



**24/00123/PPW – REPLACEMENT OF THREE EXISTING 2-BLADED WIND TURBINES OF 46M TO TIP AT MONAN WIND FARM, WITH THREE 3 BLADED WIND TURBINES WITH A TIP HEIGHT OF UP TO 86M AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE, ISLE OF HARRIS**

Report by Chief Executive

## **PURPOSE**

- 1.1 The planning application is considered by the Appointed Officer to be sensitive, and in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation is referred to the Planning Applications Board for decision.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 2.1 This Report relates to a planning application for planning permission for the proposed repowering/re-development of the existing Monan Wind Farm site, by way of the replacement of the three existing 2-bladed wind turbines of 46m to tip at Monan Wind Farm, with three 3-bladed wind turbines with a tip height of up to 86m and associated infrastructure at Ceann an Ora, Isle of Harris.
- 2.2 The planning application is an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) application. An EIA Report comprised of several chapters was submitted to assess the likely significance of effect of the proposed development on the wider environment and has informed the planning assessment.
- 2.3 The application site extends to 20.60ha (50.90ac) and is located approximately 800 metres away from the nearest settlement, with the furthest section of the site approximately 1.5 kilometres from housing.
- 2.4 The site is considered to be ‘outwith settlement’ in terms of the Comhairle Development Strategy. The site is an area of inclining and hilly moorland, rising to mountains, that lie to the north side of the A859 Stornoway to Tarbert road. The location is characterised as Prominent Hills and Mountains in NatureScot’s landscape character assessment.
- 2.5 The site is within the South Lewis, Harris & North Uist National Scenic Area (NSA), with the West Coast of the Outer Hebrides SPA approximately one kilometre to the south west, and the North Harris SPA, North Harris SAC and North Harris SSSI approximately one kilometre to the west and north west. The proposed site, like the current one, overlaps the southern edge of the Harris-Uig Hills Wild Land Area (WLA).
- 2.6 In terms of development currently in the surrounding area, there are the existing 3 x 46 metres high wind turbines (which this application proposes to replace), there are also existing telecommunications masts nearby and a proliferation of electricity poles. Immediately to the south east of the site there is an operational minerals quarry. Land in all other directions is largely undeveloped moorland, hills and is uninhabited. The land in this area is predominantly agricultural/rough grazing, with outcrops of rock. Vegetation cover is rough/rank grasses and heather. There are several watercourses and lochs in the general vicinity of the site.
- 2.7 The proposed development site is mostly underlain with mineral soils, with the western section of the site being located upon Class 2 peat which is noted as ‘peatland or areas with high potential to be restored to peatland’. A section of the existing access tracks and those leading to turbine 3 also traverse a pocket of Class 1 peat (peat soils covered with peatland vegetation). A Peat Management

Plan (PMP) submitted with the current application details the principles for the management of this peat.

- 2.8 No representations against the proposed development have been received. Consultees have made comments and offered advice, but none have raised an objection.
- 2.9 The Comhairle is required to determine planning applications in accordance with the provisions of the statutory Development Plan, comprising the Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan 2018 (OHLDP) and National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations have been given due consideration.
- 2.10 The planning assessment in this Report considers, firstly, whether the modified proposed development in this location would be acceptable, in relation to national and local planning policies, including the development strategy, before going on to consider the likely effects of the development in relation to a series of main issues:
- Carbon Balance
  - Peat and soils
  - Landscape and Visual Impacts, in particular on the Nationals Scenic Area and Wild Land Area and Cumulative effects
  - Hydrology
  - Ecology
  - Ornithology
  - Biodiversity
  - Telecommunications and Infrastructure (Broadcasting, telecommunications, electricity)
  - Traffic and Transport
  - Health and Safety
  - Aviation
  - Historic environment and cultural heritage (Archaeology)
  - Socio-Economic Impacts
  - Pollution, noise, shadow flicker
- 2.11 Mitigation measures that are considered necessary and can be secured by planning conditions and a Section 75 Agreement are identified in the Report. For the reasons given within the Report and subject to the satisfactory implementation of these measures, it is considered that the proposal would have a largely neutral residual effect on the following issues: biodiversity, health and safety, aviation, broadcasting, telecommunications, electricity, traffic and transport, noise, shadow flicker, hydrology (water environment and water supply, drainage) and soils.
- 2.12 It is concluded that the proposed development, while it would result in an element of landscape change, it would not result in harm to landscape character, to visual impacts, or to the special qualities of the South Lewis, Harris & North Uist National Scenic Area (NSA) or the Harris-Uig Hills Wild Land Area (WLA).
- 2.13 It is also concluded that the proposed development is not likely to have an adverse effect on ecology or ornithology and based on its conservation objectives, it therefore is not likely to have an adverse effect on the integrity of the North Harris SPA, West Coast of the Outer Hebrides SPA, the North Harris SAC or the North Harris SSSI.
- 2.14 No adverse impacts are anticipated to the setting of heritage assets, and in relation to climate change, where the development will make a positive contribution.

- 2.15 The assessment and recommendation for approval is a balanced one, having had regard to the Development Plan and to all material considerations.

## RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the EIA planning application be APPROVED subject to the conditions set out in Appendix 1 to this Report.**

Contact Officer:	Morag Ferguson/Iain MacLeod Telephone: 01870 604990 Email: <a href="mailto:mferguson@cne-siar.gov.uk">mferguson@cne-siar.gov.uk</a> / <a href="mailto:jainmacleod@cne-siar.gov.uk">jainmacleod@cne-siar.gov.uk</a>
Appendix 1:	Schedule of Proposed Conditions
Appendix 2:	Plans and Supporting Information
Appendix 3:	Consultation Responses
Appendix 4:	Photographs
Appendix 5:	Visualisations
Appendix 6:	Non-Technical Summary
Background Papers:	None

## IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	None
Legal	Requirement to update a Section 75 Planning Agreement
Staffing	Future resource implications for the pre-commencement discharge and construction phase monitoring of conditions
Assets and Property	None
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	None
Equalities	None
Corporate Strategy	None
Environmental Impact	The environmental impacts of the proposed development are assessed through the EIA and planning application process
Consultation	None

## BACKGROUND

### Application

- 5.1 This Report relates to the proposed re-development of the existing wind farm site, by way of the replacement of the three existing 2-bladed wind turbines of 46m to tip at Monan Wind Farm, with three 3-bladed wind turbines with a tip height of up to 86m and associated infrastructure.
- 5.2 The planning application was registered as valid on 09 April 2024. The planning application was advertised for public comment in the public notices section of the Stornoway Gazette on 25 April 2024 and in the Edinburgh Gazette on 29 April 2024. Hard copies of the application were also displayed in the Comhairle offices in Stornoway and at the Post Office in Tarbert, Isle of Harris.
- 5.3 External consultations were issued to the Ministry of Defence, Highland and Island Airports Limited, National Air Traffic Services, NatureScot, Scottish Water, Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks, Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks Transmission, SEPA, Historic Environment Scotland, Outer Hebrides Fisheries Trust, Western Isles District Salmon Fisheries Board, Joint Radio Company and

Arqiva Ltd. Internal consultations were issued to the Comhairle Roads, Environmental Health and Archaeology Services.

- 5.4 There were no notifiable neighbours.

## **SITE CONTEXT AND PROPOSAL**

### **Description of site and its context**

- 6.1 The application site is an existing Wind Farm and extends to 20.60ha (50.90ac) and is located approximately 800 metres away from the nearest settlement, with the furthest section of the site approximately 1.5 kilometres from housing. The site is considered to be 'outwith settlement' in terms of the Comhairle Development Strategy.
- 6.2 The site is an area of inclining and hilly moorland, rising to mountains, that lies above the north side of the A859 Stornoway to Tarbert road. The location is characterised as Prominent Hills and Mountains in NatureScot's landscape character assessment. This Landscape type is characterised by individual peaks with pronounced summits, long ridges and slopes, rising steadily from the surrounding terrain. Steep sided corries and short u-shaped glens form an integral part of this character type. The upper slopes of the Prominent Hills and Mountains consist of irregular rock buttresses, ledges, shelves and deep gullies. Where the hills and mountains meet the coast the deeply indented coastline is dominated by rocky headlands, sea cliffs and occasional caves.
- 6.3 In terms of development currently in the surrounding area, there are the existing 3 x 46 metres high wind turbines (which this application proposes to replace), there are also existing telecommunications masts nearby and a proliferation of electricity poles. Immediately to the south east of the site there is an operational minerals quarry. Land in all other directions is largely undeveloped moorland, hills and is uninhabited.
- 6.4 The site is within the South Lewis, Harris & North Uist National Scenic Area (NSA), with the West Coast of the Outer Hebrides SPA approximately one kilometre to the south west, and the North Harris SPA, North Harris SAC and North Harris SSSI approximately one kilometre to the west and north west. The proposed site, like the current one, overlaps the southern edge of the Harris-Uig Hills Wild Land Area (WLA).

### **Description of development**

- 6.5 The application seeks planning permission to repower the site and comprises three wind turbines up to 86m to tip. This is the same height of turbine as originally granted planning consent in 2008 (planning reference 06/00290). The proposed turbines would replace the three existing two-bladed turbines of 46m to tip and two of their locations would be in very close proximity to the current positions.
- 6.6 Hardstanding areas for cranes will be required at each turbine location and new turbine foundations will be required. A temporary construction compound, including parking, and welfare facilities are to be provided.
- 6.7 370m of new access track is proposed and 930m of the existing access track is to be upgraded with associated drainage works.
- 6.8 The existing substation building and existing access tracks and turning/passing areas on the site would be utilised.
- 6.9 The application is accompanied by plans and supplementary information which describes the development (some of which are attached as Appendix 2 to this Report).

6.10 Being an EIA development, the application has been supported by the following submissions:

#### Chapters

- Chapter 1 - Introduction
- Chapter 2 – Proposed Development
- Chapter 3 – EIA Methodology
- Chapter 4 – Regulatory and Policy Context
- Chapter 5 – Carbon Balance
- Chapter 6 – Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)
- Chapter 7 - Hydrology
- Chapter 8 - Ecology
- Chapter 9 – Ornithology (Confidential)
- Chapter 10 – Telecommunications
- Chapter 11 – Traffic and Transport
- Chapter 12 – Other issues
- Chapter 13 – Summary of Mitigation

#### Appendices

- Appendix 5.1 – Carbon Calculation input and results
- Appendix 7.1 – Outline Peat Management Plan
- Appendix 7.1 – Annex A (Site Works)
- Appendix 8.1 – Habitat and National Vegetation Classification Survey
- Appendix 8.2 – Protected Species Survey
- Appendix 8.3 – Outline Biodiversity Enhancement Management Plan
- Appendix 9.1 – Ornithology (and Annex A) (Confidential)

#### Figures

- Figure 2.1 – Site Constraints Plan
- Figure 2.2 - Site Constraints Plan with layout
- Figure 3.1 – Cumulative Projects
- Figure 6.1 – Study Area
- Figure 6.2 – ZTV to 86M Tip
- Figure 6.3 – ZTV to 59M Hub
- Figure 6.4 – Landscape Character Types
- Figure 6.5 – Local Landscape Character Areas with 86m Tip ZTV
- Figure 6.6 – Landscape Planning Designations
- Figure 6.7 – Landscape Planning Designations with 86m Tip ZTV
- Figure 6.8 – Cumulative Basemap
- Figure 6.9 – VP01 A859 at Loch a Mhorghain
- Figure 6.10 – VP02 A859 Overlooking Ceann an Ora
- Figure 6.11 – VP03 A859 at Loch Na Ciste
- Figure 6.12 – VP04 B887 at Tolmachan
- Figure 6.13 – VP05 Taransay
- Figure 6.14 – VP06 Beinn Mhor
- Figure 7.1 – Hydrological Map
- Figure 7.2 – Peat Depth Map
- Figure 10.1 – Infrastructure Constraints

### **LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT**

7.1 The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (the Act) is the principal legislation. Sections 25 and 37(2) of the Act require that planning decisions be made in accordance with the Development Plan

unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The weight to be attached to any relevant material consideration is for the judgment of the decision-maker. Two main tests are used when deciding whether a consideration is material and relevant:

- It should serve or be related to the purpose of planning. This means it should relate to the development and use of land.
- It should fairly and reasonably relate to the particular application being determined.

7.2 This Report sets out an assessment against the policies and provisions of the Development Plan and has regard to all relevant material planning considerations, to inform a conclusion and recommendation as to the determination.

7.3 In terms of the Town and Country Planning (Hierarchy of Developments) (Scotland) Regulations 2009, the class and scale of development is such that it falls within the classification of a 'Local Development'.

## **PLANNING HISTORY**

8.1 The site is an existing windfarm site, where in 2008 consent was granted for three wind turbines at a maximum tip height of 86m and associated infrastructure (ref 06/00290). This consent was then varied in 2012 to reduce the height of the turbines to the height of the operational scheme due to turbine supply issues for the site at this time.

8.2 Screening opinion 23/00024/SCR\_L was issued by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar on 01 August 2023 in relation to the current proposal.

8.3 Scoping opinion 23/00431\_SCO\_L was issued by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar on 21 December 2023 in relation to the current proposal.

## **CONSULTATION ADVICE**

9.1 Statutory consultation was undertaken as required by Regulations. The detailed responses of statutory and other consultation bodies are summarised as follows.

- **Ministry of Defence**

In this case the development falls within Low Flying Area 14 (LFA 14), an area within which fixed wing aircraft may operate as low as 250 feet or 76.2 metres above ground level to conduct low level flight training. The addition of turbines in this location has the potential to introduce a physical obstruction to low flying aircraft operating in the area.

To address this impact, and given the location and scale of the development, the MOD require conditions are added to any consent issued requiring that the development is fitted with aviation safety lighting and that sufficient data is submitted to ensure that structures can be accurately charted to allow deconfliction. Suggested condition wordings are set out in Appendix A.

As a minimum the MOD would request the wind turbines are lit with Infra-red (IR) beacons

- **Comhairle Archaeology**

Please be advised that this Archaeology Service does not recommend any archaeological mitigation regarding this application.

- **Comhairle Roads Section**

As stated in the Traffic and Transport section of the EIA Report an Abnormal Load Routing Plan and Construction Traffic Management Plan should be agreed with CnES prior to the works commencing.

Any bridges or structures crossed as part of the Abnormal Load Route should be assessed beforehand with any enquiries directed to the CnES Bridges/Structural Engineer.

Mitigation works may be required along this route to allow delivery of units.

The developer will be responsible for the repair of damages to the road network as a result of the project. It would be in the interest of the developer to film the proposed routes prior to works commencing and carry out condition surveys as stated in the EIA Report.

- **SEPA**

We are content that the development is of a scale where you can simply refer to our standing advice and we have no site-specific advice to provide in this case.

- **Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks**

With reference the above application SSEN Distribution would register no objections to the proposed works.

There is existing distribution overhead apparatus in proximity to the site which has been indicated on the site plan that they will be accessing the site beneath the 33,000V overhead line. With an overall turbine height of 86m SSEN Distribution would require a tipping distance of 1.5 times the height, which would be 129m which the applicant has from the existing distribution apparatus.

As such the applicant will need to adhere to the HSE guidance note GS6 which relates to work in proximity to overhead lines and to GS47 which relates to work in proximity to underground cables.

- **Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks Transmission**

Should the Council be minded to approve this application, transportation of the wind turbines to site would appear likely to take place underneath our overhead transmission line. To ensure that no conflict with our line takes place, we recommend the developer contact our Asset Management team at [Transmission.Asset.Management@sse.com](mailto:Transmission.Asset.Management@sse.com) at least 30 days prior to delivery to ensure that appropriate safety measures will be put in place to manage this risk. Subsequently, if this application is approved, we ask that this recommendation is added as an informative to the decision notice.

- **NATS**

The proposed development has been examined from a technical safeguarding aspect and does not conflict with our safeguarding criteria. Accordingly, NATS (En Route) Public Limited Company ("NERL") has no safeguarding objection to the proposal.

If any changes are proposed to the information supplied to NATS in regard to this application which become the basis of a revised, amended or further application for approval, then as a statutory consultee NERL requires that it be further consulted on any such changes prior to any planning permission or any consent being granted.

- **Highland and Islands Airports Limited**

With reference to the above proposal, our preliminary assessment shows that, at the given position and height, this development would not infringe the safeguarding criteria and operation of Stornoway Airport. Therefore, Highlands and Islands Airports Limited has no objections to the proposal.

Any variation of the parameters (which include the location, dimensions, form, and finishing materials) then as a statutory consultee HIAL requires that it be further consulted on any such changes prior to any planning permission, or any consent being granted.

- **NatureScot**

Biodiversity

The proposals in the attached outline Plan, in particular the plan to work with the North Harris Trust to deliver a woodland planting programme, are welcome. Our concern is that this is secured by a legally binding mechanism to deliver the biodiversity results intended.

We are likewise content with the proposals to enhance track edges and bog pool habitat, and provide an updated education pack for the site.

NSA and WLA

Overall, while the proposed increased scale of the turbines causes slightly greater effects, none of these would be sufficient to cause additional new impacts (bar a short section of the A859 at Loch a Mhorghain) and would not result in significant impacts on the NSA or WLA.

Ecology

We think that further consideration should be given to enhancement. The site may not be suitable for scrub due to the prevailing soil and exposure conditions. As there are no water voles, reptiles or native amphibians present, the refugia/hibernacula may deliver little real benefit. Similarly, the site is unlikely to ever host bird species which would benefit from the provision of bird boxes.

Ornithology

This golden eagle range overlaps the North Harris Mountains Special Protection Area (SPA). The EIA has not adequately assessed the impacts on the SPA. However, there is enough information for us to reach a conclusion.

NatureScot's advice is that there is likely to be a significant effect on the SPA. Therefore, an appropriate assessment is required.

Having made our own appraisal of the impacts on the site, based on its conservation objectives, we conclude that there is not likely to be an adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA.

- **Environmental Health**

Noise and shadow flicker were scoped out of the EIA assessment. Given the distances I don't expect any issues but would recommend including the standard conditions re noise, shadow flicker and construction.

- **Historic Environment Scotland**

We understand that the proposed turbines are to be sited c. 1km northeast of Bunavoneadar, whaling station, Harris (SM5362), which is a well-preserved early 20th century whaling station, but the proposed turbines should be screened from the monument by the intervening topography.

Our position Although the turbines may be visible in key views of the monument on approaches from the sea, we do not assess these impacts as significant. This assessment is consistent with our view on the previous consultation on the Monan Wind Farm site in 2006 for three wind turbines at a maximum tip height of 86m and associated infrastructure.

- **Scottish Water**

Scottish Water has no objection

- **Joint Radio Company (JRC)**

In the case of this proposed wind energy development, JRC does not foresee any potential problems based on known interference scenarios and the data you have provided. However, if any details of the wind farm change, particularly the disposition or scale of any turbine(s), it will be necessary to re-evaluate the proposal.



It should be noted that this clearance pertains only to the date of its issue. As the use of the spectrum is dynamic, the use of the band is changing on an ongoing basis and consequently, developers are advised to seek re-coordination prior to considering any design changes.

If any details of this proposal change, particularly the disposition or scale of any turbine(s), this clearance will be void and re-evaluation of the proposal will be necessary.

- **Arqiva Ltd**

We have considered whether this development is likely to have an adverse effect on our operations and have concluded that we have no objection.

- **Outer Hebrides Fisheries Trust**

There was no response from this consultee.

- **Western Isles District Salmon Fisheries Board**

There was no response from this consultee.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

10.1 The planning application was advertised for public comment in the public notices section of the Stornoway Gazette in the publication dated 25 April 2024 and in the Edinburgh Gazette on 29 April 2024 as required by regulations. Hard copies of the application were also displayed in the Comhairle offices in Stornoway and at the Post Office in Tarbert, Isle of Harris.

10.2 There were no notifiable neighbours.

10.3 There were no representations in relation to this application.

## **POLICY CONTEXT**

### **The 'Development Plan'**

11.1 In Scotland, the planning system is 'plan-led' and sections 25 and 37(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (the Act) require that planning decisions be made in accordance with the 'Development Plan' unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

11.2 Following the enactment of a provision of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 on 13 February 2023, the statutory 'Development Plan' for the administrative area of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is comprised of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) (2023) and the Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan (LDP) 2018 and its Supplementary Guidance.

11.3 NPF4 comprises the 'National Spatial Strategy for Scotland' up to 2045 and also provides the Scottish Government's updated statement of National Planning Policy. The OHLDP sets out the strategic land use policy and provides the local framework to develop and sustain the communities of the Outer Hebrides. Section 24(3) of the Act provides that in the event of any incompatibility between a provision of NPF4 and a provision of the LDP that whichever of them is the later in date, is to prevail.

11.4 The Development Plan policies with particular relevance to the application are:

### **OHLDP:**

- Policy DS1: Development Strategy – Outwith Settlements
- Policy PD2: Carparking & Roads Layout
- Policy PD6: Compatibility of Neighbouring Uses

- Policy ED1: Economic Development
- Policy EI 3: Water Environment
- Policy EI 5: Soils
- Policy EI 7: Countryside and Coastal Access
- Policy EI 8: Energy and Heat Resources
- Policy EI11: Safeguarding
- Policy NBH1: Landscape (National Scenic Areas)
- Policy NBH2: Natural Heritage – Ecology and Ornithology
- Policy NBH5: Archaeology

### **Supplementary Guidance: Supplementary Guidance for Wind Energy Development**

- 11.5 The purpose of this Supplementary Guidance (SG) is to deliver the wind energy aspects of the Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan Policy EI 8: Energy and Heat Resources, and to provide further detail through policies and additional advice to assist in planning for the provision of all scales of wind energy development in the Outer Hebrides.
- 11.6 For consistency and to avoid repetition, the proposal will be considered against the Supplementary Guidance for Wind Energy Development (adopted November 2021) at all relevant sections of this Report.

#### **NPF4:**

- Policy 1 Tackling the climate and nature crises
- Policy 2 Climate mitigation and adaptation
- Policy 3 Biodiversity
- Policy 4 Natural Places
- Policy 5 Soils
- Policy 7 Historic assets and places
- Policy 11 Energy
- Policy 18 Infrastructure first
- Policy 23 Health and safety
- Policy 25 Community Wealth Building

## **PLANNING ASSESSMENT**

### **Main issues**

#### Spatial strategy and principle of development

- 12.1 The Development Strategy sets out the overall spatial strategy to guide development (i.e. where development should and should not be located and the principles behind it) and applies to all development proposals.
- 12.2 The site is located 'Outwith Settlement' in terms of the Comhairle Development Strategy LDP - Policy DS1 and within a Remote Rural Area in terms of the NPF4 - Policy 29.
- 12.3 These areas act as a separation between settlements which helps to retain distinctiveness. They have some local and strategic resource functions, supporting a diverse range of development activities and largely non-residential uses, which include agriculture, recreation activities, mineral extraction, energy development and storage/waste depots. Generally, these areas have dispersed development in a more open landscape, encompassing various landscape character types with machair, moorland and some upland. Development proposals are likely to be mainly resource or tourism based. There may be capacity for a limited amount of development where siting and design are critical to mitigate impacts on landscape. 'Outwith Settlement' is not mapped but is defined as the area between settlement boundaries and mapped Remote Areas.

- 12.4 The Comhairle Supplementary Guidance for Wind Energy Development (November 2021) Map-1-Spatial-Strategy identifies the location as an area being unacceptable for Wind Farms.
- 12.5 The site is an existing windfarm site, where in 2008 consent was granted for three wind turbines at a maximum tip height of 86m and associated infrastructure (ref 06/00290). This consent was then varied in 2012 to reduce the height of the turbines to the height of the operational scheme due to turbine supply issues for the site at this time. This application is to 'repower' the site and seeks consent for turbines of height consistent with the original 2008 consent.
- 12.6 The policy states that all development proposals will be assessed against the capacity of the surrounding landscape to accommodate the development and that development proposals should avoid raised or high level locations to minimise visual impact. This requirement is assessed in detail at Policy NBH1: Landscape (National Scenic Areas) below.
- 12.7 Chapter 2 of the EIAR (Proposed Development and Design Evolution) details the site and the site selection process, however, the use of the site as a windfarm is existing and acceptable in terms of the development strategy and this aspect is therefore not revisited. An assessment of the physical changes proposed at the site are assessed in detail at the relevant sections below.

#### Carparking & Roads Layout

- 12.8 Access arrangements to the site are existing, with an access point coming off the A859 Stornoway to Tarbert road and no changes are proposed to these arrangements. However, in their consultation response to the Scoping Opinion, Comhairle Roads, Bridges and Streetlighting (Comhairle Roads) advised that an Abnormal Load Routing Plan and Construction Traffic Management Plan should be agreed with the Comhairle, Transport Scotland and Police Scotland and that any bridges or structures crossed as part of the Abnormal Load Route should be assessed beforehand.
- 12.9 Comhairle Roads also advised that mitigation works may be required along this route to allow delivery of units and that the developer would be responsible for the repair of damages to the road network as a result of the project and it may be in the interest of the developer to survey the route before works commences.
- 12.10 In response to the current application, Comhairle Roads re-iterated that as stated in the Traffic and Transport section of the EIA Report (Chapter 11) that an Abnormal Load Routing Plan and Construction Traffic Management Plan should be agreed with the Comhairle prior to the works commencing and again, that any bridges or structures crossed as part of the Abnormal Load Route should be assessed beforehand, with any enquiries directed to the Comhairle Bridges/Structural Engineer and that mitigation works may be required along this route to allow delivery of units.
- 12.11 As with all applications of this nature and in line with the comments provided by Comhairle's Roads as laid out in Chapter 11, Traffic and Transport, it is proposed to append conditions to any consent ensuring the submission of an Abnormal Load Routing Plan and Construction Traffic Management Plan prior to the commencement of the development, which will include also the requirement for the developer to film the proposed routes prior to works commencing and to carry out condition surveys as stated in the EIA Report.

#### Compatibility of Neighbouring Uses

- 12.12 LDP Policy PD6 seeks that all development proposals shall ensure that there are no unacceptable adverse impacts on the amenity of neighbouring uses and where appropriate, proposals should include mitigation measures to reduce the impact on the amenity of neighbouring uses.
- 12.13 There is an operational minerals quarry immediately to the south of the site, upon which the development will have no impact.

- 12.14 In terms of neighbouring amenity, the houses nearest to the site are approximately 0.8km away and downhill from the site boundary, at the rural settlement of Bunavoneadar. Planning Permission ref 06/00455 was granted in 2006 for the erection of these eight houses and three serviced plots with the development undertaken shortly thereafter. On account of the separation distance involved and with the windfarm having been operational at this location for a considerable period of time, the compatibility with neighbouring uses has been tested; it is understood that no concerns have been raised by residents of these dwellings in relation to the windfarm. The differential between the extant and proposed will be an increase in size and change of model of the turbines from two blade to three blade. The re-siting of each turbine is minimal such that it is unlikely to be of any consequence in this regard.
- 12.15 Comhairle Environmental Health was consulted on this application and advised that noise and shadow flicker were scoped out of the EIA assessment at the scoping stage and, given the distances involved, do not foresee any issues but would recommend including the standard conditions regarding noise and shadow flicker for the operation of the turbines and also during the construction period.
- 12.16 Outwith the decommissioning of the existing turbines and the construction phase of the repowered site, the continued operation of the windfarm site will not introduce any new activities to the site that would intensify its operational impacts, other than the increased size of turbine and type of model as referred to above.
- 12.17 It is therefore not envisaged that as a result of the development there will be undue impact upon neighbouring amenity from the proposed development and Policy PD6 would be satisfied, subject to appending the relevant conditions proposed at Appendix 1 to this Report, regarding noise during construction and noise and shadow flicker during to the operation of the wind farm.

#### Water Environment - Hydrology

- 12.18 Water dependent protected areas must be safeguarded from inappropriate development, and where possible, new developments should improve the water environment. Improvements to the water environment can contribute to flood risk management objectives. The creation of riparian habitats for mammals, birds, insects and other aquatic species, will also contribute to meeting the objectives of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.
- 12.19 Development proposals should avoid adverse impact on the water environment. All proposals involving activities in or adjacent to any water body must be accompanied by sufficient information to enable a full assessment to be made of the likely effects, including environmental effects, of the development.
- 12.20 Surface water includes watercourses, water bodies, and precipitation runoff. It provides an important resource for: potable and other uses, amenity, aesthetic value, conservation, ecological environments, and for recharge to groundwater systems. Groundwater is also an important resource. It provides more than a third of the potable water supply in the UK and includes all water stored in permeable underground strata (or aquifers). In addition, it provides essential baseflow to rivers and wetland areas, often supporting important ecological systems.
- 12.21 While the site itself is relatively large, the surrounding landscape is undulating and expansive and as such provides considerable water environment connectivity.
- 12.22 Chapter 7 of the EIAR addresses Hydrology and the Water Environment.
- 12.23 The risk of pollution or disruption of watercourses, groundwater bodies, and private water sources, within or near the site, needs to be assessed and appropriately mitigated where necessary. Potential impacts identified could include:

- Erosion and sedimentation
- Impacts to surface runoff characteristics
- Impacts on surface water quality
- Impacts on river flows and flooding
- Impacts on groundwater dependent terrestrial ecosystems (GWDTE)
- Impacts on soils
- Impacts on peat hydrological regime
- Chemical pollution of groundwater
- Disruption or fouling of private water supplies
- Impacts on public water supplies and abstractions
- Modifications to hydrogeological regime
- Peat Slide Risk

12.24 Chapter 7 presents the impact assessment of the proposed development on the hydrology and hydrogeology environments and the report is supported by the following figures associated with this chapter and within the Ecological Impact Assessment (EIA).

- Appendix 8.1 – Habitats & National Vegetation Classification Survey; Figure 7: The GWDTE classifications map within the Ecological Survey Area (ESA), and
- Figure 7.1: Hydrological Context Map; and
- Figure 7.2: Peat Depth Map.

12.25 A drainage concept drawing and drainage details plan have also been provided to demonstrate the proposals.

#### *Study Area*

12.26 The proposed development is located on and around the eastern flanks of Cnoc Leathan (250m AOD), approximately 0.8km to the north-east of the rural settlement.

12.27 The study area and the wider setting is predominantly comprised of blanket bog and shrub heathland habitats, that are intercepted by rocky outcrops and various lochs. The site also has a history of human activities, with the operational Ceann an Ora Quarry located directly to the west of the site entrance, and the presence of the existing turbines at Monan Wind Farm. The A859 passes through the south-eastern section of the study area.

12.28 The terrain within the study area ranges from an elevation of 3-390m AOD. The topography features several raised peaks, including: the northern flanks of Sgaoth Iosal (531m AOD) and the Tarsabhal (376m AOD), which then descend to the south-west to meet the coastline at Loch Bun Abhainn Eadarra.

12.29 The study area is fully situated in the Lewis and Harris Coastal catchment of the Scotland River Basin District.

12.30 The raised terrain within the study area enables water to flow in several directions. The northern section of the study area is drained by the Abhainn Thorabraidh. This watercourse travels in a south-western direction and merges with several unnamed burns that drain the surrounding heathlands to form the Abhainn Eadarra watercourse. The Abhainn Eadarra then flows in a southern trajectory before passing underneath the B887 and dispelling into Loch Bun Abhainn Eadarra at the south-western corner of the study area. This is illustrated within Figure 7.1 – Hydrological Context Map.

12.31 The Abhainn Glaic a Choin duinn stems from the south-eastern flanks of Cnoc Lethan within the centre of the study area. This watercourse flows in a south-west direction and merges with several unnamed drains before also passing underneath the B887 and emptying into the Loch Bun Abhainn Eadarra.

- 12.32 There are several small drains that drain the southern flanks of the Tarsabhal within the eastern study area that pass underneath the A859 and dispel into Loch a' Mhorghain. The outfall from Loch a' Mhorghain flows through a dam system and feeds into Loch Sgeireagan Beag and then Loch na Sgeireagan Mor.
- 12.33 An outfall from Loch na Sgeireagan Mor then flows west towards Ceann an Ora beach, whilst merging with several unnamed watercourses that drain the surrounding heathland, before flowing underneath the B887 and dispelling into the Loch Bun Abhainn Eadarra. There are also some unnamed standing waterbodies within the study area that are associated with topographical low points.
- 12.34 The study area lies within the boundary of the Western Isles District Salmon Fisheries Board and the Outer Hebrides Fisheries Trust. Bun Abhainn Eadarra is known for a variety of fish, such as haddock, dab, and whiting fish. Beyond this, the catchment as a whole is known for its Salmon and Sea Trout fishing, primarily within the lochs and is a popular recreational fishing destination. SEPA was consulted and advised as follows:

#### *Surface & Groundwater Classification*

- 12.35 SEPA has classified the quality of all significant waterbodies in Scotland under the Water Framework Directive (WFD) (2022)<sup>4</sup>. The nearest classified surface water bodies are the Abhainn Eadarra (ID: 20776) and Loch a Siar (ID: 200169).
- 12.36 The Abhainn Eadarra river is approximately 5.9km in length and intersects the northern and western section of the study area. It was awarded an overall status of 'Good' for the year 2022, with no limiting parameters. The Loch a Siar coastal waterbody is c.46.4km<sup>2</sup> in area and characterises the coastal area along the western fringes of the study area. This waterbody also received a status of 'Good' in 2022 for its overall status, with no limiting parameters noted. SEPA have also classified the quality of all groundwater bodies in Scotland under the Water Framework Directive (WFD)<sup>5</sup>. The study area lies within the Lewis and Harris groundwater unit (ID: 150695). The map illustrates that the groundwater has an overall status, chemical status, and water quality status of 'Good' for the year 2022.

#### *Sensitive Receptors*

- 12.37 The proposed development is situated within the watershed Abhainn Eadarra and Loch a Siar that form part of the Lewis and Harris Coastal catchment. The catchment as a whole is known to support salmonid species and is a popular destination for recreational fishing, which could be impacted by reduced water quality from development activities. There are also several watercourses within the study area at risk of surface and river flooding, which has the potential to be elevated by the construction of the Proposed Development. Therefore, the Abhainn Eadarra, Loch a Siar, and their tributaries are considered as receptors with 'Medium' sensitivity.
- 12.38 There are no known Private Water Supplies (PWS) within 3km of the Proposed Development. A such, PWS will not be include as a sensitive receptor.
- 12.39 As noted above, the study area is located upon the Lewis and Harris groundwater unit, which was classified as having a 'Good' overall status in 2022. The various bedrocks underlying the site can be mostly described as a low productivity aquifer. There is limited potential for unmitigated contaminated groundwater to move outwith the vicinity of the proposed development. As such, the Lewis and Harris groundwater unit has been included as a receptor with a 'Medium' sensitivity.
- 12.40 The study area is predominantly underlain with Class 1 and Class 2 peatland, which are of national importance and conservation value. Due to the proximity, there is potential for Class 1 and Class 2 peat to be degraded by construction activities and therefore, Class 1 and Class 2 peat have been included as sensitive receptors with a 'High' sensitivity.

- 12.41 The North Harris SSSI and SAC and the North Harris Mountains SPA are located c.1km to the west of the proposed development at its closest point and are separated from it by the Abhainn Glaic a Choin duinn and raised terrain associated with the Cleit nan Uan (122m AOD). Given the distance and topographical separation, it is not anticipated that the proposed development will have an adverse effect on the integrity of the qualifying features within the designated sites. Therefore, the North Harris SSSI and SAC and the North Harris Mountains SPA have not been included as sensitive receptors.
- 12.42 The West Coast of the Outer Hebrides SPA is situated 1.1km to the south-west of the proposed development at its closest point. The designation is located downhill from site and several of the surrounding watercourses feed into the designated site downstream. As such, due to its hydrological connectivity, there is potential for unmitigated contaminated runoff to reach the West Coast of the Outer Hebrides SPA and the designated site has been included as a receptor with a 'High' sensitivity.
- 12.43 The NVC study identified several pockets of plant communities within the site that are thought to be groundwater dependent (GWDTE), (which will be covered in more detail at *Natural Heritage – Ecology, Ornithology and Biodiversity* later in this Report), with these vegetation communities graded as Class 2 and Class 3. There is likely to be some dependency on groundwater discharge (as detailed within Appendix 8.1 – Habitat & National Vegetation Classification Survey). These habitats are of conservation value and may be impacted by constructional works on the site. As such, the Class 2 GWDTEs have been considered as receptors with 'Medium' Sensitivity. Given the spread of Class 2 and Class 3 GWDTEs on Site, the Class 3 GWDTE are taken to also be covered by the Class 2 review, providing a conservative element to the assessment.

#### *Flood Risk*

- 12.44 SEPA's Flood Hazard and Risk Map illustrates the indicative flood extents of high likelihood (1 in 10-year probability), medium likelihood (1 in 200-year probability), or low likelihood (1 in 1000-year probability) of coastal, surface and river floods.
- 12.45 The flood map illustrates that the Abhainn Eadarra, Abhainn Thorabraidh, Loch a' Mhorghain, Loch Sgeireagan Beag, Loch na Sgeireagan Mor and its outfall stream all have a high likelihood of river flooding. However, it is worth noting that the flood risk is contained mostly within the extent of the watercourse and the lochs. SEPA's future flood maps also identified some river flooding extents associated with the Abhainn Thorabraidh and Abhainn Eadarra that are slightly wider than the current flood extents.
- 12.46 The dam associated with Loch a' Mhorghain and Loch na Learga situated in the central study area have been identified as areas with a high likelihood of surface water flooding. These flood areas are illustrated as being mostly confined to their extents and immediate surroundings. The map also highlights scattered patches at high likelihood of surface water flooding along the Abhainn Thorabraidh and Abhainn Eadarra water channel.
- 12.47 There are also several small areas across the study area that are highlighted to be at a high risk of surface water flooding, which appear to be either periodic pools or areas of standing water that are associated with topographical low points.
- 12.48 There are no 'Potentially Vulnerable Areas' noted within the Study Area, i.e. no potential impacts of flooding on potentially vulnerable areas of people, properties, community services and specific environmental sites.

#### *Assessment of Predicted Impacts and Effects during Construction*

- 12.49 Chapter 7 advises that replacing natural land cover with impermeable surfaces will reduce the rate of infiltration of rainwater into the underlying strata and increase runoff from the site. Given the context of the topography of the development site, there is considered to be the potential of high volumes of fast flowing surface water and resulting ground water.

- 12.50 Construction of access track and crane hardstandings will increase the impermeable footprint of the site and result in localised changes to surface water hydrology. In addition, the cambered tracks may interrupt natural flow paths and will shed water more quickly than the existing ground cover. An increase in runoff in the area can compound various other predicted impacts, such as sedimentation, erosion, chemical pollution, and flood risk.
- 12.51 However, the increase in runoff will be limited as the existing substation building and access tracks will be utilised, and the proposed development will only require the construction of a short section of new access track to provide access to Turbine 1. Additionally, the hardstanding areas will be constructed in place of the existing hardstanding areas and therefore, will only result in a small increase in the footprint of impermeable surfaces.

#### *Sedimentation & Erosion*

- 12.52 Construction activities on or near the edges of watercourses can impact the structural integrity of the banks of watercourses, either through direct damage to bankside material or indirect loosening of soil structure. This can affect localised watercourse morphology and water quality through erosion or even collapse of the banks.
- 12.53 Construction works such as excavations for infrastructure can involve the relocation of peat and mineral soils, and the importation of new substrates such as aggregate for civil enabling works. This introduces the possibility for sediments to be washed out of materials before they are sufficiently compacted. Poorly implemented drainage systems can create new runoff pathways that have the potential to erode rills into loosely aggregated substrates such as alluvial deposits.
- 12.54 Although the cable trenches proposed will require only shallow excavations, the action of cable-laying also has the potential to damage soils and introduce new drainage pathways which could generate silt laden runoff.
- 12.55 If erosion was to occur around the proposed infrastructure, an increased sediment load could lead to the constriction of the channels draining into the local river systems. This would negatively impact water quality and degrade habitat for any existing aquatic receptors.
- 12.56 The amount of suspended solids pollution will be greater during heavy rainfall events, although the dilution potential of the watercourses is also at its greatest during these periods. Construction of proposed infrastructure may interrupt natural flow paths and result in localised changes to surface water hydrology. This can result in the 'drying out' of hydrologically sensitive areas, or alternatively, result in an increase in flood risk that can see sensitive areas flooded and contaminated with mineral matter.
- 12.57 However, again, it is worth noting that the proposed development will utilise the existing tracks and substation, which will limit the potential for the above to occur.

#### *Chemical Pollution*

- 12.58 There are various sources of potential contamination during construction. Runoff from construction areas and excavations may become contaminated by construction material or spilt pollutants, which ultimately enter watercourses or groundwater. Concrete or cement brought onto site for the construction of foundations may be spilt. Construction-related oil, grease, fuel, or foul water may also be accidentally leaked. Only small quantities of potential chemical pollutants will be brought on site; however, even a small amount of these pollutants can have a serious negative impact on water quality and aquatic ecosystems.
- 12.59 The anticipated effects from pollutants can be mitigated by a standard pollution prevention plan, incorporating good work methods, which it is proposed will be secured by condition.



#### *Dewatering & Abstraction*

- 12.60 Given what is known about the ground conditions in the area and the expected extent of the excavation works, there is potential for groundwater to enter excavations. If so, dewatering will be required to temporarily lower the water table for larger excavations, such as those for the turbine foundations. This can result in the temporary 'drying out' of hydrologically sensitive areas.
- 12.61 SEPA guidance specifies that the potential zone of dewatering impact can be up to 250m from excavations that exceed one metre in depth, and 100m from excavations less than one metre in depth. Once construction activities within the excavation are complete and the excavations are reinstated the groundwater table is expected to recover in a matter of days.

#### *Foul Drainage*

- 12.62 The site compound facilities (sinks and toilets) will be self-contained. No foul drainage is proposed. As such, there is no potential impact from foul drainage at the construction stage.
- 12.63 The sensitive receptors and potential impacts above are noted. However, it is also noted that the site is largely existing and was for the most part fully developed under a previous consent, which during the construction period and recent operational period, did not result in any negative impacts on the water environment. The proposed mitigation measures are however laid out below.

#### *Proposed mitigations*

- 12.64 The proposed approach to avoid any such issues from arising is for mitigation through design and the proposed layout has been designed to avoid sensitive areas wherever possible. This includes adhering to appropriate separation distances from watercourses as much as possible and avoiding the sensitive habitats on site.
- 12.65 SEPA's standard scoping advice for wind farm developments states that a buffer zone of at least 50m should be established between infrastructure and watercourses to minimize the risk of sediment-loaded runoff entering the aquatic environment. The final layout has followed SEPA guidance in this regard and, so far as possible, the proposed infrastructure has been sited at least 50m from a watercourse.
- 12.66 There is a section of access track that approaches T3 that is briefly sited <50m from Abhainn Glaic a Choin duinn however, this is utilising an existing track and should not require any upgrading. The hardstanding area for T1 also traverses the buffer of a standing pool however, this area is angled to follow the contours on the site and it is considered that the infrastructure is sited at a location that will minimise the cut and fill requirements based on the topography of the site which, in turn, will limit the construction-related pollutants and sedimentation-laden runoff to enter the waterbodies.
- 12.67 Peat surveys were carried out across the site to determine the depth and structure of the acrotelmic and catotelmic peat on site. Peat probes were collected across a 10m grid within the development footprint. This survey revealed that the proposed hardstanding of T3 was initially sited upon some areas of deeper peat (i.e. peat depth of 3m+). Following this survey, the hardstanding was reoriented to the south-west in order to minimise any unnecessary disturbance to the peat. This avoidance of deeper peat is in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy from recognised best practices and measures. An outline Peat Management Plan (PMP) is also submitted alongside the EIA Report to ensure that the potential impacts on peatland have been properly assessed and that any excavated peat is properly handled

#### *Clean water cut-off ditches*

- 12.68 Clean water cut-off ditches are proposed for the access track and hardstandings at all turbines. This system will allow clean discharge from ground uphill of the track to pass into the ground downstream, to maintain existing conditions and prevent drying out. Ditches will be located on the 'high-side' of the

relevant infrastructure and will be installed immediately ahead of construction. Stone check dams will be employed to slow water flow along the ditches. Surface runoff will be collected in the ditches and passed through regularly spaced dedicated piped culverts under the access track to reduce the volumes of flows in the ditch and provide a more even redistribution on the downhill side.

- 12.69 Discharge points will be designed to encourage sheet flow, rather than as a single point of discharge, in order to slow and spread the flow and minimise potential scour. Clean discharge will thus infiltrate into the existing vegetation in close proximity to its origin. The presence of cut-off ditches will also restrict capacity build-up of infiltration trenches adjacent to the relevant infrastructure.

#### *Access Track Sizing, Camber, and Cross-drains*

- 12.70 All tracks will be constructed with a camber sufficient to minimise ponding and prevent the track becoming a conduit for runoff. The track will be constructed using a relatively large aggregate size, enabling runoff to percolate through the track. A large aggregate size also minimises the amount of fine sediment in the construction material. Low verges will be constructed, allowing surface water to drain naturally and diffusely. Any runoff will be collected in adjacent infiltration trenches.

#### *Infiltration trenches*

- 12.71 V-Ditches with check dams will also be installed alongside the hardstanding and access tracks to collect any runoff. The check dams will be constructed from clean, granular materials or straw bales. This will help sediments and pollutants will be filtered from the water and will also slow water flow along the ditches.
- 12.72 Where infrastructure lies in close proximity to sensitive hydrological features such as watercourses, runoff will be diverted into a settlement pond to remove any potential contaminants prior to discharge into the environment.
- 12.73 Prior to excavations, an end-use will be identified for the excavated material and an appropriate storage solution determined accordingly. Stored materials will be kept away from surface water bodies to minimise the possibility for sediments entering the aquatic environment.
- 12.74 Soils will be stripped to avoid cross contamination between distinct horizons. Stripped materials will be 'side-cast' or stockpiled for use in the same area as they are excavated from, or they will be stored in appropriately designed and clearly defined separate stockpiles for re-use elsewhere.
- 12.75 Where peat excavations are unavoidable, the resulting volume of excavated peat is expected to be small and will be re-used onsite for redressing track, crane pad, and hardstanding verges. Peat bunds may be used to help stop drainage from the surrounding peatland. Any surplus peat following redressing can be used to reinstate existing drainage ditches that would become redundant following construction. This would encourage peat regeneration in areas that are currently degraded and reduce surface runoff rates onsite.
- 12.76 Where appropriate, temporary silt fences will be installed to filter runoff that is potentially carrying silt from excavations or stockpiles. This will be effective in protecting surface water quality in adjacent watercourses and eliminate the possibility for silt laden runoff to enter them.

#### *Reinstatement*

- 12.77 Early reinstatement of excavated materials is required to minimise visual impact, to reduce time required for temporary storage/stockpiling of soils, and to encourage vegetation and habitat restoration as early as possible. As far as is reasonably practical and achievable, excavated material horizons will be replaced in sequence and depths similar to those recorded prior to excavation, or similar to the surrounding undisturbed ground at the point of reinstatement.

- 12.78 Any detailed reinstatement and restoration proposals will consider and mitigate all residual risks to environmental receptors.

#### *Dewatering*

- 12.79 Dewatering shall be avoided where possible to minimise impacts on sensitive habitat. However, formation of the turbine foundations would likely involve dewatering to temporarily lower the water table and enable work in the excavated areas. Gravity foundations are proposed, which will limit depths of excavations and associated impacts. Details of the pre-construction ground investigation will include an assessment of the ground permeability and water potential; the results will be used to inform any dewatering required on site. Where dewatering is required, it shall comply with the Abstraction Regime of CAR General Binding Rule (GBR) 2 and GBR 15.

- 12.80 Details of how dewatering will be managed shall be provided within a Construction Method Statement (CMS) prior to construction of the proposed project. Mitigating measures will include: using an irrigation sprinkler head to maintain moisture in the upper soil horizons of nearby GWDTE; and, keeping the foundation construction duration as short as possible. This will maintain a continuous water supply to sensitive habitats and minimise the overall impact of dewatering.

#### *Enhanced sedimentation control*

- 12.81 To avoid potential impacts on sensitive habitats, any potential runoff will be appropriately treated prior to discharge into the natural environment. This will keep clean and contaminated runoff separate to avoid further contamination and maintain the SuDs capacity, which will mitigate the possibility of contaminants entering watercourses and impacting the aquatic environments.

- 12.82 These mechanisms of clean water cut-off ditches, sediment capture, and infiltration trenches, are intended to reduce the speed of flow, filter runoff, and allow suspended silts and particulates to settle out naturally thus minimising the potential impacts upon downstream aquatic environments, nearby PWS, or GWDTEs.

- 12.83 If the standard system is not proving to be effective, then a 'Siltbuster' system of control via settlement tanks will be employed. The 'Siltbuster' system is regularly used on construction sites situated close to waterways or in extreme situations where the combination of soil stripping and wet weather has given rise to normal silt control methods being overrun.

#### *General Site Pollution Control*

- 12.84 The proposed mitigation for the construction of the access roads will continue to function through the life of the project. Routine maintenance for the roads will be carried out in summer months when the tracks are dry. Operational best practice procedures will continue to be adopted, with the risk of water pollution from such activities considered to be negligible. With regard to vehicles, fleet vehicles entering the site will be regularly checked and maintained to prevent leakage of contaminants. Concrete will be premixed offsite and delivery wagons will only be washed out in areas where suitable control measures are in place. The concrete used will be of a high grade that is not prone to leaching alkalis. The number of onsite vehicles will be highest during construction. The ongoing risk of pollution on the site after construction is considered to be very low. Best practice procedures in the handling, use and storage of fuel, oils, and chemicals will be adhered to at all times. Prior to construction, an Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and a Pollution Prevention Plan (PPP) will be put in place, and this will be sought by way of condition and will require to adhere to the standards set out by SEPA and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. These documents will outline mitigation measures to reduce or nullify potential impacts on the ground and surface water environment.

#### *Conclusion*

- 12.85 It is anticipated that careful design of the site layout, and the implementation of the mitigation methods proposed, will ensure that any potential risks identified are avoided and the associated risk is reduced to acceptable levels.

12.86 Assessment of Chapter 7 of the EIAR, in conjunction with the associated drainage proposals presented for the site, along with the already considered and proposed mitigations demonstrate that the development has proposed acceptable systems for water management and would not be likely to create unacceptable impacts on the water environment.

#### Soils and Peat

12.87 The policy context of the OHLDP Policy EI5 (Soils) states that the disturbance of some soils, particularly peat, may lead to the release of stored carbon, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. The most significant pressures on soil are climate change and the loss of soil organic matter through disturbance. While the conservation of peat is important for nature conservation, archaeological interests and for the role it plays as a carbon sink, by necessity, much construction in the Outer Hebrides occurs on peat. Developers will be asked to refer to SEPA guidance on developments on peat in drawing up plans.

12.88 The policy intent of policy 5 of NPF 4 is to protect carbon-rich soils, restore peatlands and minimise disturbance to soils from development.

12.89 Policy EI5 goes on to advise that development should be designed to minimise adverse impacts on soils caused by ground disturbance, compaction or excavation and that developers should assess the likely effects associated with any development work on soils, particularly machair soil, peat, or other carbon-rich soils and associated vegetation, and aim to mitigate any adverse impacts arising. Where disturbance of peat or other carbon-rich soil is likely to give rise to significant emissions of carbon dioxide, developers may be required to justify the location of the proposed development and to show how emissions will be minimised.

12.90 For major developments, minerals and some large-scale renewable energy proposals (see Supplementary Guidance for Wind Energy Development), development will only be permitted where it has been demonstrated that unnecessary disturbance of carbon rich soils such as peat and any associated vegetation is avoided. A peat survey must be submitted which demonstrates that areas of deepest peat have been avoided and the impacts on carbon-rich soils and associated habitats minimised. Where required, a peat management plan must also be submitted along with any planning application which demonstrates best practice in the movement, storage, management and reinstatement of soils.

12.91 In this particular instance, the site is largely existing, and the proposal is that the existing substation building, existing access tracks and turning/passing areas on the site would be utilised. Upgraded access tracks and a short section of new access track will be required to access Turbine 1, with a potential upgrade required to the access track spur leading to Turbine 2. New turbine foundation and drainage are also required, along with temporary construction compound, including parking, and welfare facilities. It is proposed that the extent of additional areas such as crane hardstandings and site compound areas will be kept to a minimum.

12.92 The total volume of peat excavation is estimated to be on the order of 1,313m<sup>3</sup>.

12.93 EIAR, Appendix 7.1: Outline Peat Management Plan (PMP) provides supporting information to the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the proposed development and is an outline PMP that will be updated to incorporate any further site investigations and will be finalised after conditions discharge, should the project gain consent.

12.94 The following sections of the PMP provide:

- A description of the peat conditions on site;
- Detail of the construction activities that will generate peat, and of the estimated volumes that will be generated, as well as the estimated reuse volumes;

- Detail of the physical nature of the peat and confirmation of its suitability for the reuses proposed;
- Methods and procedures for handling excavated soils; and
- Details of temporary storage.

- 12.95 This outline PMP should be read in conjunction with the information provided as part of the EIAR, including Chapter 7 – Hydrology.
- 12.96 A peat survey was undertaken in January 2024. Following this survey, it was evident that Turbine 3 was sited upon an area of deeper peat (peat depth of >2m). This turbine was then moved further south and the hardstanding reorientated to avoid the identified area of deep peat, while continuing to utilise the existing access tracks and hardstandings currently found on site. In an effort to minimise any unnecessary disturbance to the deeper peat and minimise the cut and fill requirement within the peatland, the proposed access track to Turbine 1 was designed to follow the contours within the site, following a predominantly south-western trajectory. The existing access tracks will be utilised to provide access to Turbines 2 and 3 however, the tracks may require some widening to accommodate certain vehicles during the construction phase. Turbine 1 will require a new hardstanding area, which was designed to be located on a rocky outcrop and sited away from an identified area of deeper peat to the east.
- 12.97 The majority of the recorded peat depths (71.6%) across the site were noted to be <0.5m in depth. The areas of deepest peat ( $\geq 2$ m deep) are prominently found directly north-east of the foundations for Turbine 3, south-west of Turbine 2, and within a band oriented north-to-south immediately to the east of Turbine 1.
- 12.98 The PMP goes on to give the following information in relation to general design principle to minimise peat excavations:
- 12.99 *The proposed wind farm has been designed within the confines of several environmental and geological constraints. From the outset, the design of the proposed wind farm has sought to avoid areas of deep peat which are found to be present on Site and prevent the disturbance of peat habitat altogether and as far as possible, with consideration to topography and various technical constraints. The proposed layout provides an optimal solution that finds the correct balance of the various constraints on Site, given the information available at this planning stage.*
- 12.100 *A micro-siting allowance of 50m is being sought as part of the application. Micro-siting would be utilised to avoid areas of deep peat whilst maintaining the appropriate buffer distances of sensitive ecological features within the Site such as watercourses and instances of exposed peatland.*
- 12.101 *During the construction of the proposed wind farm, all reasonable measures will be taken to avoid or minimise excavations, and to minimise disturbance to peat and peatland habitats.*
- 12.102 In the PMP, preference is given to construction methods which do not involve peat excavation and highlight that the most efficient method of reducing the required volume of peat excavation is through siting infrastructure outwith areas of deeper peat during the design process and when unavoidable, alternative constructional methods such as floating tracks can be utilised.
- 12.103 Floating tracks are a construction method which removes the need to excavate peat and limits disruption to hydrological pathways and has been employed successfully at many wind turbine developments. Where new tracks are proposed across areas of peat with a depth >1m, then floating construction techniques may be proposed to avoid unnecessary disturbance to peat. Not all peatland is suitable for floating tracks and a lot is dependent on the transverse and longitudinal steepness of the land around these infrastructures. Generally, 5% gradient is the maximum for the safe floating of structures.

- 12.104 In general, floating construction techniques will incorporate a geogrid laid on top of the turf surface, which will then be covered in approximately 700 – 1000mm of crushed stones. This will then be topped with an upper layer of durable granular running surface. Other structures might also be floated. For example, there may be opportunity to float turbine component laydown areas, although this is dependent on other factors including the turbine make and model eventually employed. The same floating construction techniques would be employed. Where floating construction techniques are unable to be employed, peat would require to be excavated.
- 12.105 As required, the PMP also goes on to describe the proposals for storage, reuse and reinstatement of excavated peat and advises that sensitive areas, including Groundwater Dependent Terrestrial Ecosystems (GWDTEs), shall be avoided for dedicated temporary storage areas, thus minimising any potential ecological impacts, avoid risks from material instability, and prevent sediment-laden runoff directly discharging into watercourses on Site. The storage location(s) proposed by the contractor will be agreed with the appointed Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) and signed-off prior to commencement of main phase of works.
- 12.106 The PMP concludes by setting out the estimated volume of peat to be excavated and it is considered that any peat disturbed during the construction of the wind farm can be suitably reused within the development site. It is considered that no waste license will be required for the re-powering of Monan Wind Farm. The volumes calculated and presented in the PMP are identified as conservative and provide an extreme scenario in terms of extraction. The developer and their appointed contractor will review the site before any construction work commences to ascertain any further savings which can be achieved to avoid the disturbance of peat within the development site, and which sections of access tracks will be floated.
- 12.107 The submission advises that this PMP should be treated as a live document and should be read in conjunction with Annex A: Site Work and further information will be collated with input from statutory consultees and the PMP will be updated and finalised as part of the planning condition discharge. The updated PMP will also include the results of further site investigations and detailed site design, should the project gain consent.
- 12.108 In their consultation response which can be seen at Appendix 3 to this Report, SEPA have advised that they are content that the development is of a scale where their standing advice can be referred to and that they have no site-specific advice to provide in this case.
- 12.109 The outline PMP (read in conjunction with Chapter 7 – Hydrology), provides sufficient information to satisfy the requirements of the relevant policies and demonstrates the development proposes to limit the excavation of peat as far as reasonably practicable, the predicted volumes of peat that will be excavated on the site, the characteristics of the peat that will be excavated, and outlines suitable methods for storage, reusing and managing excavated peat in line with good practice methods. The developer has advised that they intend to submit a revised PMP following any further site investigations and it is therefore proposed to append a condition to any consent requesting that the development be carried out in accordance with the PMP, or any revised and acceptable version subsequently submitted.
- 12.110 SEPA's standing guidance on renewables, windfarms and soils and GWTDE's will also be appended to any consent by way of an informative.
- 12.111 In light of the above, the proposals are considered to comply with Policy EI5 of the OHLDP policy 5 of the NPF4.

#### Safeguarding

- 12.112 The Outer Hebrides has both civil and military infrastructure which by their nature are protected by statutory safeguarding zones. The consultation process with the operator of notified sites is set out

within Circular 2/2003. Certain safeguarding zones within the islands are identified on Development Plan Maps. The notified safeguarding zones are provided by the operator. A building or structure, because of its size, shape, location or construction materials, can reflect or diffract radio and radar signals.

- 12.113 For all development proposals the Comhairle will take account of the advice of the relevant agencies with regard to safeguarding and consultations zones notified by the Health and Safety Executive, Civil Aviation Authority, Highlands & Islands Airports, NATS, Ministry of Defence, Meteorological Technical Sites, Marine Consultation Areas, relevant Harbour Authorities and Marine Protected Areas.
- 12.114 In this regard, the Ministry of Defence (MOD), National Air Traffic Services (NATS) and Highlands and Islands Airport Limited (HIAL) were all consulted and the full responses can be seen at Appendix 3 to this Report.
- 12.115 In short, HIAL responded to confirm that at the given position and height, this development would not infringe the safeguarding criteria and operation of Stornoway Airport and therefore has no objections to the proposal. They did however advise that any variation of the parameters (which include the location, dimensions, form, and finishing materials) then as a statutory consultee HIAL requires that it be further consulted on any such changes prior to any planning permission, or any consent being granted. NATS also had no objection and again advised that if there are any changes to the proposal, they were required to be reconsulted.
- 12.116 The MOD responded and advised that the development falls within Low Flying Area 14 (LFA 14), an area within which fixed wing aircraft may operate as low as 250 feet or 76.2 metres above ground level to conduct low level flight training and the addition of turbines in this location has the potential to introduce a physical obstruction to low flying aircraft operating in the area.
- 12.117 To address this impact, and given the location and scale of the development, the MOD require that conditions are added to any consent issued requiring that the development is fitted with aviation safety lighting and that sufficient data is submitted to ensure that structures can be accurately charted to allow deconfliction. As a minimum the MOD have requested the wind turbines are lit with Infra-red (IR) beacons and have suggested conditions and wordings, which are proposed to be appended to any consent and these can be viewed at Appendix 1 to this Report.
- 12.118 Section 2.6.2 of Chapter 2 (Proposed Development and Design Evolution) makes the commitment that turbines will be fitted with aviation obstacle lighting to meet the requirements of the Ministry of Defence (MOD). This lighting will take the form of Infra-red lighting to MOD specification as required.
- 12.119 Subject to the imposition of two conditions referred to above, the development is considered to comply with Policy EI11: Safeguarding.

#### Countryside and Coastal Access

- 12.120 Development proposals must be located to ensure the Hebridean Way, the Core Path network and established and functional access points to water are kept free of obstruction unless it can be demonstrated that it can either:
- a) retain the existing path or water access point while maintaining or enhancing its amenity value; or
  - b) ensure alternative access provision that is no less attractive and is safe and convenient for public use.
- 12.121 The site is an existing operational windfarm, that has operated without any impacts on or obstruction to the Hebridean Way or the Core Path Network.

12.122 The Hebridean Way at this location combines with the A859 road, so is sufficiently distant from the site. The nearest core paths are also distant from this site (Urgha to Maraig and Miabhaig to Bhiogadail), although the site may be visible from certain sections of these tracks.

12.123 The surrounding land is used for recreation and walking and other than health and safety measures associated with the construction phase of the development, the proposal will not impact on countryside access.

#### Energy and Heat Resources

12.124 The policy context states that the Comhairle wishes to capitalise on the significant renewable energy generation potential in and around the Outer Hebrides, e.g. wind and wave resources.

12.125 The policy states that the Comhairle will support proposals that contribute to meeting the targets and objectives of the National Planning Framework 3 (superseded), the Climate Change Act, and the National Renewables Infrastructure Plan in relation to electricity grid reinforcement, infrastructure and renewable energy generation.

12.126 Development proposals for all scales of onshore wind energy development will be assessed against the Supplementary Guidance for Wind Energy Development. The Comhairle supports the principle of wind farm development in Areas with Potential for Wind Farms (SG Map 1) subject to a satisfactory assessment against other policies in this plan and the Supplementary Guidance.

12.127 The Comhairle will also consider wind farm development in Areas of Constraint, with potential in certain circumstances (Map 1) subject to a satisfactory assessment against other policies in this plan and the Supplementary Guidance.

12.128 The Comhairle will not support wind farm developments in Areas Unacceptable for Wind Farms (Map 1).

12.129 Proposals for all other renewable energy projects and oil and gas operations (including land-based infrastructure associated with offshore projects) will be required to demonstrate all the following:

- a) appropriate location, siting and design including the technical rationale for the choice of site;*
- b) no significant adverse impact (including cumulative) on: landscape, townscape and visual aspects; natural, built and cultural heritage resources; the water environment; peatlands; aviation, defence and telecommunications transmitting and receiving systems, e.g., broadband; public health and safety, and amenity (including noise); neighbouring land uses, transport management and core paths;*
- c) appropriate decommissioning and site reinstatement arrangements;*
- d) phasing arrangements, where appropriate;*
- e) the contribution towards meeting national energy supply targets and local economic impact.*

12.130 The type, scale and size of the proposed development will have a significant effect on the way the Comhairle will consider an application and the level of accompanying information that will be required. Conditions and, where necessary, a planning agreement may be used to control the detail of the development. Non-permanent elements of a development will be granted permission consistent with their lifespan and/or projected period of use.

12.131 It is worth noting in relation to the section of the policy which states that the Comhairle will not support wind farm developments in Areas Unacceptable for Wind Farms, that the proposed development is actually located in one of these areas, however, as the proposal related to the repowering of existing turbines, the precedent for wind energy development on the site is already established, therefore invalidating this element of Policy E18.



12.132 The following requirements of this policy (summarised below) have been assessed under other policy headings and have been considered to be acceptable:

- *siting and design, technical rationale for the choice of site;*
- *significant adverse impact (including cumulative) on: landscape, townscape and visual, aspects; natural, built and cultural heritage resources; the water environment; peatlands; aviation, defence and telecommunications transmitting and receiving systems and amenity (including noise); neighbouring land uses;*
- *transport management and core paths.*

12.133 In terms of appropriate decommissioning and site reinstatement arrangements, this will be dealt with by way of conditions being appended to any consent and by way of a legally binding restoration bond through a Section 75 agreement.

12.134 The contribution towards meeting national energy supply targets are important factors of the policy.

*Contribution towards meeting national energy supply targets*

12.135 The Scottish Government published an updated version of the Onshore Wind Policy Statement (OWPS) in December 2022. The document highlights that Scotland has approximately 8.4GW of installed capacity of onshore wind. The new target for deployment by the year 2030 is for 12GW of additional onshore wind deployment. The developer has advised that considering this, the target for the rapid deployment of additional onshore wind developments provides further material weight in favour of planning applications for onshore wind development.

12.136 The OWPS includes in section 5.3 that there will be opportunities for the repowering of existing wind farms. This is considered to be one of those opportunities, as the current site generates 1.5MW and the proposed site also anticipates generating capacity of up to 1.5MW, retaining capacity of onshore wind towards the 2030 target.

12.137 The statement is progressing towards publishing a 'sector deal' for onshore wind amongst other actions being taken by the Scottish Government to encourage deployment. In order to meet these ambitious targets, new proposals will need to shift towards utilising the larger turbine typologies that are emerging with the evolution of onshore wind technology.

12.138 The proposal, being an established windfarm, where the majority of the physical works have previously been carried out during the implementation of the original consent, including the main access from the A859, internal access roads, hardstandings, substation and the turbines and subject to assessment of other related policy headings is considered to make a contribution towards meeting national energy supply targets and is assessed as being acceptable in relation to Policy EI 8: Energy and Heat Resources.

Tackling the climate and nature crises, Climate mitigation and adaptation

12.139 NPF4 Policy 1 requires that when considering all development proposals, significant weight will be given to the global climate and nature crises, and that developments should be designed to reduce, minimise or avoid greenhouse gas emissions.

12.140 The policy intent of NPF4 Policy 2 is to encourage, promote and facilitate development that minimises emissions and adapts to the current and future impacts of climate change.

12.141 Chapter 5 of the EIAR (Carbon Balance) considers the potential impact of the proposed development on climate change through a carbon balance assessment, which should be read combined with Appendix 5.1 – Carbon Calculator Input and Results.

12.142 Predicted overall carbon savings/losses, shows that over its 35-year lifetime the project is expected to result in a CO<sub>2</sub> saving of ~200,500 tonnes. It is anticipated that the carbon expended in the repowering

of the windfarm will be offset in approximately two years (equivalent to 6% of its 35-year operational lifespan). The repowered windfarm is expected to have a beneficial effect on climate change in terms of offsetting greenhouse gas emissions.

- 12.143 Chapter 5 advises that renewable electricity generated by wind turbines is already considered to be the cheapest form of new electricity generation and as such, has a vital role to play in achieving the ambitious targets set by both the Scottish and UK Governments.
- 12.144 The manufacturing, construction, and installation of the wind turbines on-site have an associated carbon cost, and carbon losses are also generated by the requirement for extra capacity to back up wind power generation. The carbon balance over the lifetime of the wind farm is illustrated in detail in this chapter.
- 12.145 The calculations take into account several items, which include the manufacturing, construction, and installation of the wind turbines, the requirement for backup power generation, reduced carbon fixing potential as a result of the disturbance of peat and the removal of forestry.
- 12.146 As noted above, wind generated electricity is inherently variable; therefore, as the NatureScot Technical Guidance Review states, extra capacity is required for backup power generation to meet consumer demand. Backup power generation is assumed to be by fossil-fuel mix of electricity generation. The additional CO<sub>2</sub> output is calculated using the NatureScot Carbon Calculator.
- 12.147 At the proposed development, the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions associated with the requirement for extra backup generation over the years of operation are calculated as a loss of 975 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>.
- 12.148 Peatlands contain large reservoirs of carbon, containing about one-third of the global amount of carbon in all soils. Undisturbed, peatlands sequester carbon from the atmosphere through photosynthesising vegetation. This carbon is then stored in the soil. This accumulates primarily in waterlogged conditions, where there is a low potential for decomposition. This element of the calculation accounts for the loss of carbon fixing potential of the peat that is removed during construction of access tracks, hardstandings, turbine foundations and other site infrastructure. It also factors in the impact of areas of peat that might be drained as a result of the wind turbines.

#### *Peat*

- 12.149 In this particular instance and to establish peat depth at the site, a peat probing survey was undertaken, with a total of 946 locations probed across the site to ascertain the depth of peat, concentrating on potential access track routes and turbine locations. As a result, turbines and associated infrastructure have been sited to avoid areas of deep peat as far as possible, based on results from peat probing, thereby reducing impacts as much as possible.

#### *Forestry*

- 12.150 No felling is required to accommodate the proposed development. As such, there will be no losses for the removal of forestry.

#### *Carbon Losses Summary*

- 12.151 The carbon losses due to turbine life occur from multiple phases. The carbon losses from the wind turbine itself come from the raw materials used to construct the turbine during the manufacturing phase. Carbon losses from construction and decommissioning arise from the transportation and machinery used.

#### *Mitigation*

- 12.152 The design approach taken for the layout of the proposed development ensured that the turbines and associated infrastructure were placed to avoid the deeper areas of peat and avoid watercourses, as

well as utilising existing infrastructure where possible. Chapter 7: Hydrology outlines the measures to be taken to mitigate water pollution and flood risk during construction activities.

- 12.153 To mitigate potential effects during the construction phase, a comprehensive Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) framework will be prepared and implemented ahead of the commencement of construction. This framework will outline a range of optimal practices, encompassing environmental best practices such as the efficient processing and reuse of all reclaimed materials on-site whenever feasible. By incorporating training and contractual obligations, the project aims to uphold the highest standards of environmental protection throughout the construction phase.
- 12.154 This approach underscores the proposed development's commitment to minimising its environmental impact and ensuring responsible construction practices.

#### *Conclusion*

- 12.155 The majority of the infrastructure (roads, hardstandings and cabling is already on site and as such will have significantly less impact on the environment than the implementation of an entire new site.
- 12.156 Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises seeks to prioritise the climate and nature crises in all decisions; it requires to be applied together with other policies in NPF4.
- 12.157 Guidance from the Scottish Government advises that it is for the decision maker to determine whether the significant weight to be applied tips the balance in favour for or against a proposal on the basis of its positive or negative contribution to climate and nature crises.
- 12.158 The current application which proposes green energy measures, on an existing wind farm site would have a positive benefit on the climate crisis and, when considered alongside the other relevant national and local planning policies, the development is directly supported by NPF4 Policy 1.
- 12.159 As noted above, it is anticipated that over its 35-year lifetime the project is expected to result in a CO<sub>2</sub> saving of ~200,500 tonnes and it is anticipated that the carbon expended in creating the development will be offset in approximately two years (equivalent to 6% of its 35-year operational lifespan). The proposed development is therefore expected to have a beneficial effect on climate change in terms of offsetting greenhouse gas emissions and no further mitigating actions are deemed necessary at present.
- 12.160 Climate, Mitigation and Adaption seeks to ensure that new development proposals will be sited to minimise lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions as far as possible, and that proposals will be sited and designed to adapt to current and future risks from climate change.
- 12.161 Guidance from the Scottish Government confirms that at present there is no single accepted methodology for calculating and/or minimising emissions. The emphasis is on minimising emissions as far as possible, rather than eliminating emissions. In the case of the current application, it is clear that the green energy measures proposed would have a positive benefit on the climate crisis and, when considered alongside the other relevant national and local planning policies, the development is directly supported by NPF4 Policy 2.
- 12.162 The assessment demonstrates that the development would make a modest but positive contribution to net zero targets and would support the decarbonisation targets set locally, while contributing to the wider national target of achieving net zero by 2045.

#### Community Wealth Building and Economic Development

- 12.163 NPF4 - Policy 25 – Community Wealth Building, supports development proposals that contribute to local or regional community wealth building strategies and are consistent with local economic priorities. Amongst other matters, it indicates that this could include increasing spending within communities,

ensuring the use of local supply chains and services, local job creation, supporting community led proposals, including creation of new local firms and enabling community led ownership of buildings and assets. It goes on to say development proposals linked to community ownership and management of land will be supported.

- 12.164 The current application is for repowering an existing site and while repowering schemes will be treated as new planning applications, unlike the establishment of an entirely new wind farm site, the level of works and economic benefit associated with their establishment is greatly diminished and in this case the works are not of a significant scale.
- 12.165 In terms of the economic impacts of the current proposal, works are required to facilitate the decommissioning of the existing turbines. In addition to the removal of the existing turbines, upgraded access tracks and a short section of new access track will be required to access Turbine 1, with a potential upgrade required to the access track spur leading to Turbine 2. New turbine foundations and drainage are also required, along with temporary construction compound, including parking, and welfare facilities.
- 12.166 It is anticipated that due to the level of upgrading associated with the repowering, as identified above, that the works will result in opportunities for local civils contractors and crane hire companies and contribute towards employment and continued employment. In addition to this, the submission advises that borrow pits are not proposed on the site and the likely source of aggregate materials will be from the operational quarry approximately 200 metres to the south of the site.
- 12.167 A financial contribution (to be secured by a Section 75 Agreement) is proposed for off-site Biodiversity enhancement measures, in conjunction with North Harris Trust. As a consequence of this, the financial input contributed will support employment and job retention.
- 12.168 Some of the works are likely to need input from specialist contractors, who may require to be brought on island during aspects of the development, which will in turn prove of economic benefit to local hospitality providers, hotels, guesthouses, restaurants and shops.

Infrastructure First and Energy – (Telecommunications, Infrastructure and Health and Safety)

- 12.169 Chapter 10 of the EIAR (Telecommunications and Infrastructure) outlines the potential impacts of the proposed development in relation to telecommunications and infrastructure and highlights whether mitigation measures are required to minimise potential disruption.

*Electricity infrastructure*

- 12.170 The high voltage 132kV (132,000 volt) Harris to Stornoway overhead line (OHL) runs past the site to the south-east, which is critical national infrastructure.
- 12.171 The proposed nearest wind turbine would be sited approximately 370m away from the existing overhead line and Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) Transmission have advised that this would be sufficient separation from the existing overhead 132kV overhead line to mitigate any adverse operational impacts on critical national infrastructure, allowing SSEN to maintain a safe and reliable supply of electricity to all those that require across the Outer Hebrides.
- 12.172 SSEN obtained Section 37 (under the Electricity Act 1989) consent (ref: ECU00004490) for a replacement 132kV overhead line (OHL) from Scottish Ministers in February 2024 and work on implementing this consent has now commenced. Given that the replacement line would most likely be located further away from the proposed wind turbines than the existing OHL, there would be sufficient separation between the two developments to mitigate any adverse effects on future infrastructure, ensuring SSEN maintain a safe and reliable supply of electricity to local communities.

12.173 In relation to delivery of wind turbines to the site, SSEN Transmission have advised that should the Comhairle be minded to approve this application, transportation of the wind turbines to site would appear likely to take place underneath the overhead transmission line and to ensure that no conflict with the line takes place, they have recommended that the developer contact their Asset Management team at least 30 days prior to delivery to ensure that appropriate safety measures will be put in place to manage this risk. It is proposed to convey this information by appending an informative to any consent.

#### *Telecommunications*

12.174 Chapter 10 of the EIAR (Telecommunications and Infrastructure) considers the potential effects from the proposed development on telecommunications infrastructure.

12.175 There are telecommunications masts located to the south of Turbine 1.

12.176 Wind turbines have the potential to affect television reception, fixed telecommunication links and utilities during operation. These impacts include but are not limited to:

- Physical obstructions;
- Adverse effects on overall performance of Communications, Navigation and Surveillance (CNS) equipment;
- Interference with electromagnetic signals and potentially affecting television reception and fixed telecommunication links.

12.177 Policy 11 of NPF4 states that project design and mitigation will demonstrate how impacts are addressed on telecommunications and broadcasting installations, particularly ensuring that transmission links are not compromised.

12.178 The developer has advised that consultation was undertaken with appropriate stakeholders to identify any potential impacts on telecommunication and utilities/services infrastructure during or post-construction and discuss potential mitigation options where necessary. The Ofcom Spectrum Portal was used to assess whether any existing fixed microwave/radio links would be impacted by the wind turbines during operation. From the service, the Licensee Company of any nearby fixed links is identified and contacted by the applicant following which the extent of the potential impact is identified and mitigation agreed upon. Ofcom has primary responsibility for regulating broadcasting, telecommunications, and postal industries in the UK. The Ofcom Spectrum Information Portal identified that there are no fixed links within 2.5km of the closest relative turbine to be constructed as part of the repowering of the windfarm. Following consultation, it has been confirmed that the proposed development will affect no Scottish Power or Scotia Gas Networks fixed microwave/radio infrastructure.

12.179 The developer has also advised that the telecommunications mast 426m southeast of turbine 1 was not present on the Ofcom Spectrum Information Portal, despite Telefonica's network being fully present on the portal, nor were any fixed links going to or from it, hence they have assumed that the mast is not currently operational. Telefonica were contacted on 22 December 2023 and 05 March 2024 to request their consultation; however, no response has been received. Due to the lack of available information regarding the operation of the mast or data regarding potential links to or from it the assessment of impact cannot be carried on further.

12.180 However, the developer has made a commitment in Chapter 10.5 that they propose to work closely with telecommunications operators to ensure that there are no unacceptable impacts on potentially unidentified links.

12.181 In any event, the Planning Service undertook consultation with Joint Radio Company (JRC) and Arqiva Ltd and neither objected to the development, however JRC advised that should any details of the development change, it will be necessary to re-evaluate the proposal.

#### *Television*

12.182 A 2009 Ofcom report states that: 'Technologies such as analogue television are quite seriously affected by signal reflections, which can give rise to an effect known as 'ghosting'. Ghosting (or delayed image interference) is where a pale shadow or shadows appear to the right of the main picture on viewers' television screens; this, and other signal interference, can occur to houses within a few kilometres of the development if their TV aerials are oriented towards the turbines. The 2009 Ofcom report goes on to state that: 'Digital television signals are much better at coping with signal reflections, and digital television pictures do not suffer from ghosting.'

12.183 Following the digital switchover in 2009 and the cessation of analogue television signals being broadcast, any potential impacts are considered to be greatly reduced and therefore it is not expected that there will be any significant effects on television as a result of the Proposed Development.

#### *Utilities and services*

12.184 There is an underground fibre optic cable running through the site, which currently serves the operational turbines. As referred to above, at present, two 33kV overhead lines pass over the site access track to be used as part of the delivery route for materials and components. Mitigation in the form of an assessment undertaken by SSEN has been proposed to avoid impacts and an informative is proposed to communicate this.

#### Health and Safety

##### *Construction*

12.185 Chapter 12.3 of the EIAR (Other issues) outlines the procedures that will be put in place and followed to ensure the safety of the workforce and the public, specifically in relation to the following:

- Approach to safe operation and maintenance;
- Turbine safety;
- Safe operation;
- Safety during adverse weather conditions; and
- Public safety.

12.186 Works on the site will largely comprise excavation and infilling of the new turbine bases, roads and hardstanding and involves the movement of HGV vehicles and plant. The delivery of the turbines to the site and their subsequent erection forms the final element of the development. The chapter confirms that the work will be undertaken in compliance with the requirements of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015. These regulations oblige the developer to notify the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) of the project and to establish a safety management system encompassing risk assessment, design measures and management instructions to ensure the safety of construction (and operational) staff and the public. Best practice health and safety guidelines published by Renewable UK (2010), will be adhered to and speed limits will be put in place to regulate traffic flow.

##### *Operational Safety*

12.187 Modern wind turbines incorporate sophisticated supervisory control systems that continually interrogate the operational status and safe working of the key components of each turbine and allow an operator to remotely monitor the turbines via satellite link. Under fault conditions, affected turbines automatically shut down and send an alarm to the maintenance engineer. For safety-critical faults, turbines do not re-start until the maintenance engineer has diagnosed and rectified the problem. The chapter states that in terms of general safety during operation, the turbines would be supported by the manufacturer's operational and maintenance safety manuals, which would be

available on-site. These manuals would form the basis of the regular safety checks that would be undertaken throughout the life of the development.

- 12.188 It can reasonably be expected that the construction phase of the development and the ongoing operation of the site will be carried out in full accordance with the relevant Health and Safety requirements.

#### Landscape (NSA) and Natural Places

- 12.189 The policy context says that the landscapes of the Outer Hebrides are a valuable resource for our island communities, shaping the distinctiveness and identity of place, the cultural heritage and the quality of people's everyday lives. Encompassing some of Scotland's most scenic images, they are a unique asset and offer a competitive advantage in an international market place.

- 12.190 As a critical element of the 'tourism product' they underpin a growth industry for the islands and the contribution they make to the wider economy is increasingly recognised and valued. The OHLDP has a key role to play in managing change in the landscape whilst maintaining and enhancing its distinctive character. By integrating landscape considerations with wider economic development aspirations, the Plan can proactively support development that will contribute to sustainable economic growth.

- 12.191 The site is within the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist National Scenic Area.

- 12.192 NPF4 – Policy 4 Natural Places and LDP Policy NBH1 advise that development which affects a National Scenic Area (NSA) will only be permitted/supported where the objectives of the NSA designation and the overall integrity of the area will not be compromised; or any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by benefits of national importance. LDP Policy NBH1 states that development proposals should relate to the specific landscape and visual characteristics of the local area, ensuring that the overall integrity of landscape character is maintained and that development proposals should not have an unacceptable significant landscape or visual impact.

- 12.193 National Scenic Areas (NSAs) are areas that have been designated as having outstanding scenic value in a national context and have been recognised within the planning system since 1980. They were identified in 1978 by the Countryside Commission for Scotland (CCS) in its publication Scotland's Scenic Heritage, and their boundaries remain unchanged today. The South Lewis, Harris and North Lewis National Scenic Area is one of forty and is one of the two largest in terms of area.

- 12.194 Section 263A (2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 requires planning authorities to pay special attention to the desirability of safeguarding or enhancing the character or appearance of an NSA when exercising any powers under that Act in relation to any land within that NSA.

- 12.195 Each NSA has an up-to-date statement of its Special Qualities that underpin each National Scenic Area's designation as one of Scotland's finest landscapes.

#### *South Lewis, Harris and North Uist National Scenic Area*

- 12.196 The relevant section in the description from Scotland's Scenic Heritage relating to the South Lewis, Harris and North Lewis National Scenic Area states: *'There is a striking contrast between the subdued topography of most of Lewis and the bold rugged hills of South Lewis and Harris which, viewed from the north, rise abruptly out of an expanse of blanket bog. Around the rugged hills, there are a number of different contrasting lowland and coastal landscapes. These have been identified as knock-and-lochan, rocky indented coast, and wide sandy machair beaches contained between rocky headlands. Each type has elements of its own which combine to produce landscapes with a variety of form, colour and grain, which are further diversified by changes of scale and aspect.'*

12.197 *North Harris has the highest peaks in the Outer Hebrides. On a clear day views from Clisham (799m) span from Cape Wrath to the Cuillins and St Kilda. The glens are steep-sided and precipitous crags which, despite their relatively low altitude, give to the hills a mountainous character that compares favourably with better known mainland massifs. Exposure and grazing prevent tree growth, and the scenic quality depends on landform and intervisibility with surrounding landscapes, these doing much to enhance the significance of the mountains.*

12.198 The proposed development, like the current one, overlaps the southern edge of the Harris-Uig Hills Wild Land Area (WLA).

*Harris – Uig Hills Wild Land Area (WLA)*

12.199 Pertinent extracts of NatureScot's description of core areas of wild land relating to the Harris-Uig WLA are as follows: *At 453 km<sup>2</sup> this is the largest of the 11 island Wild Land Areas (WLA), one of two on the Isles of Lewis and Harris. It forms a T shape, with the short side running between Uig in the north and Loch a Siar in the south, and the longer branch extending to Acha Mòr in the east. It also includes the island of Scarp and its surrounding islets off the west coast. One of 12 WLAs defined in part by the coast, to the west, roads otherwise flank its edge, including the main island spinal route to its east.*

12.200 *The WLA comprises an impressive range of many different landscape elements at a variety of scales, elevation and pattern. These include: open peatland; high rocky mountain ranges; isolated lone peaks; rocky cnochan; deeply carved fjords; open sea; islands; sea cliffs; lochs and lochans; and rivers and waterfalls. These represent the underlying geology as well as subsequent erosion, with the peatlands extending over ice-scoured metamorphic Lewisian gneiss, and some of the higher hills corresponding to intruded igneous rocks. The superlative qualities of these elements are emphasised by their contrast and juxtaposition, for example seeing a curtain of high, steep rocky hills beyond a wide expanse of peatland.*

12.201 *Land within the WLA is used mainly for deer stalking, fishing, grazing, nature conservation and recreation. Within part of the WLA, this is influenced by the community ownership of The North Harris Trust, whose objectives include: 'To keep North Harris wild and beautiful by safeguarding and enhancing the environment and managing this in ways that benefit the local community and the general public'.*

12.202 *The WLA is largely uninhabited, apart from a few isolated lodges and cottages. Nonetheless it contributes significantly to the visual backdrop of crofting settlements located just beyond its edge in the north, east and south, as well as a number of main and minor roads. The area is valued for recreation and attracts many visitors, with the Harris hills (one Corbett and three Grahams) and Uig area being particularly popular for hillwalking, bird watching and fishing via a number of paths and tracks that enter the WLA. In contrast, the peatlands in the centre and east of the area are visited infrequently and are much more difficult to access, with a lack of paths and a dense distribution of waterbodies.*

12.203 *The landscape and scenic qualities of the western half of the WLA are recognised by its inclusion within the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist National Scenic Area. Its description highlights '...the general absence of development lends a wild and remote character to this whole region of rocky hills, precipitous glens, remote lochs and rushing rivers'.*

12.204 *Although the mountains are not extremely high for Scotland (An Cliseam, the highest at 799m AOD), they nonetheless appear very high and arresting in relation to their low-lying surroundings. They are also physically challenging and provide a sense of risk when ascending due to being steep and rugged.*

12.205 *Some of the Harris mountains attract many hillwalkers and climbers, often favoured for their proximity to the B887 or A859, for being Corbett or Grahams, and/or for being accessible via some good*



*footpaths. In contrast, the remoter mountains to the north tend to be visited infrequently, resulting in a stronger sense of solitude.*

- 12.206 *The broad scale horizontal expanse and ‘wide skies’ appear awe-inspiring; whilst, at a detailed level, the rugged landform undulations harbour a closely interwoven arrangement of lochs, lochans and pools. These waterbodies vary in scale, from very small pools to very large lochs that extend over a wide area with many projections, such as Loch Langabhat. These waterbodies are irregular in shape and pattern which, in combination with the predominant rock cover in some areas, amplifies the sense of naturalness. The horizontal waters also emphasise the rugged nature of the adjacent landform.*
- 12.207 *The peatland interior is remote, with access routes limited to one path from Loch Morsgail in the north and a track to Loch Langabhat in the south. Within the remaining area, access is off-path and physically challenging, influenced by the need to cross or avoid lochs, lochans, pools, bogs and watercourses.*
- 12.208 *This challenge is increased by the undulating ground and visual foreshortening making it difficult to see far ahead to these obstacles, so movement is indirect and lengthy. These factors, in combination with very few visitors to the peatland interior, contribute to a strong sense of remoteness, naturalness, sanctuary, solitude and risk.*
- 12.209 *There is a prevalent lack of human artefacts within the peatland interior and little evidence of contemporary land use. There are, however, some shielings within the interior, including some distinctive ‘beehive huts’. Whilst these features indicate human intervention, they typically appear very discrete and isolated.*
- 12.210 *Around the margins of the area, views of human artefacts and contemporary land use are often screened locally by the peatland landform. When walking into the WLA, this means that a sense of remoteness and sanctuary can often be gained after just a short distance and time in places that are not actually physically remote.*
- 12.211 The application site is within the Prominent Hills and Mountains Landscape Character Type, as per NatureScot’s Western Isles Landscape Character Assessment.

#### *Landscape Character*

- 12.212 The Prominent Hills and Mountains landscape character type is characterised by individual peaks with pronounced summits, long ridges and slopes, rising steadily from the surrounding terrain. Steep sided corries and short u-shaped glens form an integral part of this character type. The upper slopes of the Prominent Hills and Mountains consist of irregular rock buttresses, ledges, shelves and deep gullies. Where the hills and mountains meet the coast the deeply indented coastline is dominated by rocky headlands, sea cliffs and occasional caves.
- 12.213 The screening opinion relating to this application concluded that, while the site has previously been developed, the proposed turbines would increase the tip height by 40m and on account of the sensitivity of the location, the development would be likely to have significant effects on the special qualities of the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist National Scenic Area, the landscape character and visual amenity. It was considered that the proposal also has the potential to have cumulative landscape and visual effects with other planned windfarm developments on the Isle of Lewis.

#### *Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Methodology*

- 12.214 Landscape and Visual Impacts comprise a significant portion of the assessment of this development for the reasons identified above in the findings of the related screening and opinions. As such, the EIAR included Chapter 6 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. The methodology for the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) and the Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (CLVIA) has been undertaken in accordance with the methodology set out in Appendix 6.1 and conforms with

the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (Landscape Institute and IEMA, 20131).

- 12.215 The assessment process has encompassed the construction, operational, and decommissioning phases of the wind turbine and has included the design, landscape and visual assessment (including cumulative) and assessment of the residual effects. Consultation relevant to the assessment had previously been undertaken with the Comhairle Planning Service in relation to aspects of methodology, sources of information, scope of assessment, viewpoint assessment and cumulative development.
- 12.216 The chapter assesses the landscape and visual effects of the proposed development. The LVIA forms one of the key components of the EIA process to comply with the EIA Regulations and this chapter assesses the proposed development against the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 and any relevant planning policies relating to the landscape resource and visual amenity.
- 12.217 The purpose of the assessment has been to determine the landscape and visual effects of the proposed development on the existing landscape visual resource. The following landscape and visual receptors have been assessed:
- Landscape character, key characteristics, and elements;
  - Designated landscapes; and
  - Views and visual amenity experienced by residents, tourists, visitors, and road users.

#### *Location and Proposed Development*

- 12.218 The proposed development is situated in North Harris and the proposed turbines would replace the three existing 2-bladed turbines of 46m to tip and two of their locations would be in very close proximity to the current positions. The nearest turbines are 15.5km to the north-east of the proposed development. The landcover is dominated by a mixture of low moorland, rock and rocky outcrops, mixed windswept heather with damp rough grassland which gives a coarse texture surface. The wider area is sparsely populated, with the nearest residential properties situated approximately 0.8km to the south-west in Bunavoneader. The settlement of Tarbert is approximately 5km south of the wind farm site.
- 12.219 The repowering proposal will comprise three wind turbines up to 86m to tip. The proposed turbines would replace the three existing 2-bladed turbines of 46m to tip and two of their locations would be in very close proximity to the current positions. The existing substation building and existing access tracks and turning/passing areas on the site would be utilised. A short section of new access track will be required to access turbine one, see Chapter 2 - Proposed Development and Design Evolution for full details.

#### *Assessment*

- 12.220 The assessment process has encompassed the construction, operation, and decommissioning of the proposed development and has included design parameters and further assessment of the residual effects. The design process has sought to achieve the highest energy generation capacity for the site, whilst balancing this with environmental considerations and achieving an acceptable design in terms of landscape and visual effects.
- 12.221 This chapter is accompanied by:
- Appendix 6.1 Methodology
  - Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Figures 6.1- 6.8
  - Figure 6.1 – Study Area
  - Figure 6.2 – 86m Tip ZTV

- Figure 6.3 – 59m Hub ZTV
- Figure 6.4 – Landscape Character Types
- Figure 6.5 – Landscape Character Area with 86m Tip ZTV
- Figure 6.6 – Landscape Planning Designations
- Figure 6.7 – Landscape Planning Designations with 86m Tip ZTV
- Figure 6.8 – Cumulative Basemap
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Visualisations Figures 6.9 to 6.14
- Figure 6.9 – Viewpoint 1, A859 at Loch a’Mhorghain
- Figure 6.10 – Viewpoint 2, A859 overlooking Ceann an Ora
- Figure 6.11 – Viewpoint 3, A859 at Loch na Ciste
- Figure 6.12 – Viewpoint 4, B887 at Tolmachan
- Figure 6.13 – Viewpoint 5, Taransay
- Figure 6.14 – Viewpoint 6, Beinn Mhor

12.222 The aim of the design and assessment process is to promote the best ‘environmental fit’ for the proposed development through consideration of the existing landscape resource, the potential landscape and visual effects and design alternatives and the assessment process refers to landscape value, and in particular landscape designations and related planning policy, as well as landscape character and capacity for wind farm development at this site.

12.223 The scope of the assessment has been established on the basis of professional judgment and early discussions with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. A Scoping Report was submitted to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in September 2023, and the feedback from this, which was provided in December 2023 has been taken on board in the scope of the assessment.

#### 12.224 Scope of the Landscape and Visual Assessment

<b>Landscape Issues</b>	<b>Description</b>
Landscape Character	The effects of the Proposed Development on the landscape character and quality of the site area, as defined by the Western Isles – Lewis and Harris Landscape Character Assessment and site survey.
Landscape Elements	Direct or physical effects on any landscape elements which characterise the area.
Landscape Designations	Views from any designated landscape including National Scenic Areas (NSA), Special Landscape Areas (SLA), or Gardens and Designated Landscapes (GDL). Views from other areas of landscape character as perceived by people.
<b>Visual Issues</b>	<b>Description</b>
Local Community	Views from the local rural community, particularly from residential properties near the site and from local settlements which lie within the ZTV. Views from roads and popular tourist/walker destinations and hilltops will also be taken into consideration.
Tourist Destinations	Views from popular outdoor tourist destinations which entail an appreciation of the landscape, and the setting of features and visitor experience.
Major Transport Routes	Transport routes including the A859 as well as any popular walking routes in the area.
<b>Cumulative Issues</b>	<b>Description</b>
Cumulative Assessment	The cumulative assessment includes viewpoint assessment within the study area where simultaneous and/or successive views of more than one wind energy development may be achieved, and sequential cumulative assessment, where more than one wind energy

	development may be viewed along transport routes (simultaneous or successive).
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#### *Viewpoint Selection*

- 12.225 As noted above, the final list of selected viewpoints was borne out of consultation with the Comhairle Planning Service, professional experience and the scoping process and the table below provides a summary of the viewpoint locations and rationale for their selection.
- 12.226 The selected viewpoints offer views from near, middle and distant locations as well as views from the north, south, east and west. Four locations in total have been photographed across the study area with photomontages created, and two further locations have had wireline illustrations produced.
- 12.227 These locations represent a number of different receptors, viewing directions and distances, and are the locations perceived to experience the greatest change regarding the height increase of the turbines. As far as possible, viewpoints were selected to represent the development at its most visible and these can be viewed at visualisations, Appendix 5 to this Report.

<b>Viewpoint</b>	<b>Reason for initial selection</b>	<b>Distance from nearest turbine</b>
1.A859 at Loch a'Mhorghain	Selected to cover additional visibility caused by the taller turbines from the Loch a'Mhorghain area and impacts on drivers travelling west on the A859.	0.9km
2.A859 Overlooking Ceann an Ora	Selected to represent views experienced by road users travelling north on the A859.	1.7km
3. A859 at Loch na Ciste	Selected to cover additional visibility caused by the taller turbines from the Loch na Ciste area and impacts on drivers travelling west on the A859.	1.9km
4. B887 near Cliasmol	Selected to cover additional visibility caused by the taller turbines from the Cliasmol area and impacts on drivers travelling east on the B887.	6.2km
5. Taransay	Selected to assess the impacts on the Taranasay part of the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA. It is proposed that a wireline would be sufficient to cover this.	10.6km
6. Beinn Mhor	Selected to assess the impacts on the Eisgein Wild Land Area, as well as cumulative impacts. It is proposed that a wireline would be sufficient to cover this.	11.9km

#### *LVIA Study Area*

- 12.228 An overall study area of 30km radius from the outermost proposed turbines has been established following NatureScot Guidance. This study area is illustrated in Figure 6.1. The cumulative assessment will consider existing wind energy development proposals that have permissions, and those that are currently the subject of undetermined applications within a Search Area of 30km radius of the site centre. The detailed assessment focuses on the relationship with other schemes in the area and the potential for significant cumulative effects in combination with the operational turbines.

#### *Cumulative Assessment*

- 12.229 Drawing from NatureScot guidance, a cumulative baseline of all operational and consented wind energy development and other planning applications for wind energy development, within the 30km study area is created. All turbines above 50m within 15km of the proposed development site are

included in the assessment. Wind farms over 15km away are highly unlikely to give rise to significant cumulative effects. In accordance with the NatureScot guidance, projects at or up to the scoping stage have not been included.

12.230 All other wind energy developments included in the assessment are listed in the table and illustrated in Figure 6.8.

Development Name	Scale of Project	Number of Turbines	Tip Height	Distance to Project
Uisenis Wind Farm	Wind Farm	25	200	15.5km

12.231 The above development at Uisenis has been included on any wirelines and CZTVs for each of these in conjunction with the proposed development, primarily focused on the cumulative visibility between the wind turbine elements of the proposal. For a full list of all cumulative projects see Figure 6.8.

12.232 For context, Chapter 6 of the EIAR goes on to make the following comments in relation to site layout, turbine selection and other characteristics in relation to the development:

#### *Layout Design*

12.233 *The proposed, broad location has been chosen as it is considered to represent the best compromise between technical and environmental considerations, whilst not exacerbating the effects of the operational development. The design in terms of turbine position and height, was developed to limit the development's visibility over the local receptors including the NSA and appear in scale with the surrounding landscape.*

#### *Turbine Selection*

12.234 *The LVIA assumes a generic turbine with a height of 86m to tip. Other likely design considerations include the following:*

- *Modern turbines will be used that have a simple and balanced appearance with three blades and tapered, non-lattice towers; and*
- *The turbines will be semi-matt and pale grey in colour to reduce its contrast with the background sky under most weather conditions.*

12.235 For a full description and details of the scheme and all its components see Chapter 2 – Proposed Development and Design Evolution.

#### *Construction activities*

12.236 *Temporary landscape and visual effects would occur during the construction period, and would result from the visibility of construction activity, use of lay down areas, and site compound. The landscape and visual effects would be of a low to negligible magnitude of change and not significant. The lay down areas and compound would be located adjacent to the proposed turbine locations. During the construction period the landscape and visual effects would be significant for a small number of receptors along the A859 to the south-west of the Proposed Development. This is due to the movement and contrast of workers and machinery in this area. These effects would be temporary and fully restored on completion.*

12.237 *All disturbed areas resulting from the construction (around turbine bases, temporary access tracks and onsite compounds and lay down areas) will be restored upon completion of the construction period. Specific mitigation measures necessary during construction would include:*

- *Colour and finish of substation to be agreed with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar prior to construction;*
- *Land clearance and occupation will be limited to the minimum necessary for the works;*
- *Vegetation removal will be minimised as far as possible; and*

- *Valued features, such as any historic features and field boundaries will be protected. Fencing will be used to define such areas to avoid accidental damage.*

#### *Decommissioning*

- 12.238 *All of the visible, above ground structures (turbines, substation and grid connection) will be removed upon decommissioning, thus rendering the landscape and visual effects of the development as reversible. There would, therefore, be no landscape and visual effects remaining after decommissioning as a result of the Proposed Development.*

#### *Assessment of Landscape Effects*

- 12.239 In terms of the magnitude of change, the chapter identifies that this landscape has already been modified by the existing Wind Farm development and while the existing turbines have some influences over the local landscape, the increased size of the proposed development will have greater prominence, however, while their influence is greater than the operational turbines, it remains relatively limited and contained to a local area around the development site, as can be seen by the ZTV.
- 12.240 The chapter goes on to state that the proposed development would be a notable feature, particularly when seen from the south, and south-west, however its presence would not be sufficient to alter the perceived character of this section of the landscape and the development is never an overbearing or dominant presence on the coastline to the south-west, nor the glen to the south-east and the mountains retain their dominant presence and ability to enclose this pocket of the wider Landscape.
- 12.241 The magnitude of change for direct landscape effects as a result of the proposed development on the local landscape character resource, would be medium, resulting in a major/moderate level of effect, which would be significant.
- 12.242 The ZTV coverage across the LCA is limited to the area immediately around the proposed development, by ~2km, with some occasional sections of hill summit. The proposed development will have the potential to impact on the characteristics which comprise the landscape when seen from these locations.
- 12.243 While the turbines are situated on an area of higher ground above the coastline, these are not the high peaks or dramatic skylines which do occur in sections of this landscape. The proposed development is situated on a simpler, lower-lying shoulder and is typically backdropped by the higher more dramatic hills. The presence of the turbines at this point would not diminish the hills' ability to provide enclosure to the coast and glens below, as has been demonstrated by the visualisations at Appendix 5 to this Report.
- 12.244 The section below from chapter 6 provides further context of the development within the landscape and its impacts:
- 12.245 *When seen from the areas of higher ground within the LCA and the summits such as An Cliseam, the Proposed Development is a minor feature of the lower ground at the foot of the hills. It neither interrupts the important long-range vistas over the coastlines, islands and lochs, nor does it appear on the dramatic skylines. This landscape also has a strong sense of remoteness as can be seen by the WLA designation, however the area in which the Proposed Development is seen, is already modified with the operational turbines and with the other infrastructure such as the telegraph poles, A859 and scattered development along the coastline. As such, it would not be affecting a pristine section of the LCA which is currently unaffected by human development.*
- 12.246 *In addition to the section of Dramatic Mountain Massif LCA in which the development is located, there is also potential visibility from the north facing slopes of the Frith Losgaintir peninsula. From here the*

*Proposed Development would appear at over ~5km distance and be a minor feature which is backdropped by the landscape, and are not seen on a dramatic skyline or interrupting important vistas.*

12.247 *This is a particularly remote section of the LCA and as discussed above the Proposed Development would be seen in conjunction with human activity along the northern shores of Loch A Siar, and not within a remote section such as Frith Losgaintir. From the vast majority of the LCA there would be no visibility of the Proposed Development and it would have no impact on the quality, character, scale or setting of the LCA.*

12.248 *The magnitude of change on the section of Dramatic Mountain Massif surrounding the Site would be low, resulting in a moderate level of effect, which would not be significant. Impacts on the remainder of the LCA would be negligible.*

#### *Effects on Landscape Planning Designations*

12.249 As noted above, the site location is designated as a National Scenic Area and as such, there will be some direct impacts to this landscape designation.

12.250 Any other designated landscape would only be affected indirectly, where the ZTV pattern in relation to the various landscapes is illustrated in Figure 6.7. The assessment considers if these effects on the views would lead to an indirect effect on either the landscape character or valued features and characteristics for which these areas are designated. The assessment of the overall indirect effects experienced by people viewing the development from designated landscape and the development's impact on the setting and character of any designated landscapes areas is provided in Table 6.7. The sensitivity of all designated landscapes considered as part of this assessment has been considered as high.

12.251 The current development which this proposal would replace comprises part of the assessment baseline.

12.252 Being located within the NSA, the development will have an influence over the quality of the scenery. The turbines would be directly in front of An Cliseam when viewed from the south, which is a prominent feature of the scenic landscape. Currently the existing turbines are also seen in front of An Cliseam when viewed from the south, however to a lesser extent. Despite this, the scale of the turbines is such that they do not diminish the perceived scale of An Cliseam, and thus its prominence is still an important part of the scenic qualities of the NSA. In addition to this, the ZTV indicates very limited visibility of the proposed development and its influence over the scenery of the NSA is also limited.

12.253 The seascapes and landscapes across the National Scenic Area are diverse and this proposal would only affect a very small proportion of these, due to the enclosed nature of the development site from most directions, which very much limits any impact on intervisibility. Considering the impacts of the proposal over and above those of the current wind farm on site, it is not considered that the special qualities of the NSA at this location would be adversely affected so as to affect the overall integrity of the NSA.

12.254 The proposed development is situated with the Harris-Uig Hills Wild Land Area and will have an impact on this landscape.

12.255 Chapter 6 states that given the potential for turbine development to have wide ranging indirect effects across the landscape, and the potential for a strong visual presence when seen, it is considered that these attributes have a high sensitivity to this type of development and goes on to state:

12.256 *As described in the Wild Land Description, An Cliseam is not particularly tall, however given its relation to the low-lying surroundings appears much higher. This (and the adjacent hills) would be the features of this attribute most likely to be affected by the Proposed Development. These hills are popular for walkers given their proximity to the A859 and B887, as such it has resulted in path erosion and braiding*

*that diminishes the sense of naturalness at a local level and the hills further north represent a stronger sense of solitude. While the Proposed Development is seen in conjunction with An Cliseam, it is also always seen in conjunction with the human activity along the coastline and is positioned in a section already containing wind turbines. As such, its contrast to this aspect of the baseline is mitigated somewhat.*

- 12.257 *Views from the summit of An Cliseam and adjacent hills contain panoramic views over the low-lying surroundings. While the turbines would feature in these views, their position is such that they are often overlooked by the viewer, where the eye is drawn further afield to distinct dramatic skylines of Frith Losgaintir, Taransay and Giolabhal Glas. These views would not be affected due to the low position of the development. Additionally views over the sea lochs, lochans and coastlines are also relatively unaffected as the turbines tend to be backdropped by the landscape and not interrupting the views of these aspects.*
- 12.258 *The Proposed Development is at the very southern edge of the WLA and views from these mountain tops into the interior of the WLA, which has a stronger sense of naturalness, remoteness and general lack of human artifacts is unaffected. Views from the south, outwith the WLA, towards the WLA would have views of the Proposed Development, however the topography is such that viewing into this interior is not possible until summits north of the Proposed Development such as An Cliseam and the magnitude of change on this quality is considered to be low.*
- 12.259 *Extensive peatland that is simple at a broad scale, but interwoven with a complex pattern of lochs, lochans, pools and bogs at the local level that highlight the rugged nature of the landform and limit access.*
- 12.260 *This aspect of the WLA is particularly evident in the central and eastern sections which comprise of a wide expanse of peatlands, that are simple and open at a broad scale. Given the turbines position on the southern edge, any views over this peatland from the higher ground would have the Proposed Development to the rear and it is not seen in conjunction with the extensive areas of peatland, lochs and lochans to the north.*
- 12.261 *There would be no direct impact to any of these features, as the Proposed Development is not situated in an area of peatland, and is on landscape already altered by the operational wind farm. Nor would there be any physical impacts to any lochs, lochans, pools or bogs. The nearest of which would be Loch na Learga, with the Proposed Development actually moving the turbines further away from this feature than the existing turbines.*
- 12.262 *While there is a prevalent lack of human artefacts within the peatland interior and little evidence of contemporary land use, the larger mountains to the south of the peatland will screen any views of the turbines and this aspect will remain unaffected.*
- 12.263 *The magnitude of change on this quality is considered to be negligible.*
- 12.264 *Given that the sensitivity of the WLA is considered to be high, and the two affected qualities are affected to a low and negligible level, the level of effect will be minor. No mitigation is required or proposed.*

#### *Consultation advice*

- 12.265 NatureScot were consulted on this planning application, the full details of which can be viewed at Appendix 3 to this Report. In summary, the pertinent points of NatureScot's response are as follows:

#### *National Scenic Area*

- *Potential impacts on the NSA are assessed in relation to the special qualities of the NSA. In this case, we largely in concur with the following conclusions presented in the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) that has been prepared by the applicant:*



- *There are many diverse seascapes across the NSA, and this proposal would only affect a very small proportion of these.*
- *The somewhat enclosed nature of the development site from most directions, very much limits any impacts on intervisibility.*
- *The wild, mountainous character is best experienced from the north of the NSA viewing south, where the mountains create a stark contrast with the flatter moorland, and form a backdrop and dramatic skyline. Given the turbines are south of this, they would have limited impact on this aspect of the mountainous character.*
- *Overall therefore, considering the impacts of the proposal over and above those of the current wind farm on site, we do not consider that the special qualities of the NSA at this location would be adversely affected so as to affect the overall integrity of the NSA.*

#### *Harris-Uig Hills Wild Land Area (WLA)*

- *Views from the south towards the WLA would include other human artefacts as well as the wind farm, as they include the current wind farm, and would not extend to the interior of the WLA. Similarly, views from the north would be almost entirely of areas outwith the WLA, including developed areas.*
- *The Proposed Development will replace three existing 2-bladed wind turbines of 46m to tip at Monan Wind Farm, with three 3-bladed wind turbines with a tip height of up to 86m. The impacts are therefore upon a part of the landscape, that is already affected by this type of development, albeit with a larger scheme.*
- *The Proposed Development thus would have a slightly greater impact than the existing development. However, any impacts would not be sufficient to significantly alter the existing landscape. This is due to two of the turbines located on the same bases as the existing turbines, minimising direct physical effects, and the degree of containment provided by the topography restricts the influence even the larger turbines will have.*
- *While there is slightly greater impact on the setting and scale of landscape features such as the Clisham, this would not be sufficient to diminish the scale of these mountains, whose scale and dramatic presence remain intact.*

#### *Conclusion*

12.266 Chapter 6 provides the following conclusion:

12.267 *The Proposed Development will replace three existing 2-bladed wind turbines of 46m to tip at Monan Wind Farm, with three 3-bladed wind turbines with a tip height of up to 86m. The advantages of this are the ability to impact a section of the landscape, both directly and indirectly, that is already affected by this type of development, albeit with a larger scheme. The Proposed Development thus would have a slightly greater impact than the existing development however any impacts would not be sufficient to significantly alter the existing landscape. This is due to two of the turbines located on the same areas as the existing turbines, minimising direct physical effects and the level of containment provided by the topography restricts the influence even the larger turbines will have.*

12.268 *While there is slightly greater impact on the setting and scale of landscape features such as An Cliseam, this would not be sufficient to diminish the scale of these mountains, whose grand scale and dramatic presence remain intact. This is due to maintaining a 1:3 vertical ratio when the two are seen in conjunction.*

12.269 *Visually the turbines would be more prominent, although significant visual effects are only predicted from two of the four viewpoint locations, in these cases, the increased height never causes them to appear dominant or overbearing on the visual receptors below such as the A859, crofting properties at Ardhasaig. The high sensitivity of the area due to the NSA means that even a medium magnitude of change results in significant effects, thus all four viewpoint locations have significant effects predicted in landscape terms. These represent singular static locations and would also represent the worst affected locations, and despite these localised effects, they would not be sufficient to cause significant*

*effects on the NSA as a whole. The changeable topography allows for common screening of the development and ridgelines often screen the lower sections of the turbines reducing the vertical prominence. While the included viewpoints have some significant effects, these views were selected as they represent the areas most affected by the Proposed Development and not necessarily the most scenic views, or commonly experienced views.*

- 12.270 *While the proposed development is within both an NSA and a WLA, its presence is not sufficient to significantly alter the quality, character or setting of these designed landscapes, particularly the NSA as it is situated on the very southern edge of the designation. Many of the key qualities of the NSA are completely unaffected due to the limited visual influence the turbines have. None of the key qualities that are affected, are affected to significant levels. The four viewpoints provided are all within the NSA and while significant effects would occur on these specific locations, this impact would not occur throughout the NSA and is highly localised.*
- 12.271 *Overall, while the proposed increased scale of the turbines causes slightly greater effects, none of these would be sufficient to cause additional new impacts (bar a short section of the A859 at Loch a Mhorghain) and would not result in significant impacts on the two landscape planning designations.*
- 12.272 Measures were taken during the design evolution stage of the project which were a combination of mitigation in terms of landscape impacts, but also in relation to historical turbine performance, have contributed towards reducing impacts of the development. All iterations of the site layout were directed in an effort to improve turbine performance and to utilise the existing infrastructure as much as possible (access roads/hardstandings etc).
- 12.273 Following a review of the historic performance of the wind farm over the past 7 years it was observed that the conditions experienced by the northern turbines have been very turbulent due to the higher elevation of the topography and the impact of surrounding topography to the east creating significant levels of turbulence. This was particularly the case for the most northeasterly turbine. In consultation with the turbine manufacturer, it was deemed necessary to move the northeastern turbine to the south-west to reduce these effects on the repowered scheme. Further examination of the other turbines also resulted in micro-siting of the proposal turbines, still adjacent to the existing, to maximise the use of existing infrastructure.
- 12.274 Upon further review, it was found that the conditions created by the initially proposed triangular layout would not reduce the effects of turbulence to a significant degree. The newly placed southern turbine was subsequently moved west to move it further from the public road and recreate the existing linear layout but with improved siting taking into account turbulence and desired distances between wind turbines.
- 12.275 This move has additional benefits in terms of the landscape and visual impact as it removes one of the turbines from the Harris-Uig Hills WLA, reducing the direct impact to the WLA. Additionally, the move of the most northerly turbine to the south-west of the site brings the turbine onto lower elevation land and thus reduces the prominence and visibility of the proposed development within the landscape and the linear layout would be retained.
- 12.276 The site is currently an established and operational windfarm at an elevated location in North Harris, adjacent to the A859 road, which is the spinal route between Lewis and Harris. This is a relatively busy trafficked road (in the context of levels of traffic prevalent in the Outer Hebrides).
- 12.277 Views of the wind farm site are primarily restricted to the area to the north of Loch na Ciste, the hillside valley below the site, the immediate location on the A859 approaching and passing the site and from the surrounding hills. The site will be most visible from the south on the A859 when travelling north through the rural settlement of Ardhasaig where views of the site are open towards Ceann an Ora when looking north. This would be as is the case with the current windfarm, and although the height

increase of the proposed turbines will result in them appearing more prominent, the site and new turbines will still significantly benefit from the dominant backdrop of An Cliseam.

- 12.278 In terms of cumulative impacts with other developments, the proposed Uisenis Wind Farm is approximately 15.5km to the north east of the site. VP06, which can be viewed at Appendix 5 to this Report demonstrates that while the site will be visible, the cumulative effects are highly limited. Given that the only other developments within the study area are the existing Monan Wind Farm and simultaneous visibility of the two will be extremely rare, no tangible impacts are anticipated in this regard.
- 12.279 Chapter 6 to the EIAR is considered to be a comprehensive and balanced Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and both NatureScot in their consultation response and the Comhairle as Planning Authority largely agree with its assessments and conclusions presented, which in summary do not dispute that there will be landscape and visual impacts associated with the proposal, however, the continued use of the site, albeit with larger turbines, is unlikely to give rise to any unacceptable significant landscape or visual impacts or generate negative impacts on the special qualities of the NSA or WLA. Accordingly, the proposal would be in accordance with OHLDP Policy NBH1 and NPF4 – Policy 4 Natural Places.

#### Natural Heritage – (Ecology and Ornithology)

- 12.280 The Outer Hebrides has an outstanding natural heritage resource with international and national recognition for its special qualities. It is widely acknowledged that a high-quality environment can contribute positively to economic growth and the Plan promotes sustainable development within a framework that recognises and safeguards the most important natural heritage resources of the islands.
- 12.281 Traditional land management practices on the islands have helped create the character of the crofting environment and the conditions for many species and habitats to survive and thrive. The opportunity to maintain and enhance biodiversity through development proposals restoration plans is promoted through the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.
- 12.282 The North Harris SSSI and SAC and the North Harris Mountains SPA are located c.1km to the west of the proposed development at its closest point and are separated from the windfarm site by the Abhainn Glaic a Choin duinn and raised terrain associated with the Cleit nan Uan (122m AOD). The West Coast of the Outer Hebrides SPA is situated 1.1km to the south-west of the proposed development at its closest point.
- 12.283 *Policy NBH2: Natural Heritage states that Development that affects a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or National Nature Reserve (NNR) will only be permitted where:*
- a) the objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the area will not be compromised; or*
  - b) 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.*
- 12.284 *The policy also states that development that affects a Marine Protected Area will only be permitted where there is no significant risk of the activity hindering the achievements of the conservation objectives of the Nature Conservation Marine Protected Area (NC MPA) or:*
- c) there is no alternative that would have a lesser impact on the Conservation objectives of the NC MPA; and*
  - d) the public benefit outweighs the environmental impact; and*
  - e) the applicant will arrange for measures of equivalent environmental benefit to offset the anticipated damage.*

- 12.285 Where there is good reason to suggest that a European Protected Species (EPS)\* is present on site, or may be affected by a proposed development, the Comhairle will require any such presence to be established and, if necessary, a mitigation plan provided to avoid or minimise any adverse impacts on the species, prior to determining the application.
- 12.286 Planning permission will not be granted for a development that would be likely to have an adverse effect on an EPS unless the Comhairle is satisfied that:
- there is no satisfactory alternative; and
  - the development is required for preserving public health or public safety or for other imperative reasons of overriding public interest including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment; and
  - the development will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of an EPS at a favourable conservation status in its natural range.
- 12.287 Planning permission will not be granted for development that would be likely to have an adverse effect on a species protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended in Scotland)\* unless the development is required for preserving public health or public safety.
- 12.288 The EIA Screening Opinion associated with this application stated the following:
- 12.289 *On account of proximity, there is the potential for impacts on the North Harris Mountains Special Protection Area (SPA), designated for breeding golden eagle. The site is approximately 1km from the SPA, and approximately 500 metres from a nest site of a pair of golden eagles, which also nest within the SPA. There is also potential of disturbance/displacement as well as collision risk mortality to both Golden and White-tailed eagles, both Schedule 1, 1A and A1 protected birds under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended in Scotland). It is considered that the development has the potential to impact negatively on the population level of golden and white-tailed eagles and impacts are therefore likely to be significant.*
- 12.290 *It is therefore concluded that the proposal would be EIA development and that significant effects are potentially likely on Landscape and Visual amenity and on Ornithological species including effects on the North Harris Mountains Special Protection Area (SPA) and Golden and White-tailed eagles, both Schedule 1, 1A and A1 protected birds under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.*
- 12.291 The EIA Scoping Opinion which followed this advised that *the ecology chapter will consider the potential impacts of the Proposed Development on the ecological (non-avian) features present within the Site. They will summarise the methods used to establish the baseline conditions within the Site and its surroundings, the results of the baseline surveys, and the process used to determine the sensitivity of the habitats and species' populations present. The ways in which habitats or species might be affected (directly or indirectly) by the construction, operation and decommissioning of the Proposed Development will be assessed, prior to and after any mitigation measures are considered. In addition, any cumulative effects will be considered, taking together impacts of other wind farm projects in the area, whether operational, consented or at application stage, along with the significance of any predicted effects of the Proposed Development.*
- 12.292 *It is noted that the final report will provide commentary across each phase of the development process construction, operation, and decommissioning and in compiling the assessments, further consultation will be carried out with: SEPA; NatureScot; and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.*
- 12.293 *Given the nearby loch and watercourse and being close to the boundary of the North Harris Mountains Special Protection Area (SPA) an assessment should be undertaken of potential impacts on otter and wild salmonids.*

12.294 In order to address the items highlighted above, the following were submitted to accompany the application:

12.295 Chapter 7 – Hydrology (considers the hydrological impacts on Groundwater Dependent Terrestrial Ecosystems).

12.296 EIA Report Chapter 8 Ecology supported by the following Technical Appendices

- Appendix 8.1 Habitats & National Vegetation Classification Survey
- Appendix 8.2 - Protected Species Survey
- Appendix 8.3: Outline Biodiversity Enhancement Management Plan.
- EIA Report Chapter 9 Ornithology
- Appendix 8.3: Outline Biodiversity Enhancement Management Plan.

#### *Ecology*

12.297 The ecology assessment considers the potential impacts of the proposed development on habitats, flora and fauna. It details likely significant effects associated with the construction, operation and decommissioning phases of the proposed development.

#### *Protected Species*

12.298 Protected Species Surveys were undertaken (Appendix 8.2) and encompassed all land within the site in line with NatureScot guidance and determined that suitable habitat is present for otter on site and no field signs were noted within the application site boundary, however, otter droppings on rocks were recorded at Loch na Sgeireagan Mor.

12.299 Otter, an EPS, are known to be in the general area. There is habitat connectivity with Loch na Sgeireagan Mor and the site and otter can utilise the site. Two mountain hares were recorded during the survey period in the upland areas.

12.300 The submission states that the habitat present on site provides good reptile habitat (moorland, stone outcrops) for species such as common lizard. Reference is also made to water vole, although the protected species survey concludes that there were no signs of these on the site. It is not thought the lizards and water voles occur in the Outer Hebrides, which is a view shared by NatureScot in their consultation response.

12.301 Habitats are suitable for amphibians, such as common frog in the wetter areas of vegetation (such as soft-rush and sharp flowered rush) and were noted occasionally during surveys. Frogs do occur in the Outer Hebrides but are non-native. Therefore, Common Lizard, Water Voles, Frogs and Bats (for which there is no habitat on or near the site can therefore be discounted from further consideration.

#### *Otter survey*

12.302 The surveys consisted of walkovers of the site and a 200m buffer to visually inspect and assess the site for its potential to support otters. Otter surveys were undertaken according to recommended guidelines. All suitable watercourses and waterbodies located within the site, and where accessible, within the 200m buffer of the site were surveyed. Evidence of otter activity searched for included:

- Holts: otter holts are often found in various situations. These include cavities in a riverbank, hollow trees, between roots, rocky clefts, rabbit burrows or tunnels in peat. The entrance may be underwater with an air vent into the chamber, which is lined with dry vegetation;
- Couches: otters often have resting spots or couches when they lay up. An otter may have many holts or resting sites within its home range;
- Paw prints in muddy or silted areas along the burn edges;
- Spraints or otter faeces. Often found on boulders, under bridges, elevated positions, fallen trees or on piles of grass; and
- Characteristic worn pathways/slides or haul out areas.

12.303 The survey identified that suitable habitat is present for otter on site and no field signs were noted within the application boundary, however, otter droppings on rocks were recorded at Loch na Sgeireagan Mor. Otter are known to be in the general area. There is habitat connectivity with Loch na Sgeireagan Mor and the site and otter can utilise the site.

*Otter Mitigation proposed*

12.304 As otter are known to be in the wider area and often wander widely and expand their territories the following mitigation is proposed:

- All personnel are made aware that protected species and their holts exist close to the site and are at risk from vehicles;
- All trenches dug during construction and exposed open pipes will be covered at the end of each working day to ensure no risk to any wildlife that may have the potential to be trapped;
- Ramps will be located within the trenches or pits that cannot be covered to allow an exit for any mammal that has gone into a trench or pit; and
- A pre-construction otter survey will be required. Pre-construction surveys should be completed as close to the start of works as possible, and always within the most recent survey period.

12.305 With the above in mind, it is proposed to append a condition to any consent requiring that prior to the commencement of the development, an otter species protection plan shall be submitted to the Comhairle as Planning Authority for review in conjunction with NatureScot and that no construction works shall proceed until the otter species protection plan has been approved in writing by the Comhairle as Planning Authority, in order to ensure adequate protection of Otter, a European Protected Species within the terms of Regulation 39 and 43 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994.

*Wild salmonids*

12.306 The study area lies within the boundary of the Western Isles District Salmon Fisheries Board (WIDSFB) and the Outer Hebrides Fisheries Trust. Beyond this, the catchment as a whole is known for its Salmon and Sea Trout fishing, primarily within the lochs and is a popular recreational fishing destination. WIDSFB made no response to the consultation relating to the development.

12.307 The development is situated within the watershed Abhainn Eadarra and Loch a Siar that form part of the Lewis and Harris Coastal catchment. The catchment as a whole is known to support salmonid species, which could be impacted by reduced water quality from development activities. The site also has hydrological connectivity with the West Coast of the Outer Hebrides SPA.

12.308 As noted at the Hydrology section of the Report above, robust mitigations are proposed in relation to the Water Environment and any subsequent impacts on wild salmon and the development is considered to have an acceptable system for water management and would not be likely to create unacceptable impacts on the water environment or West Coast of the Outer Hebrides SPA.

*Ornithology*

12.309 The North Harris Mountains SPA is situated 875m to the west of the proposed development site.

12.310 The North Harris Mountains SPA, designated as such for Golden Eagle, is part of a range of steep rocky hills on the west coast of Harris. These mountains, composed of Lewisian gneiss and granite, rise from sea level to 729m. They have a strong oceanic character with an abundance of wet heath, an abundance of Atlantic bryophytes including the large endemic moss *Campylopus shawii*, and numerous streams, oligotrophic lochs and dystrophic lochans. The boundary of the SPA follows that of North Harris SSSI.

### *Qualifying interest*

- 12.311 North Harris Mountains SPA qualifies under Article 4.1 by regularly supporting a nationally important breeding population of golden eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, an Annex I species. The site supports 6-7 pairs, representing over 1% of the GB population. This population has a high breeding productivity for the west coast of Scotland and is one of the highest density populations in Britain.
- 12.312 The site also supports a notable assemblage of breeding birds including Annex I species, such as red-throated diver, black-throated diver, merlin, golden plover, common tern and Arctic tern, which require special protection measures.
- 12.313 The conservation objectives of the SPA are to avoid deterioration of the habitats of the qualifying species or significant disturbance to the qualifying species, thus ensuring that the integrity of the site is maintained; and to ensure for the qualifying species that the following are maintained in the long term:
- Population of the species as a viable component of the site;
  - Distribution of the species within site;
  - Distribution and extent of habitats supporting the species;
  - Structure, function and supporting processes of habitats supporting the species;
  - No significant disturbance of the species.
- 12.314 The closest Golden Eagle territory to the development site has three alternative nest sites. One is 600m to the west, with no line of sight from the nest. The other two are some 3km to the north-west. The last confirmed use of the closest nest site was in 2019, but survey work by the local raptor study group has been incomplete since then. One of the 3km eyries is being used in 2024.
- 12.315 As a result of the proposed development, there is the potential that collision risk mortality could occur in relation to the above noted species.
- 12.316 Chapter 9 of the EIAR covers Ornithology. It notes that Likely significant effects associated with ornithology identified during the review of desk-based information and field survey data are assessed, as follows:
- Collision risk mortality from birds colliding with turbine blades;
  - Displacement of birds due to proposed turbines and infrastructure; and
  - Direct habitat loss to construction of the development.
- 12.317 A 12-month survey period was undertaken from February 2023 – January 2024.

### *Survey Details*

- 12.318 Primary target species were identified as golden eagle, white tailed eagle, red throated diver, merlin, black throated diver and BoCC and Red listed Birds of Conservation Concern.
- 12.319 There was a lack of target species apart from white tailed eagle and red throated diver recorded on the site within the 500m zone during the 12 months VPS from February 2023 to January 2024.
- 12.320 Up to three white-tailed eagle are present at certain times of the year. They fly around the turbine area and rest or sit on the ground, near a turbine. Golden eagles were very rarely recorded within the 500m zone but were often noted offsite to the north. No other Schedule 1 raptors were recorded over the site.
- 12.321 A pair of red throated divers were present April-August on nearby lochs. No black throated divers were recorded.

- 12.322 No white-tailed eagle breed within 5km of the Site. The golden eagles on site have historically used three alternative breeding sites. Two of these nest sites are on crags more than 3km from the windfarm. They have also used a crag approximately 600m from the windfarm where breeding was last noted in 2019, but survey work has been incomplete since then. Turbines are not visible from any of these breeding sites.
- 12.323 Almost no golden eagle flights were recorded within the search area during the survey period. This is consistent with the nearest eyrie not being used over the survey period, and the relative unimportance of the development site for foraging. The frequent use of the eyrie 600m from the site in preceding years suggests that there has been no significant displacement as a consequence of the presence of the existing wind farm.
- 12.324 The survey advised that there appeared to be limited interaction between the two species of eagles with golden eagle keeping clear of the turbine area.
- 12.325 Some of the survey results from this report highlight changes in eagle activity between original survey work in 2005-2006:
- That there was some evidence that golden eagle activity close to the turbines has declined. This would appear to be associated whether the eagles are using the nearby nest site (600+m) or one of the two sites located 3km from Site.
  - That if the golden eagles are using the 600m nest site then they are not avoiding the Wind Farm and that displacement is not an issue.
  - The authors consider that the most likely collision risk mortality would be by White tailed Eagle and that this would continue to rise if White tailed Eagle flight activity increases.
  - There was no evidence for a significant negative impact on BoCC following construction and operation of the wind farm.
- 12.326 The report also suggests that the White-tailed Eagle population is rapidly increasing in Lewis and Harris from three pairs in 2003, 31 territories in 2019 and 42 territories in 2023 and, as such, it is possible that White tailed Eagle presence may be affecting Golden Eagle behaviour due to competition for resources.

#### *Construction*

- 12.327 The proposal is for repowering and replacing three turbines with three larger models, with only a very small change in footprint. Therefore, habitat loss, disturbance and displacement will be very limited during construction. Given the small amount of habitat that is to be lost on site, the effect will be short term and there are not likely to be any significant impacts on ornithology as a result of the construction phase of the proposed development.

#### *Operational Phase*

- 12.328 In the original survey work Golden Eagles were recorded regularly in the CRZ around the turbines. Post construction monitoring was carried out between 2015 and 2018 and Golden Eagles were still recorded regularly. In 2023 surveys recorded no Golden Eagle flights in the CRZ.
- 12.329 The reasons for this are unknown, however factors that can be considered and identified in Chapter 9 are:
- At present the Golden Eagles are breeding 3km from the turbines. In 2015-2019 they were breeding 700m from the turbines. All breeding eyries are out of sight from the turbines.
  - Given that they bred close to the turbines for a minimum of 5 years it is considered that displacement due to proximity of turbines is not an issue.
  - Flights were recorded regularly between 2015-2018 whilst the pair was present.
  - The pair is still present but breeding 3km distant. As golden eagles generally have a concentric site area it is presumed that the turbines are outwith their foraging site boundary at present.



- The pair was noted regularly in 2023 but flights were virtually all at distance to the north outwith the CRZ.
- Research suggests that Golden Eagles are prone to avoid turbines, however this is a response to turbines per se, and not turbine blade movement.

12.330 The three turbines already present on site are to be replaced with three taller turbines, with an increase in windswept area from 866m<sup>2</sup> to 2290m<sup>2</sup>.

12.331 Golden Eagles are still present in the territory and have bred close to the turbines in recent years and no collision mortalities for Golden Eagles was recorded during 2023. Based on these facts, the repowering with taller turbines would be considered not significant and based on the data generated from the surveys this assessment does not predict any likely significant ornithological residual effects associated with the proposed development.

12.332 In their consultation response, full details of which can be viewed at Appendix 3 to this Report, NatureScot have advised:

12.333 *Almost no golden eagle flights were recorded within the search area during the survey period. This is consistent with the nearest eyrie not being used over the survey period, and the relative unimportance of the development site for foraging. The frequent use of the 600m eyrie in preceding years, suggests that there has been no significant displacement as a consequence of the presence of the existing wind farm.*

12.334 *There were not enough recorded flights to run the collision risk model for golden eagles.*

12.335 *This golden eagle range overlaps the North Harris Mountains Special Protection Area (SPA). The EIA has not adequately assessed the impacts on the SPA. However, there is enough information for us to reach a conclusion.*

12.336 *NatureScot's advice is that there is likely to be a significant effect on the SPA. Therefore, an appropriate assessment is required.*

12.337 *Having made our own appraisal of the impacts on the site, based on its conservation objectives, we conclude that there is not likely to be an adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA.*

12.338 The Planning Service has carried out an Appropriate Assessment and similarly concluded that, based on its conservation objectives, there is not likely to be an adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA, subject to the imposition of a condition requiring the submission of scheme for monitoring the impact of the development on birds and in particular, Golden Eagle; this scheme for the written approval of the Comhairle, in consultation with NatureScot.

12.339 The monitoring shall include regular recording of bird strike casualties in particular and an annual report, over the first three years of operation summarising the results of monitoring, to be submitted to the Comhairle for consideration and for suggestions for any remedial, mitigation or compensation action, in order to establish effective monitoring in the interests of ornithology.

#### *Habitats & National Vegetation Classification Survey*

12.340 The habitats found within the Ecological Survey Area of the site were mainly dominated by blanket bog, wet and dry heath and acid grassland, with mosaics of grassland and wet/dry heath, with running water, ditch systems and lochans. Habitats assessed as a GWDTE included the following:

- MG10a and M15a/c have moderate groundwater dependency (Class 2 GWDTE).
- M17b, U5e and H10b have low groundwater dependency (Class 3 GWDTE)

- 12.341 Some of the moderate GWDTE habitats are in the form of mosaics with other habitats, and their groundwater dependency classification aligns with that of the dominant habitats.
- 12.342 It is concluded that the main habitats within the site which are described as groundwater-dependent (MG10a) may be due to disruption of the soil and drainage impacts from the previous works undertaken for the wind farm.
- 12.343 The M15a and M15c sub-communities may be due to bog habitat seepage and potential water flow through fractures and other discontinuities in the surrounding rock. The hydrogeology indicates that this is a low productivity aquifer (Class 2C) which does not widely contain groundwater in exploitable quantities but where possible some bedrock formations can locally yield water supplies. It may also be likely that there is no reliably available source of groundwater on which the NVC communities can depend. Therefore, they are likely to rely on a combination of rainfall and surface runoff, with some direct surface water in areas adjacent to watercourses and waterbodies.
- 12.344 Nevertheless, all of these habitats are considered to be sensitive, and a level of protection is required to minimise and, if necessary, mitigate any impacts that may occur.
- 12.345 The main habitat lost to the proposed repowering infrastructure is wet dwarf shrub heath (M15) with a loss of 0.17Ha, wet dwarf shrub heath (M15), and closely followed by dry heath (H10b) with a loss of 0.15Ha, and blanket bog (M17) at 0.12ha. However, the development may have indirect impacts on the surrounding blanket bog and upland heaths, therefore, a Habitat Management & Monitoring Plan (HMMP) is to be developed which considers biodiversity enhancement (further discussed at Biodiversity below), upland heath and peatland restoration which also benefits and maintains important hydrological connectivity throughout.
- 12.346 Good practice design and construction, and measures that will be outlined in the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) will minimise potential indirect effects of the development on any GWDTEs during the construction phase.
- 12.347 By way of further mitigation, a suitably qualified and experienced Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) will be appointed to provide ecological and environmental advice during construction, including the monitoring of compliance with the recommendations of this EIA Report and subsequent planning conditions and this will be secured by condition.
- 12.348 Distance and intervening topography ensure that the development will have no adverse impacts on the North Harris SAC and SSSI, designated for their heaths, grasslands, lochs and habitats. As assessed above, it is considered that the proposed development is unlikely to have adverse effects, based on its conservation objectives, or on the integrity of the SPA.
- 12.349 On assessment of the relevant submission of the EIAR and in light of the proposed mitigations above, the development is considered to comply with the policy.

#### Biodiversity

- 12.350 Impact on biodiversity is a key consideration in the suitability of development. Developments should conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity, in accordance with national and local guidance. Measures should be proportionate to the nature and scale of development.
- 12.351 The intent of Policy 3 of NPF4 is to protect biodiversity, reverse biodiversity loss, deliver positive effects from development and strengthen nature networks.
- 12.352 Proposals for national or major development, or for EIA development, need to demonstrate significant biodiversity enhancements, in addition to any proposed mitigation.

- 12.353 At present there is no single accepted methodology for measuring biodiversity loss or gain within Scotland, however the Scottish Government's Delivery Programme includes research exploring options for developing a biodiversity metric or other tool, specifically for use in Scotland.
- 12.354 The initial Outline Biodiversity Enhancement Management Plan (OBEMP) submitted to accompany the application was deemed to be inadequate as further consideration was required to be given to enhancement. A revised version was subsequently submitted in September 2024.
- 12.355 The revised biodiversity enhancement measures consist of both on-site measures, which are within the application site boundary, and off-setting measures, as discussed during a meeting between the Planning Service and the developer in July 2023.
- 12.356 The OBEMP advised that the provision of standard compensatory measures and enhancement of biodiversity for the proposed scheme will be via a final Biodiversity Enhancement Management Plan (BEMP), which will provide the framework for achieving biodiversity enhancement and ensuring its success and that this is an updated Outline Biodiversity Enhancement Management Plan which will be refined and developed post-consent. The final BEMP will confirm all biodiversity enhancement measures and management prescriptions and the locations. The final BEMP will be agreed by the Local Council (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) in consultation with NatureScot, forming a stakeholder group with the development owner and landowner. Reporting levels will be at the end of years 1,2,3,5,10 and 15. The monitoring and reporting plan will be reviewed following each year of survey work by the stakeholder group.
- 12.357 The management recommendations within this OBEMP are based on the findings of Chapter 8: Ecology, Appendix 8.1: Habitat Survey and National Vegetation Classification and Appendix 8.2: Protected Species Surveys.
- 12.358 In terms of the ecological context of the site, the OBEMP advised that the site is situated in an area of open upland ground with peatland, blanket bog, bog pools, wet heath, lochans and rocky outcrops. The soil consists of peaty gleys with dystrophic semi-confined peat, comprising a mixture of Class 1 and 2 Peat. The vegetation types include blanket bog, wet heath, dry heath and acid and neutral grassland to a lesser extent.
- 12.359 There are multiple drainage systems throughout and along track edges originating from the original wind farm development. The land is utilised for animal grazing. Baseline protected species surveys noted mountain hare and otter evidence, along with common frog.
- 12.360 The OBEMP goes on to provide the following information:

*Assessment of Potential Effects*

- 12.361 *It was noted that there would be direct loss of habitat of wet dwarf shrub heath, blanket bog, dry dwarf shrub heath and a mosaic of dry heath and acid grassland. The total direct habitat lost to the proposed repowering infrastructure for all habitat types was predicted to be 0.174Ha. The direct and potential indirect loss of wet heath, blanket bog, dry heath and acid grassland was considered minor and not significant within the context of the site and the wider area.*
- 12.362 Biodiversity enhancements have been identified in proportion to the opportunities on site, scale of the development and informed by the ecological baseline survey and desktop study of the habitats on the Isle of Harris, including woodland strategies, Western Isles Local Biodiversity Action Plan, Native Woodlands Habitat Action Plan.
- Off-setting measures*
- 12.363 As noted above, alterations to the initial report as a result of the initial NatureScot consultation response and the meeting with Comhairle's Planning Service was further developed and discussed

regarding the inclusion of off-setting part of the biodiversity enhancement plan with a selected local habitat management plan that is being undertaken on the Isle of Harris.

- 12.364 Multiple options and approaches were discussed with the final outcome focused on the Native Woodlands Habitat Action Plan and the Western Isles Woodland Strategy.
- 12.365 There is an active North Harris Trust Group which oversees woodland planting which aligns with the Native Woodlands Habitat Action Plan. The North Harris Trust (NHT) noted the following '*Native woodland has been identified as a Local Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitat for the Western Isles and it is clear from pollen analysis that woodland would once have been much more widespread in the Western Isles than it is now, with trees covering at least half of the land mass at one point*'. The NHT has been developing an interconnected network of woodland habitat and aims to increase the amount of woodland in North Harris wherever possible.
- 12.366 Following discussions between Constantine Wind Energy Ltd and NHT in regard to the best approach it was concluded that funding to the NHT for woodland planting would have a valuable positive impact on woodland enhancement, and ecosystem services associated with woodlands. Therefore, it was concluded that a funding package was to be given to NHT to be utilised for the woodland planting projects that benefitted the Native Woodlands Habitat Action Plan.
- 12.367 As this proposal is to take place outwith the planning boundary, conventional planning conditions are not appropriate and a Section 75 agreement, under Section 75 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 and sometimes known as a planning obligation agreement will be required.
- 12.368 While planning conditions control how a project is built and used, Section 75 agreements tend to provide for financial contributions and any requirements affecting land outside the area to which the planning permission relates (outside the 'red line boundary').
- 12.369 At the time of writing this Report, the Heads of Terms of a Section 75 agreement is under discussion between the developers, landowner and the Comhairle (Legal Services); securing this proposed enhancement will be positive and is of an ecological benefit and the most appropriate biodiversity measures specific to the area.

#### *On-site measures*

- 12.370 The National Vegetation Classification (NVC) habitats on site have been determined as mainly in good overall condition, with slight impact due to drainage channels causing bare peat, edge effects of track and hardstandings, and grazing. An area of habitat has been impacted by the wind farm development track and overhead powerline where the wind farm track leaves the main A859 road.
- 12.371 The main aim for on-site measures is to restore and enhance the habitat along tracks, drains/ditches, and thus enhance peatland restoration in selected areas with the objective to reduce bare peat soil by re-profiling of exposed peat along drains and revegetating the exposed surface. This is to include other areas where bare peat is exposed and any major drainage/ditch systems that impact the function of the peatland habitats on-site.
- 12.372 The OBEMP advises that the proposed development provides ample opportunity to improve and enhance the habitat along the track edges and ditches that have been impacted by the present wind farm during its development. This mainly includes exposed bare peat. The ditch edges will be re-profiled and vegetated turves placed over exposed peat. The vegetated turves are to be sourced within the vicinity, where there is ample healthy vegetation.

#### *Habitat Protection & Enhancement*

- 12.373 There are multiple bog pools and flush channels in the area of the proposed development, and it is essential that these are protected as they provide essential habitat for wetland plants, dragonflies and

other invertebrates. The CEMP will provide standard mitigation procedures to safeguard these sensitive habitats.

12.374 It is also proposed that an education pack is produced for the public and schools to highlight the diversity in the area, such as rocky outcrops, bog habitats and pools that are host to birds, invertebrates, amphibians and diverse plants such as mosses and insectivorous plants. The existing notice board on the local fauna and flora at the entrance to the Monan Wind Farm is proposed to be updated and expanded as part of community education and involvement. The notice board proposed is to be child and community-friendly and may include local artwork, such as designed by a local designer and illustrator or a carved stone or other material.

#### *Vegetation Monitoring*

12.375 The objective of the vegetation monitoring (part of on-site measures) will be to determine the effectiveness of the management and assess the need to alter management prescriptions. Quantitative transects and fixed-point surveys will be undertaken where restoration and enhancement have been undertaken. Monitoring of vegetation will record the main species colonising the site, the location and extent of any undesirable species, and the extent of re-vegetation which has occurred at the time of each survey. Appropriate areas for targeting these surveys along with survey routes will be identified following the baseline survey. At each quadrat location in each survey year a fixed geo-tagged photograph will be taken to visually catalogue regeneration. The monitoring will give an indication of the rate of vegetation regeneration and whether further measures are necessary.

12.376 GPS coordinates will be taken of each transect location and all quadrats during the first survey, so that the same area is revisited and accurately surveyed over time. If vegetation surveys reveal areas that are not regenerating at an acceptable rate, remedial action is to be considered and implemented.

12.377 In response to the revised OBEMP, NatureScot advised that in their original response to this planning application, they had highlighted some shortcomings with the off-setting and enhancement proposals which they considered may limit their effectiveness and likelihood of delivering the results intended.

12.378 However, the proposals in the revised outline OBEMP, in particular the plan to work with the North Harris Trust to deliver a woodland planting programme, are welcome.

12.379 NatureScot also advised that they were content with the proposals to enhance track edges and bog pool habitat and provide an updated education pack for the site.

12.380 One concern raised by NatureScot was that the proposal is to be secured by a legally binding mechanism to deliver the biodiversity results intended.

12.381 As noted above, this element of the proposal is to be secured by a Section 75 agreement, which is currently in the process of being agreed.

12.382 Subject to the completion of the Section 75 agreement, it is considered that the proposals demonstrate biodiversity enhancements, in addition to proposed mitigation.

#### Archaeology and Historic assets and places

12.383 The policy context states that the importance of the Island's history and culture is demonstrated by their abundant archaeology and much can be learnt about the past from these remains. Key factors such as low impact farming practices and environmental conditions have meant that archaeological sites and features have been well preserved within the machair, beneath the peat and submerged underwater. Therefore, development affecting archaeology should be carefully assessed to ensure preservation of any information that such sites might provide.

- 12.384 It has been determined that archaeological mitigation for the existing site has been carried out previously and that any new works required would be unlikely to encounter any unknown archaeological deposits. The potential for indirect impact on known archaeological sites was considered to be low/negligible at the Scoping stage and for these reasons Cultural Heritage & Archaeology were screened out of the EIAR and the Comhairle Archaeology Service does not recommend any archaeological mitigation regarding this application.
- 12.385 However, the policy also goes on to state that Scheduled Monuments (scheduled archaeological remains) are nationally important monuments or archaeological sites and where there is potential for a proposal to have a direct impact on a scheduled monument, the written consent of Historic Environment Scotland (HES) is required in addition to any other consent required.
- 12.386 Historic Environment Scotland (HES) were consulted on this application in relation to the potential impacts on the Scheduled Monument Bunavoneadar whaling station (SM5362), which is approximately 1km from the site (full response at Appendix 3 to this Report).
- 12.387 This monument comprises the remains of a well-preserved whaling station built around 1900 and abandoned around 1939. The monument consists of a large slipway, landing platform, and handling areas, along with the remains of several substantial processing buildings. A brick chimney stack, one of two originally built, survives almost intact as do anchor blocks for vats, boilers, winches, and other heavy equipment. The monument is of national importance as the best-preserved example of a whaling shore station in the country. It represents one of a very small group of such stations founded around Scottish Coasts by joint British/Norwegian companies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
- 12.388 HES considered the original planning application relating to this development, which was granted in 2008 for three wind turbines, at a maximum tip height of 86m and associated infrastructure (ref 06/00290). HES had no objection to the original application, although they noted that all three turbines would likely be visible as part of the wider landscape backdrop to whaling station.
- 12.389 In relation to the current application, HES have confirmed that they consider that the proposed turbines will be screened from the monument by the intervening topography and though the turbines may be visible in some long-distance views of the site from the sea, they are at a sufficient distance that they will not impact on the visual relationship of the station with the surrounding coastline and the turbines are not likely to be visible from the site itself and therefore will not detract from the dominance of the industrial chimney over its immediate surroundings in the bay.
- 12.390 HES concluded their response by saying that although the turbines may be visible in key views of the monument on approaches from the sea, they do not assess these impacts as significant and this assessment is consistent with their view on the previous consultation on the Monan Wind Farm site in 2006 for three wind turbines at a maximum tip height of 86m and associated infrastructure.
- 12.391 In light of the above, it is considered that the development is assessed as not having significant impact on the Scheduled Monument Bunavoneadar whaling station (SM5362) and is in compliance with the policy.

#### Supplementary Guidance: Supplementary Guidance for Wind Energy Development

- 12.392 As noted at the Policy Context section at the beginning of this Report, the proposal has been considered against the SG for Wind Energy Development (adopted November 2021) at all relevant policy assessments and covered the following SG policies:
- Economic impacts and Benefits
  - Landscape and Visual Impact
  - Aviation and Defence
  - Noise
  - Community Amenity

- Neighbouring Developments
- Historic Resources
- Natural Heritage
- Peat and Soil Resources
- (Borrow Pits policy not required, as neighbouring operational quarry to be utilised)
- Repowering
- Planning Obligations
- Decommissioning
- Cumulative Impacts

12.393 Section 3 of the Supplementary Guidance: Supplementary Guidance for Wind Energy Development relates specifically to Repowering and goes on to state:

12.394 *Repowering generally involves the replacement of existing wind turbines with fewer, larger turbines, and taking advantage of opportunities to combine wind generation with energy storage. Proposals to repower existing wind farms which are already in suitable sites where impacts have been shown to be capable of mitigation will maintain or enhance installed capacity, underpinning renewable energy generation targets.*

12.395 *Scottish Government in principle supports repowering at existing wind farms. The Comhairle supports the principle of repowering in appropriate circumstances. Applications for the repowering of a wind farm will be considered against this Supplementary Guidance. Areas identified for wind farms shall, subject to a satisfactory policy assessment, be suitable for use in perpetuity, although consents will continue to be time limited. The operating period of an individual wind farm is a matter which developers can consider and discuss prior to the submission of an application. It should be noted that this does not remove the need for decommissioning provisions, where considered appropriate Repowering schemes will be treated as new planning applications and will be assessed on a case by case basis.*

12.396 The current use of a site as an operating wind farm will be a significant material consideration in deciding an application. When considering new proposals, the Comhairle will take into account the extent to which the proposals make use of existing infrastructure and limit the need for additional footprint; and will balance this with all of the policy considerations set out in the OHLDP and this Supplementary Guidance. This will include consideration of the current situation with regards to the natural and historic environment, including designations and features designated since the original permission was granted.

12.397 The proposal has been fully assessed throughout the Report in regards to the above relevant sections of the SG and are considered to meet the necessary requirements and are to be conditioned where relevant (Aviation and Defence, Noise, Natural Heritage, Peat and Soil Resources, Decommissioning) to ensure compliance with relevant matters.

#### Material Planning Considerations

##### *Planning History*

12.398 The site is an existing windfarm site, where in 2008 consent was granted for three wind turbines at a maximum tip height of 86m and associated infrastructure (ref 06/00290). This consent was then varied in 2012 to reduce the height of the turbines to the height of the operational scheme due to turbine supply issues for the site at this time. This application is to 'repower' the site and seeks consent for turbines of height consistent with the original 2008 consent.

12.399 The current use of a site as an operating wind farm is a material consideration, afforded considerable weight in deciding this application.

### *Climate Change*

- 12.400 It is anticipated that over its 35-year lifetime the project is expected to result in a CO<sub>2</sub> saving of ~200,500 tonnes and it is anticipated that the carbon expended in creating the development will be offset in approximately two years (equivalent to 6% of its 35-year operational lifespan). The proposed development is therefore expected to have a beneficial effect on climate change in terms of offsetting greenhouse gas emissions.
- 12.401 The assessment demonstrates that the development would make a modest, but nevertheless positive, contribution to the national target of achieving net zero by 2045.

### **SECTION 75 AGREEMENT**

- 13.1 As referenced at relevant sections of the Report, elements of the development are beyond the remit of conventional planning conditions (works to take place outwith the planning boundary of the site and financial considerations) and as such a Section 75 agreement, under Section 75 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 will be required and is in the process of consideration between parties.

### **REASONED CONCLUSION**

- 14.1 Planning Authorities are required to determine planning applications in accordance with the Development Plan unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise. An assessment has been carried out against the provisions of the National Planning Framework 4 and the Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan and consideration has been given to all material planning considerations.
- 14.2 The planning application was publicised in accordance with the relevant regulations and was made available to inspect in person and on-line throughout the application period with no public comments or representations forthcoming.
- 14.3 Having regard to the information available, including the EIA Report, related appendices and figures, and responses given to consultations from specialist consultees on the proposal, it is considered that the planning authority has sufficient information to enable it to reach a reasoned conclusion on the proposal.
- 14.4 This Report sets out the background to the proposal and a description of the proposed development. The legislative context is identified, and the planning history provided, along with information about consultation advice and the public participation process. The Report then identifies the planning policy context, before undertaking an assessment of the proposed development. This concludes with an overall assessment of the likely significant effects of the proposal and the planning balance.
- 14.5 Mitigation measures that are considered necessary can be secured by planning conditions as identified at Appendix 1 to this Report. Other mitigation measures relating to decommissioning/restoration and off-site biodiversity, as identified above, would be subject to a Section 75 Agreement.
- 14.6 For the reasons given in the assessment within this Report and subject to the satisfactory implementation of these mitigation measures, it is considered that the proposal would have a largely neutral residual effect on the following issues: biodiversity, health and safety, aviation, broadcasting, telecommunications, electricity, traffic and transport, noise, shadow flicker, Hydrology (water environment and water supply, drainage) and soils.
- 14.7 No adverse impacts are anticipated to the setting of heritage assets, and in relation to climate change, where the development will make a modest but positive contribution.
- 14.8 It is concluded that the proposed development, while it would result in an element of landscape change, it would not result in harm to landscape character, to visual impacts, or to the special qualities



of the South Lewis, Harris & North Uist National Scenic Area (NSA) or the Harris-Uig Hills Wild Land Area (WLA).

- 14.9 It is also concluded that the proposed development is not likely to have an adverse effect on ecology or ornithology and, based on its conservation objectives, is therefore not likely to have an adverse effect on the integrity of the North Harris SPA, West Coast of the Outer Hebrides SPA, the North Harris SAC or the North Harris SSSI.
- 14.10 Additionally, the implementation of this development in this location has previously been considered to be acceptable and without a significant departure or change in relevant policies in the intervening years, remains so.
- 14.11 Overall, it is considered that the proposed development would satisfactorily meet the policy requirements of the Development Plan taken as a whole and would be acceptable, including in relation to its effects on the environment.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

- 15.1 It is recommended that the EIA planning application be approved subject to the conditions set out in Appendix 1 to this Report.