Cable Sealing Ends at ~5 m above FFL;
- Grid Transformers at 6.32 m above FFL:
- Voltage Transformer at 7.1 m above FFL.

The 132kV Substation Compound and the Western BESS Compound will be enclosed by a 4 m high acoustic barrier. The Southern BESS Compound will incorporate a 3 m high acoustic barrier on the northern and western boundaries and a 2.4 m high palisade security fence (with 600 mm high electric topper) on the southern and eastern boundaries.

The battery strings are 2.86 m above FFL and the MV skids at 3.61 m above FFL. Other equipment includes lighting columns at 5 m above FFL.

5.6 Mitigation Measures

5.6.1 Construction Phase Mitigation

Initial construction stage works will comprise clearance and removal of site features, including a small area of the southern conifer plantation, trees, scrub and agricultural fencing etc. Root protection areas will be defined around existing trees/ vegetation to be retained and those features fenced off, protected and managed using current best practice methodologies. Full details can be found in the Tree Management Report submitted as part of the application.

Initial construction works will require striping and separation of site topsoils and subsoils, temporary stockpiling of soils and excavation of reduced level development platforms. Subbase arisings from cutting works will be used to form the core of proposed earth mounds with subsoils and topsoils capping off mounds to depths appropriate to the type of proposed restoration planting.

Early formation of proposed earth bunds will provide some visual screening of ongoing ground level construction activity.

The construction period is 24 months with works subject to a Construction Environmental Management Plan to minimise environmental effects, including those derived from lighting, noise and dust generation etc.

5.6.2 Operational Phase Mitigation

The Proposed Development includes embedded mitigation designed to reduce potential landscape and visual impacts from the outset. These include:

- Retention of existing conifer plantations, mature tree stands and heathland scrub to margins. Evergreen conifer plantations provide valuable ‘all year’ screening of views into site. Mature tree stands are a characterful, focal feature of the site and contribute to local landscape character.
- Proposed landscape mitigation measures include the combination of earth bunding and planting. (Refer to **Appendix 01**, Drawing R01 Proposed Landscape Restoration). Establishment of mixed species woodland planting along the northern margins of the 132 kV Compound will provide taller and more substantial screening commensurate with taller equipment within the compound.

- Other landscape treatments will include establishment of heathland scrub with birch trees set amongst species rich grasslands, to provide additional screening but also enhance landscape character, reflecting local heathland features.
- A species rich hedgerow with intermittent trees is proposed along the southwestern site boundary and along a section of Essich Road to the north. Hedgerow and trees will provide additional screening / filtering of views to the Proposed Development from nearby residential receptors and road users, whilst further reinforcing landscape field pattern.
- The development platforms are partially set in cutting which provides immediate screening, particularly to the lower level battery and transformer units.
- The switch room building is designed to be as low in height as practicable. External facades will be rendered and painted white to reflect the local vernacular of farm dwellings and outbuildings.
- External lighting will be designed to current best practice guidelines to minimise nighttime light usage and light spill.

5.7 Potential Landscape and Visual Effects

5.7.1 Construction Phase

Landscape and visual effects that result from the construction process will be temporary and short term. Physical effects to existing landscape features will occur during the site clearance phase of construction and these effects will either be irreversible or effectively mitigated over a period of time.

5.7.2 Effects on physical landscape features during the construction phase

The construction of the main development platforms, internal access roads and attenuation basins, located on sloping topography, will require cut and fill works across the site. The varied and undulating topography within the central, eastern and southern land areas will be extensively modified. Proposed earth mounding around the development area will further alter topography although its design is intended to reflect existing topographical character. Topography within the central eastern site area will be preserved to retain a mature group of trees. Refer to the sections illustrated on Drawings S01 and S02 (**Appendix 01**).

The magnitude of change to topographical features within the site is considered to be medium high adverse and a resultant significance of effect of **moderate major adverse**; a significant and irreversible local landscape effect.

In terms of vegetation loss, approximately 480 m^2 of conifer plantation will be removed to accommodate the western BESS Compound. Three mature trees will be removed in the central southern site area and areas of heathland scrub on the eastern boundary to accommodate access from Biorraid Road (refer to Drawing R01 at **Appendix 01**). Vegetation removed is not of high value and is common locally. Effects to existing vegetation is considered to be low adverse magnitude incurring a **minor negligible adverse** significance of effect. In the medium to long term, proposed landscape planting measures will outweigh initial losses with overall beneficial effects, introducing a greater diversity of native species that are characteristic of the local landscape.

5.7.3 Effects on landscape character during the construction phase

Construction activity will include establishment of site cabins, vehicular parking, materials storage and processing facilities, hoarding and fencing. Site activity during construction will include stripping and temporary stockpiling of soils and materials. There will be constant and varied vehicular movements and on-site activity. The construction phase will require the use of tall plant including cranes.

The most significant landscape character effects will occur during the construction phase. Initial site activity will introduce a high degree of contrast with the prevailing rural character. Adverse effects will reduce during later stages of construction work when outer earth modelling is complete and proposed grassland established. Earth bunding will provide some screening to ground level activity and initial landscape works will help assimilate the appearance of the site within the wider landscape.

The existing sense of tranquillity and remoteness will also be adversely affected with noise emanating from vehicular traffic and general construction activity. The physical movement of plant and vehicles will further introduce visual discordance.

In terms of the geographical extent of landscape character effects, areas across the wider study will primarily be subject to visual effects derived from construction activity. Auditory disturbance may also be experienced across a wider area subject to prevailing wind direction and levels of activity.

Adverse landscape character effects will diminish across the wider study area as visibility to site activity is reduced either by intervening features or becomes less apparent in a wider, more expansive scene. The ZTV studies indicate that landscape areas to the north and east typically have potential intervisibility with the site. The perceived magnitude of change in visual character will be reduced by the presence of the extensive Knocknagael Substation development and associated tall pylons; often prominent in views and significant detracting feature within the existing landscape.

Notable landscape character effects will be limited to areas within relatively close proximity of the site with minor or negligible effects predicted beyond 1 km distance. Construction stage effects are short term and temporary. Local effects during peak construction stages are predicted to incur a **medium adverse** magnitude of effect within medium sensitivity landscape areas and a resultant **moderate adverse** effect upon both the Rolling Farmland and Wooded LCT and adjoining Flat Moorland Plateau with Woodland LCT.

5.7.4 Effects on visual receptors during the construction phase

Representative viewpoint analysis indicates that significant construction stage effects would be limited to receptors in immediate proximity to the proposed site with no significant effects identified across the wider study area. Construction stage effects would be the most visually disruptive phase of the Proposed Development; however, these would be temporary and short-term.

5.7.5 Views from residential properties

Site activity will be highly prominent in the view from the grounds of Essich Farm Cottage with tall plant visible in the skyline. General ground level activity will also be visible with plant movements and soils stockpiling during the formation of the bunds being highly intrusive. Similar adverse visual effects will be experienced in views from Achvraid Farm and Horseshoe Cottage, southwest of the site. Effects will be **moderate major adverse** although short term and temporary.

Views of the site from Achvraid House are mostly screened by intervening conifer plantations and gorse scrub. South-western margins of the site will be visible; western bund earthworks and construction activity within the western BESS Compound seen in glimpsed views. Taller cranes may become visible seen above the existing tree line. Effects will be short term incurring a predicted **minor moderate adverse** significance of effect.

Predicted effects to views from residential properties to the north and west will not be significant due to the overall distance and intervening vegetation screening or filtering potential views. Where glimpsed views are possible, Knocknagael Substation and tall pylons are often notable detractors, reducing the perceived magnitude of change in the view during construction works.

5.7.6 Views from recreational routes / core paths

No significant visual effects have been identified for users of recreational routes or core paths. Core path IN12.06 (representative viewpoint 5) may allow a glimpsed, distant view to tall cranes and plant seen above the existing conifer plantation, although activity will barely be discernible in context of the overall view.

Core paths in the northern study area do not obtain views to the site; views are screened or substantially filtered by intervening vegetation and buildings.

There are no significant or sensitive views towards the Proposed Development from National Cycle Network, Route 78.

5.7.7 Views from heritage assets

Leys Castle Garden and Designed Landscape does not have public access. Dense woodland along the southwestern garden boundary is predicted to screen outward views toward the site. Representative viewpoint 7 from the B861, represents a worst case view in proximity to the gardens. Predicted construction stage effects are negligible or no effect.

Representative viewpoint 9 is located on the margin to Drummossie Muir. A narrow, glimpsed view through a gap in vegetation may allow a glimpsed view to construction activity in the southern site area including tall lifting cranes, plant movements and flashing orange warning lights. In context of the wider scene and the existing electricity infrastructure the predicted magnitude of change in the view will be limited with negligible effects.

5.7.8 Views from recreational facilities

There are no specific recreational visitor facilities within the study area and no potential effects have been identified.

5.7.9 Views from road corridors

Essich Road and Biorraid Road obtain open, close-range views across the site. Construction works will be highly intrusive in views with ground level activity, materials storage compounds, welfare facilities, temporary vehicular parking etc clearly seen in the foreground. Short term, **moderate major adverse** effects are predicted during construction.

Potential views from the B861 road are distant and intermittent (representative viewpoints 6 and 7). Glimpsed views to construction activity in the southern site area may be possible although in context of the existing substation and tall electricity pylons the predicted magnitude of change in the view will be limited with negligible overall effects.

5.7.10 Effects on landscape character during the operational phase

Initial operational phase effects will not be significant. Earth modelling and established grassland will be effective in substantially screening the BESS Compounds and provide some visual integration with the local landscape. Tall acoustic fencing around the Western BESS Compound will be effective in screening the MV skids and battery strings, although fencing will appear relatively prominent in the landscape.

Proposed taller structures within the substation compound will be prominent locally, although they will be seen in context of similar infrastructure within Knocknagael Substation, reducing the magnitude of change to existing landscape character. Tall acoustic fencing around the Substation Compound will be effective in

screening the lower sections of the visually complex infrastructure features with only upper sections appearing above the acoustic barrier.

There will be no significant effect upon night-time character of the landscape. Proposed external lighting will be activated by motion sensors; limited site activity will significantly reduce the frequency and duration of lighting periods. When the site is illuminated it will be seen in context of existing, comparable lighting within Knocknagael Substation and in views north, against the backdrop of dense, urban lighting within Inverness.

Initial effects are predicted to be **minor moderate adverse** effect to local landscape areas of the Rolling Farmland and Wooded LCT and adjoining Flat Moorland Plateau with Woodland LCT.

In the longer term, established woodland, gorse and proposed tree planting will be effective in substantially screening the acoustic barriers and infrastructure within the site from adjoining landscape areas. Planting will also help reinforce local landscape character. Local visual character will be altered, with certain existing views foreshortened or partially screened, although those changes are not considered to be detrimental.

Overall, the Proposed Development will incur low medium adverse magnitude of effect on local landscape character and a **minor adverse** significance of effect. Effects will be permanent, lasting the duration of the operational phase of the Proposed Development.

5.7.11 Effects on visual receptors during the operational phase

Representative viewpoints were used to determine predicted visual effects upon various receptors within the study area. Effects are summarised in **Appendix 02** Representative Viewpoint Assessment Tables with viewpoint photographs VP1 to VP9 shown in **Appendix 03** Drawings VP01 to VP09.

To illustrate the appearance of the Proposed Development photomontages have been produced from Viewpoints VP2, VP3 and VP4 (**Appendix 03**), illustrating the scheme at Year 1 and Year 10 when restoration planting has established. Sections illustrated in Drawings S01 and S02 (**Appendix 01**) show the topographical/ elevational relationship between key receptors and the Proposed Development.

Representative viewpoint analysis indicates that significant operational stage effects would be limited to receptors in immediate proximity to the proposed site with no significant effects identified across the wider study area.

5.7.12 Views from residential properties

During the early operational phase, the proposed northern and western bunds will be prominent in views from the grounds of Essich Farm Cottage. Bunds will screen the ground plane of the Proposed Development although upper sections of the acoustic barrier around the Substation Compound and Western BESS Compound will be visible. Taller features within the Substation Compound will be seen in the skyline, above acoustic fencing and partially set against the backdrop of existing mature trees. Initial effects are predicted to be **minor moderate adverse**.

In the longer term, established woodland planting and heathland scrub will be effective in significantly filtering or screening views to proposed taller structures within the Proposed Development. Planting will also partially screen views to Knocknagael Substation and tall pylons. The Proposed Development will alter existing view character although the combination of planting and varied bunding will be slightly beneficial to the overall scene, reinforcing existing landscape character.

Proposed western bunds and the acoustic fencing will be effective in screening views to the BESS Compounds from Achvraid Farm and associated cottages. Upper sections of the acoustic fence to the Western BESS Compound and the Substation Compound will be visible. The upper ridgeline of the control building and taller structures within the substation will be seen above proposed bunding and against the skyline. The backdrop of existing tall pylons and substation will reduce the perceived magnitude of change in the view. Initial operational phase effects are predicted to be **minor adverse.**

Long term establishment of proposed landscape planting, including hedgerow along the western site boundary will be effective in substantially screening the Proposed Development in views from the farm. The combination of planting and varied bunding will be slightly beneficial to the overall scene.

There will be no significant effect to views from Achvraid House during the operational phase of the Proposed Development. Upper sections of acoustic fencing on the western boundary of the Western BESS Compound will be visible, with potential views to the uppermost sections of substation infrastructure. In the longer term, established tree, scrub and hedgerow planting will be effective in screening the Proposed Development. Glimpsed, substantially filtered wintertime views to structures may be possible, although with negligible effect in the overall scene.

There will be **no or negligible** effects to views from residential properties to the north and west of the site during the operational phase of the development. Proposed structures will typically be screened.

5.7.13 Views from recreational routes / core paths

There will be **no or negligible** effect to views from recreational routes and core paths during the operational phase of the Proposed Development.

5.7.14 Views from heritage assets

There will be **no or negligible** effect to views from heritage assets during the operational phase of the Proposed Development.

5.7.15 Views from recreational facilities

There are no specific recreational visitor facilities within the study area and no potential effects have been identified.

5.7.16 Views from road corridors

Close range views from Essich Road and Biorraid Road will remain significantly affected during early operational phases of the Proposed Development. The proposed eastern bund will provide screening to the ground plane of the development, although compound fencing and upper sections of battery strings and MV skids will be seen clearly in intermittent views from the lane. Upper sections of taller substation structures and the acoustic barrier will be visible, partially screened by proposed bunding. Key characteristics of the existing view will be retained although changes in landform and partial views to proposed infrastructure will notably detract from the foreground scene. The presence of the neighbouring Knocknagael Substation will reduce the perceived magnitude of change in the view. Initial operational phase effects to views from Biorraid Road are predicted to vary between **moderate adverse** and **moderate major adverse**, depending on the view location (refer to Viewpoints 1 and 2 of the Representative Viewpoint Analysis Tables at **Appendix 02**). These are significant effects.

Longer term establishment of planting on earth bunds around the outer margins of the development area will provide effective screening of proposed infrastructure features in views obtained from Essich Road.

Certain views may be slightly improved due to partial screening of Knocknagael Substation and associated pylons.

Views from Biorraid Road will also be improved by the establishment of woodland planting and scrub. However, close range views (for example immediately to the east of the substation and at the site access) will allow glimpsed or filtered views to taller substation structures, more so during winter months when trees are without leaf. The overall development will significantly alter existing view character, foreshortening or obstructing more distant views to the south and west. Long term views from the lane are predicted to range from **minor moderate adverse** (not significant) to **moderate adverse** (a significant effect) at specific 'worst case' locations.

There will be **no or negligible** effect to views from the B861 during the operational phase of the Proposed Development.

5.8 Cumulative Assessment

Two sites are considered in the following outline assessment of potential cumulative landscape and visual effects.

- Knocknagael Substation Extension (KSE), Essich Road. The substation extension has an indicative platform size of 75 m x 125 m located on the southeast side of the existing compound. Proposed height of equipment will be approximately 11.7 m above finished floor levels. The extension of Knocknagael Substation is part of the works required to connect the consented Red John Pumped Storage Hydro Scheme into the wider grid (below). Planning status; not yet decided.
- Loch na Cathrach Pumped Storage Hydro Scheme (PSHS). A Pumped Storage Hydro scheme comprising an electrical generating station with a capacity of more than 50 MW, located approximately 14 km southwest of Inverness on the eastern shore of Loch Ness. Planning status; the scheme is consented.

ZTVs generated for the PSHS development are 'bare earth' and do not take into account the screening effects of existing vegetation. The PSHS ZTV bare earth (worst case) studies do not extend across the Proposed Development site, and it can therefore be assumed there is no direct intervisibility between the two sites. There will be some overlap of the PSHS bare earth ZTV and the Proposed Development bare earth ZTVs (Drawings 05 & 06 at **Appendix 01**) in an area to the south and southwest of the Knocknagael site. The most likely location where theoretical views of the two developments could be seen would be along the ridgeline tracked by General Wade's Military Road, however in that instance the two sites (located in opposite directions) would not be viewed concurrently.

Land areas between the PSHS site and Proposed Development to the east and west of the study areas could theoretically allow concurrent views of both developments. Given that the Proposed Development is predicted to incur either negligible or minor effects upon receptors located more than 1 km distance from the site, the potential for cumulative visual effects to become significant in more distant views is considered highly unlikely.

Bare earth ZTVs are worst case; in reality, there will always be a certain quantum of woodland and conifer plantations in existence that will significantly reduce or prevent intervisibility between the two sites. Overall, it is predicted there will be no significant cumulative effects between the consented Red John Pumped Storage Hydro Scheme and the Proposed Development.

Although not yet determined, the extension of Knocknagael Substation, neighbouring the Proposed Development, could give rise to potentially significant cumulative effects, particularly if both were under

construction simultaneously. Adverse landscape and visual effects to local receptors would be exacerbated, although the construction stage would be short term and temporary. The 'overlap' of simultaneous construction activity is also likely to occur over a shorter period and not last the full duration of either sites' construction programme, therefore temporally limiting the potential for significant cumulative effects.

Potential cumulative effects during the operational phases of the two developments will not be significant. The existing presence of the Knocknagael Substation and tall electricity pylons, strongly affects both visual and landscape character within the area. The extension of the substation, in combination with the Proposed Development, will not significantly alter existing landscape character.

Although the Proposed Development is comparable in footprint to the existing Knocknagael Substation, the Proposed Development is separated across three main compounds, each partially set in cutting. The combination of varied topography, proposed earth bunding, planting and the relatively modest height of proposed structures, is considered to allow the Proposed Development to be sufficiently well mitigated to avoid significant or additional, cumulative visual effects between the two sites.

6 Summary

This report has considered the predicted landscape and visual effects that would result from the Proposed Development.

The assessment describes the existing characteristics of the landscape and views within the study area. This establishes the 'baseline' from which the effects of the proposed scheme can be determined. Landscape effects include both physical effects on features (for example loss of existing trees) and effects on the character of the landscape. Visual effects are assessed from a series of viewpoints, selected to represent a range of views people experience within the study area.

The Proposed Development is located within an area of undulating pasture farmland on topography that falls to the north. Coniferous woodland defines the southern site boundary and forms a strong, local visual horizon. Large, rectilinear tracts of coniferous plantations are present within the immediate area and form abrupt visual horizons, often seen high in the skyline. Biorraid Road defines the eastern site boundary and the lane, Essich Road (General Wade's Military Road) is located to the west. There are distant views to the north towards Inverness and the Moray Firth. The overall landscape is generally attractive and strongly rural in character although the extensive Knocknagael Substation and associated tall electricity pylons are highly intrusive locally and often prominent in the skyline from views across the wider study area.

There are no landscape related planning designations or other landscape constraints within the site or its immediate setting. Loch Ness and Duntelchaig Special Landscape Area is located approximately 3.1 km to the southwest of the site. There is no intervisibility between the Proposed Development and the SLA due to the modest height of proposed structures, located on a north facing slope, away from the SLA.

Leys Castle (Garden & Designed Landscape) is located approximately 2.5 km away, northeast of the Proposed Development. ZTV studies extend to the dense woodland southern boundary of the GDL, however site observation confirms that actual intervisibility between the GDL and site is further limited by roadside and other scattered vegetation. Potential views from the Leys Castle GDL are restricted to the outer margins of the southern woodland boundary. The worst-case scenario will be views to high level construction activity although this is predicted to incur negligible affect to views from the GDL and no effect during operation.

High sensitivity receptors within proximity to the site include residential properties at Achvraid Farm and Achvraid House to the southeast of the site and Essich Farm Cottage on the northern site boundary. Essich Road on the western site boundary and Biorraid Road on the eastern boundary offer recreational use to cyclists and motorists with mountain and coastal views.

A summary of predicted effects upon key landscape and visual receptors identified in the LVIA is given in **Table 12** and text below.

Table 12 Summary of Landscape and Visual Effects

Receptor	Project Stage	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Significance of Effect
Leys Castle Garden and Designed Landscape	Construction	High	Low adverse	Minor adverse
	Year 1		None	No effect
	Year 10		None	No effect
	Construction	Medium	Medium adverse	**Moderate adverse**

Receptor	Project Stage	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Significance of Effect
LCT 223 *Flat Moorland Plateau with Woodland* (areas in proximity to the site)	Year 1		Medium adverse	Minor moderate adverse
	Year 10		Low medium adverse	Minor adverse
LCT 228 *Rolling Farmland and Woodland* (areas in proximity to the site)	Construction	Medium	Medium adverse	**Moderate adverse**
	Year 1		Medium adverse	Minor moderate adverse
	Year 10		Low medium adverse	Minor adverse
Grounds to Essich Farm Cottage	Construction	Medium	High adverse	**Moderate major adverse**
	Year 1		Medium adverse	Minor moderate adverse
	Year 10		Low beneficial	Minor negligible effect
Achvraid Farm & adjoining dwellings	Construction	Medium	High adverse	**Moderate major adverse**
	Year 1		Low medium adverse	Minor moderate adverse
	Year 10		Low beneficial	Minor negligible effect
Achvraid House	Construction	Medium	High adverse	Minor moderate adverse
	Year 1		Low medium adverse	Minor adverse
	Year 10		Low adverse	Minor negligible effect
Properties to NE of the Proposed Development	Construction	Medium	Low adverse	Minor negligible effect
	Year 1		Negligible adverse	Negligible effect
	Year 10		Negligible adverse	Negligible effect
SW margins of Inverness at Tobreck	Construction	Medium	Low adverse	Minor negligible effect
	Year 1		Negligible adverse	Negligible effect
	Year 10		None	No effect
Biorraid Road (adjacent to site)	Construction	Medium	High adverse	**Moderate major adverse**
	Year 1		High or medium high adverse	**Moderate major or Moderate adverse**
	Year 10		Medium high or medium adverse	**Moderate** or Minor moderate adverse
Essich Road (adjacent to site)	Construction	Medium	High adverse	**Moderate major adverse**
	Year 1		Medium adverse	Minor moderate adverse

Receptor	Project Stage	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Significance of Effect
	Year 10		Low beneficial	Minor negligible effect
B861 road	Construction	Medium	Low adverse	Minor negligible effect
	Year 1		Negligible adverse	Negligible effect
	Year 10		Negligible beneficial	Negligible effect
Core Path IN12.06	Construction	Medium	Low adverse	Minor negligible effect
	Year 1		None	No effect
	Year 10		None	No effect

The construction stage is predicted to incur significant landscape and visual effects at a local level, within close proximity to the site. Views from properties at Achvraid Farm and the grounds to Essich Farm Cottage being most affected. Views from lanes alongside the Proposed Development will also be substantially adversely affected.

Construction stage effects across the wider study area will not be significant due to existing vegetation and topographical variation limiting potential intervisibility. In addition, Knocknagael Substation and associated pylons are highly intrusive features within the area and will reduce the perceived magnitude of change to landscape character and views incurred by the lesser scale, Proposed Development.

Construction stage effects will be short term and temporary.

During early operational stages of the Proposed Development extensive earth modelling around the site and retention of vegetation (including trees and conifer plantations) will provide screening to the battery storage compounds and partial screening to lower sections of structures within the proposed substation compound. Taller structures will remain prominent in views, particularly from the adjoining roads.

Longer term establishment of proposed woodland and scrub will substantially screen structures within the Proposed Development. The site will be effectively assimilated within its landscape setting and overall landscape character reinforced. Certain local views may be slightly improved where proposed mitigation planting provides additional, incidental screening of Knocknagael Substation.

7 Compliance with planning policy

Compliance of the Proposed Development with planning policy relevant to landscape and visual effects is summarised in **Table 13**.

Table 13 Compliance with Planning Policy

Policy / guidance	Compliance commentary
NPF4 (National Planning Framework 4)	
'Natural Places' Policy 4	Complies. The Proposed Development will not have an unacceptable level of impact on the natural environment and will not affect nationally protected landscapes or special landscape areas.
'Forestry, woodland and trees' Policy 6	Complies. The proposed landscape mitigation strategy will introduce a range of appropriate native species trees and shrubs that will enhance and expand local tree cover. The Proposed Development will not affect native woodlands, hedgerows and individual trees of high biodiversity value.
'Blue and green infrastructure' Policy 20	Complies. Proposed SuDS ponds will be enhanced where possible to provide improved biodiversity value. Landscape measures will introduce valuable local green infrastructure.
Highland-wide Local Development Plan	
Policy 28 Sustainable Design	Complies. Proposed landscape measures will negate harm to wider landscape character and provide improvement of local landscape character.
Policy 36 Development with Wider Countryside	Not applicable, the Proposed Development lies within 'Hinterland'.
Policy 51 Trees and Development	Complies. Existing vegetation will be protected and retained, including stands of mature trees within the site. Proposed landscape measures include the planting of native species hedgerow, woodland and scrub. Retained landscape features and proposed landscape planting will be subject to a long-term landscape and ecological management plan.
Policy 57 Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage	Complies. The Proposed Development will not have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment, amenity or heritage resource.
Policy 61 Landscape	Complies. The proposed landscape scheme will introduce topographical and landscape features that are appropriate to and will enhance local landscape character. The LVIA outlines predicated cumulative effects of the Proposed Development.

The Proposed Development is considered to comply with both national and local planning policy.