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6.0 Landscape and Visual

6.1 Introduction

This assessment defines the existing landscape/townscape and visual baseline environments; assesses their sensitivity to change; describes the key landscape/townscape and visual related aspects of the proposed development; describes the nature of the anticipated changes and assesses the effects arising during construction, operation and decommissioning.

The assessment has been carried out by Mary Fisher and Mark Evans of Abseline LLP. Both are Chartered Landscape Architects with more than 10 years of experience of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA). To inform the assessment, Site visits were made to various locations within the study area including, but not restricted to, representative viewpoints by the assessment team during 2021-2023.

The chapter is supported by:

- Technical Appendix 6.1 Methodology
- Technical Appendix 6.2 Visual Aids
- Technical Appendix 6.3 Viewpoint Analysis
- Technical Appendix 6.4 Effects lower than Moderate
- Technical Appendix 6.5 Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA)

Figures 6.1 – 6.12, Viewpoints 1 – 23 and Illustrative Viewpoints A - C are referenced in the text where relevant.

6.2 Policy and Guidance

Planning policies relevant to landscape and visual are listed below. Further information regarding planning policy is provided in **Chapter 4: Climate Change, Renewable Energy and Planning Policy**, and in **Chapter 5: Approach to EIA and Consultation**. The **Planning Statement** addresses the planning policy position in full and should be referred to.

6.2.1 National planning policy

Relevant national planning policy is set out within National Planning Framework 4 ¹.

Within NPF4, Policy 11 Energy is of specific relevance to the proposed development and indicates in relation to landscape and visual matters that project design and mitigation should demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed:

- *“on communities and individual dwellings, including, residential amenity, visual impact ..”;*
- *“significant landscape and visual impacts, recognising that such impacts are to be expected for some forms of renewable energy. Where impacts are localised and/ or appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they will generally be considered to be acceptable;”*

Policy 11 also indicates that Policy 4 will be taken into account in relation to effects on international or national designations but is silent in relation to local designations. Policy 4 sets out criteria identifying that the “overall integrity” of a National Park or National Scenic Area should not be compromised by development, with other criteria within that policy indicating that significant effects on the qualities for which landscapes have been designated or on the integrity of locally

¹ Scottish Government (2023). National Planning Framework 4. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/>



designated landscapes may be outweighed by “social, environmental or economic benefits of at least local importance”.

Although not planning policy, the Onshore Wind Policy Statement (OWPS) ² sets out the Scottish Government’s policy towards onshore wind and explicitly notes that:

“Meeting our climate targets will require a rapid transformation across all sectors of our economy and society. This means ensuring the right development happens in the right place. Meeting the ambition of a minimum installed capacity of 20 GW of onshore wind in Scotland by 2030 will require taller and more efficient turbines. This will change the landscape” (their underlining).

The OWPS also notes within the section relating to landscape and visual impacts that outside of National Parks and National Scenic areas the criteria within NPF4 include “stronger weight being afforded to the contribution of the development to the climate emergency” and that “Landscape Sensitivity Studies (LSS) are strategic appraisals of the relative sensitivity of landscapes ... a tool to help guide development to less sensitive locations. ... LSS should not be used in isolation to determine the acceptability of a development type in landscape terms..., however they will continue to be a useful tool in assessing the specific sensitivities within an area.”

6.2.2 Local planning policy

The relevant local plan is Moray Local Development Plan 2020 ³. Key policies relevant to this assessment include:

- DP9 Wind Energy – which seeks that wind energy development should not have “unacceptable significant adverse impact on landscape character or visual amenity” and should be “appropriate to the scale and character of its setting, respects the main features of the site and the wider environment and addresses the potential for mitigation”. The policy also references the Wind Energy Landscape Capacity study in relation to considering the effects of wind energy development.
- EP3 Special Landscape Areas and Landscape Character which references the Moray Local Landscape Designation Review in relation to the considering effects on Special Landscape Areas, and requires that “New developments must be designed to reflect the landscape characteristics identified in the Landscape Character Assessment of the area in which they are proposed.”

Part of the study area is within Aberdeenshire, and the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (2023) ⁴ identifies Special Landscape Areas (SLA) under policy E2, referring to Appendix 13 to the Local Development Plan in relation to “assessing potential impact” of development. Policy C2 which relates to renewable energy refers to the Strategic Landscape Capacity Assessment for Wind Energy in relation to considering wind farms.

6.2.3 Policy considerations

Taking account of these policies, this assessment considers effects on landscape and visual receptors; with the assessment for designated landscapes identifying any effects on the qualities for which they are designated and the effect on the overall integrity of the designation.

Baseline studies also inform this assessment as set out below.

² Scottish Government (2022). Onshore Wind Policy Statement. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/onshore-wind-policy-statement-2022/>

³ Moray Council (2020). Moray Local Development Plan. Available at: http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_133431.html

⁴ Aberdeenshire Council (2023). Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan. Available at: <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans-and-policies/ldp-2023/>



6.2.4 Local Guidance and Baseline studies

In addition to the policy documents identified above, there are relevant local guidance and baseline documents as follows:

- NatureScot National Landscape Character Assessment (2019) ⁵;
- Moray Wind Energy Landscape Sensitivity Study (MWELSS, 2023) ⁶;
- Strategic Landscape Capacity Assessment for Wind Energy in Aberdeenshire (SLCAWEA, 2014) ⁷;
- Moray Local Landscape Designation Review (LLDR, 2018) ⁸; and
- Appendix 13 Special Landscape Areas (Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2023) ⁹.

These baseline studies are further considered in section 6.4.2.3.

6.3 Scope and Consultation

6.3.1 Consultation

Consultation was undertaken both via scoping and pre-application consultation with Moray Council (MC), and is summarised in **Table 6.1**.

Table 6.1: Consultation Summary

Consultee	Comment	Response
Energy Consents Unit	As the maximum blade tip height of turbines exceeds 150m the LVIA, as detailed in section 6 of the scoping report, must include a robust night time Assessment with agreed viewpoints to consider the effects of aviation lighting and how the chosen lighting mitigates the effects.	A night-time Assessment is provided as part of this chapter.
Energy Consents Unit	The proposed viewpoints are given at Chapter 6, section 6.2.10, Table 6-1. of the scoping report. Scottish Ministers request at this stage that any additional viewpoints, wireframes, ZTV and photomontages as requested by MC, Aberdeenshire Council, Historic Environment Scotland (HES) and NatureScot (NS) as set out in their relevant responses at Annex A are considered in full.	The additional viewpoints requested by MC and NS have been accepted and are included in the assessment. Additional viewpoints requested by HES are included within the Cultural Heritage chapter. Aberdeenshire Council did not request any further viewpoints.
Moray Council	Agree that the Cairngorms National Park should be scoped out of the detailed LVIA due to distance.	

⁵ NatureScot (2019). National Landscape Character Assessment. Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/landscape-character-assessment/scottish-landscape-character-types-map-and-descriptions>

⁶ Moray Council (2017). Moray Wind Energy Landscape Sensitivity Study. Available at: http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_80938.html

⁷ Aberdeenshire Council (2014). Strategic Landscape Capacity Assessment for Wind Energy in Aberdeenshire. Available at: <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans-and-policies/the-strategic-landscape-capacity-for-windfarms/>

⁸ Moray Council (2018). Moray Local Landscape Designation Review. Available at: http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_121575.html

⁹ Aberdeenshire Council (2023). Appendix 13 Special Landscape Areas. Available at: <https://online.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/ldpmedia/LDP2021/Appendix13AberdeenshireSpecialLandscapeAreas.pdf>



Consultee	Comment	Response
Moray Council	<p>The assessment of effects on valued landscapes in Moray should be focussed on the following Special Landscape Areas (SLAs):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spey Valley and Gordon Castle Policies • Spey Valley • Portgordon to Cullen Coast • Lossiemouth to Portgordon Coast <p>While there could be some potential visibility of the proposal from within the Deveron Valley SLA, it is likely that this designated landscape could be scoped out of the detailed assessment due to the strong containment provided by the valley landform and vegetation which could reduce intrusion and effects on the intimate character of this landscape which are key reasons for its designation.</p> <p>The assessment of effects should consider potential effects on the character and special qualities of each SLA, as set out in the 2018 Local Landscape Designation Review which can be downloaded from MC's website.</p>	<p>The identified SLAs are considered in this chapter and the assessment considers effects on the special qualities of these landscapes as set out in the 2018 Local Landscape Designations Review.</p> <p>The consideration of effects on landscape character is undertaken separately and informs the consideration of effects on special qualities.</p>
Moray Council	<p>Cullen House and Castle Gordon Inventory listed Garden and Designed Landscapes (GDL)...we would expect to see a detailed assessment of potential effects on their character and from views to and from these landscapes.</p>	<p>GDLs which have a notable tourism aspect, such as Castle Gordon, will be included in the LVIA as such and visual effects on visitors to these will be considered.</p> <p>All GDLs are assessed in the Cultural Heritage chapter.</p>
Moray Council	<p>A detailed ZTV should be provided in the EIA-R based on an OS 1:50,000 scale map base within 15km of the proposal to allow more accurate appraisal of potential visibility in the local area.</p>	<p>Detailed Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) studies are provided as Figure 6.2 and Figure 6.3.</p>
Moray Council	<p>The viewpoints shown on Figure 6.1 and listed in Table 6-1 of the Scoping Report are likely to provide an adequate range of representative views although it is requested that the following additional viewpoints are also included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gordon Castle Garden and Designed Landscape • The B9015 south-west of Fochabers • Ben Aigan • The Speyside Way (replacing scoping viewpoint 19) • Castle Hill at Cullen (as a wireline) 	<p>These viewpoints are considered in this chapter.</p>
NatureScot	<p>Suggest a viewpoint representing a key route is considered for the A96 between Keith and Huntly at approximately NJ 4407 4675.</p>	<p>An additional viewpoint along the A96 is included.</p>
NatureScot	<p>If the applicant is confident of agreeing a reduced aviation lighting requirement with the Civil Aviation Authority then, whether or not this is confirmed at the point of application, it would be helpful if a night-time visualisation could be prepared to represent the anticipated reduced lighting scenario in addition to the default full lighting requirement</p>	<p>The night-time assessment considers effects of a reduced lighting scheme (that has been agreed with the CAA) as illustrated on Figure 6.12 and this is illustrated by relevant visualisation – including night-</p>



Consultee	Comment	Response
		time photomontages at viewpoints 2, 6, 11 and 18.
Aberdeenshire Council	It is clear that the proposed development would be theoretically visible from large swathes of Aberdeenshire. The inclusion of viewpoint locations within Aberdeenshire is to be welcomed.	Viewpoints within Aberdeenshire are included in this assessment.
Aberdeenshire Council	Reference is made to the Deveron Valley SLA within paragraph 6.1.4 of the Scoping Report, beyond which no further mention is made. The ZTV identifies areas of high theoretical visibility within this designation, therefore the decision not to proceed with a viewpoint within the SLA should be expanded upon and justified.	A wireline has been provided from this designated area – see illustrative viewpoint C.
Aberdeenshire Council	It is noted that the Landscape and Visual Impact chapter states that some viewpoints may consist solely of a wireframe drawing. It is difficult to comment upon the acceptability of this approach, without said viewpoints being clearly identified as wireframe only.	All 23 agreed viewpoints are presented as full NatureScot format visualisations. Additional illustrative wirelines have been provided from a local road to the north of the Site near Greenbank, Findochty and Deveron Valley SLA.

6.3.2 Effects Scoped Out

It was agreed by consultees at the scoping stage that effects outside of the study areas (see below) and effects on the Cairngorms National Park could be scoped out of assessment.

6.4 Approach and Methodology

6.4.1 Scope of Assessment

This assessment considers effects on landscape character, visual receptors and designated landscapes, both during the day and at night, and both alone and cumulative with other wind farms. Effects on the private amenity of individual residential properties are considered in **Technical Appendix 6.5: RVAA**.

6.4.2 Baseline

6.4.2.1 Study Area

The following study areas were agreed for this assessment:

- 25km for the detailed LVIA;
- 20km for night-time effects from aviation lighting;
- 45km cumulative search area with single turbines and turbines under 50m only considered within 5km;
- 2km for effects on residential visual amenity (**Technical Appendix 6.5: Residential Visual Amenity Assessment**).

6.4.2.2 Information and Data Sources

Information and data sources that have informed this assessment include the documents listed in section 6.3.1 above; ordnance survey mapping and terrain data as referenced on figures; Ordnance



Survey AddressBase Data and the Moray Council planning public access portal to identify residential properties, and planning application information for cumulative developments.

6.4.2.3 Desk Study / Field Survey

Data sources as identified in section 6.4.2.2 were reviewed and site visits were undertaken to inform the baseline assessment.

Review and Use of Landscape Capacity Studies

The two landscape capacity studies listed in section 6.2.4 above are used to inform consideration of landscape sensitivity within their areas of coverage. In considering the findings of these studies the following advice within NatureScot (formerly SNH) 'Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Guidance' (NatureScot, 2022) is taken into account. This guidance which post-dates all of the above studies directs that a sensitivity based approach be used to "inform plans, policies, guidance and strategies at a range of scales" including (inter alia) "individual proposals, where their indication of relative sensitivity can inform the site selection process, pre-application stages, and can provide information for subsequent ... LVIA." This recent guidance specifically notes the following key points which have a bearing on the application of the above studies in relation to this assessment:

"A finding of 'high' sensitivity does not necessarily mean that there is no ability to accommodate development and 'low' sensitivity does not necessarily mean that there is definitely potential for development..."

"In the past, many so-called capacity studies actually dealt with susceptibility rather than capacity Capacity is determined by wider spatial planning, societal and technical considerations. Most older studies should be considered as landscape sensitivity assessments, or even susceptibility assessments if value was not included, unless relevant quantities, e.g. for housing, were set for the study area...."

"Existing assessments provide useful evidence and understanding to inform spatial planning. However, updating may well be beneficial, particularly for wind farm studies, as development patterns and technology change."

As there are no development targets or quantities set for wind development within each area, these local landscape studies are considered as providing relevant sensitivity information within this LVIA. Both GLVIA3 and the 2022 NatureScot guidance identify landscape value, alongside susceptibility, as contributory judgements to overall landscape sensitivity (as set out within the LVIA methodology in Appendix 6.1). Landscape Institute TGN 02/21 'Assessing landscape value outside national designations (2021)'¹⁰ is the most recent guidance which identifies which factors should be considered in relation to landscape value. In line with these guidance documents, the factors considered in each of the two landscape capacity studies are used to inform the assessment as set out in **Table 6.2** and **Table 6.3** below:

Table 6.2: Use of Criteria in MWELSS

Criterion	Relates to	Comments
Scale	Susceptibility	-
Landform	Susceptibility	-
Land cover	Susceptibility	-
Built Environment	Susceptibility	The previous version of this guidance, the 'Moray Wind Energy Landscape Capacity Study' (MWELCS, 2017) ¹¹ , had one criterion

¹⁰ 'Landscape Institute (2021). Technical Guidance Note 02/21 Assessing landscape value outside national designations. Available at: <https://landscapewpstorage01.blob.core.windows.net/www-landscapeinstitute-org/2021/05/tgn-02-21-assessing-landscape-value-outside-national-designations.pdf>

¹¹ Moray Council (2017). Moray Wind Energy Landscape Capacity Study. Available at: http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_81378.html



Criterion	Relates to	Comments
		called 'Built Environment' and another relating to potential cumulative effects based on the proximity of other wind farms. In this 2023 version, the two appear to have been combined with emphasis being placed on the potential cumulative effects in reaching judgements. The potential for cumulative effects with other developments is not a measure of the susceptibility of the landscape character to change and using it in this way has the effect of increasing the susceptibility ratings for landscapes previously found to be suitable for wind development (i.e. those likely to be of lower susceptibility). For example, the host landscape type has changed from being rated as medium-low susceptibility in relation to 'built environment' to High between to 2017 and 2023 studies. The ratings from the 2017 study are used in this assessment.
Landscape Context	Susceptibility	This relates to the potential for effects on adjacent landscapes arising from development within a landscape type and is thus only relevant for the host LCT.
Visual Amenity	Susceptibility	This criterion includes a mix of information. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness, key views, skylines, landmarks and visual relationships with adjacent landscapes are relevant to susceptibility and are taken into account. • References to visual receptors such as roads are relevant to visual effects not landscape susceptibility. • References to visual relationships with adjacent landscapes are sometimes duplicated from the Landscape Context criterion and are included only under that heading where duplication arises.
Landscape Values	Value	-

Table 6.3: Use of Criteria in SLCAWEA

Criterion	Relates to	Comments
Scale	Susceptibility	-
Landform	Susceptibility	-
Pattern	Susceptibility	-
Development	Susceptibility	-
Quality	Value	This term is usually synonymous with 'Condition' as indicated by the definition in GLVIA3, however in the SLCAWEA the descriptions focus on landscape value.
Elements and Features	Susceptibility	-
Context	Susceptibility	-
Visual Receptors	N/A	Not a relevant criterion for either landscape susceptibility or value – used in the capacity study as an indicator of potential visual effects.
Internal Visibility	N/A	Not a relevant criterion for either susceptibility or value
External Visibility	Susceptibility	-
All 'Landscape Value' criteria	Value	-



Both Moray and Aberdeenshire Councils have recently reviewed their local landscape designations. The studies are broadly in line with current NatureScot guidance in relation to such studies and on this basis it is not considered that further detailed evaluation is needed to inform this assessment in relation to landscape value. Accordingly, this assessment uses the criteria listed above relating to susceptibility and designations to reach a judgement in relation to landscape sensitivity.

The MWELSS also offers some advice on the suitability of landscapes in relation to turbine sizes, but this is provided in the context of a consent for Aultmore Wind farm and makes no specific recommendations in relation to the host landscape type and the placement of turbines within it except that the *"simple, gently undulating landform, often uniform land cover, very sparse settlement and medium to large scale of the lower, less distinctive plateau-like hills"* which include the Site are included as potential opportunities for development, and constraints are identified as *"landmark hills of Bin of Cullen and Meikle Balloch"*; the potential for effects on adjacent smaller scale settled landscapes, and the importance of the western parts of the LCT (which do not include the Site) as *"a backdrop to Fochabers, the Spey valley and Gordon Castle designed landscape."*

Review and use of Local Designation Studies

As noted above, both the Moray and Aberdeenshire studies relating to local landscape are relatively recent and broadly in line with current guidance on undertaking such studies. As set out within **Technical Appendix 6.1: LVIA Methodology**, consideration of effects on designated landscapes is undertaken by considering the effects on their purposes of designation and the special qualities for which they are designated.

The Moray LLDR describes each SLA under a number of headings. The 'Reasons for designation' provide a succinct description of what is important about each SLA. The section entitled 'Description of character and special qualities' is lengthy and does not separate out specific special qualities from general description. On this basis, the 'Reasons for designation' are used as the basis for assessment of effects on SLAs within Moray.

The Aberdeenshire study (Appendix 13 SLAs of the Aberdeenshire Local Plan) provides a bulleted list of *"aspects and features"* that are *"considered worthy of recognition"* within each SLA, and these are used as the basis for assessment of effects on SLAs within Aberdeenshire.

6.4.2.4 Assessment Methods

Landscape and Visual Impact assessment findings are formed via professional judgement informed by a combination of baseline studies, visual aids (including ZTV studies) and Site surveys. The primary guidance in relation to carrying out such assessments is 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd edition' (GLVIA3)¹². That document has informed this assessment as well as other relevant guidance referenced within **Technical Appendix 6.1** which sets out the detailed methodology. Key terms used within the assessment are described below and a glossary is provided within **Technical Appendix 6.1**.

6.4.3 Sensitivity Criteria

Sensitivity is judged taking into account the component judgements about the value and susceptibility of the receptor as illustrated in **Table 6.4**. Where sensitivity is judged to lie between levels, an intermediate assessment will be adopted. A slightly greater weight is given to susceptibility in judging sensitivity of visual receptors as indicated in **Table 6.5**:

¹² Landscape Institute and IEMA (2013). Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd edition.



Table 6.4: Landscape Sensitivity

LANDSCAPE RECEPTORS		Susceptibility		
		High	Medium	Low
Value	National	High	High/Medium	Medium
	Regional	High/Medium	Medium	Medium/Low
	Community	Medium	Medium/Low	Low

Table 6.5: Visual Sensitivity

VISUAL RECEPTORS		Susceptibility		
		High	Medium	Low
Value	National	High	High/Medium	Medium
	Regional	High/Medium	High/Medium	Medium/Low
	Community	High/Medium	Medium	Low

6.4.4 Magnitude of Effect

Scale of effect is the primary factor in determining magnitude; which may be higher if the effect is particularly widespread and/or long lasting, or lower if it is constrained in geographic extent and/or timescale. **Table 6.6** illustrates how this judgement is considered as a two-step process.

Table 6.6: Magnitude

Scale / extent	Large	Medium	Small	Negligible
Wide	Substantial			
Intermediate		Moderate		
Localised			Slight	
Limited				Negligible

Stage 1 Result / Duration	Substantial	Moderate	Slight	Negligible
Permanent	Substantial			
Long-term		Moderate		
Medium-term			Slight	
Short-term				Negligible

Where magnitude is judged to lie between levels, an intermediate assessment will be adopted.



6.4.5 Significance Criteria

The significance of any identified landscape or visual effect is assessed as major, moderate, minor or negligible. These categories are based on the consideration of sensitivity with the predicted magnitude of change. **Table 6.7** is not used as a prescriptive tool and illustrates the typical outcomes, allowing for the exercise of professional judgement. In some instances, a particular parameter may be considered as having a determining effect on the analysis.

Table 6.7: Significance

		Magnitude of change			
		Substantial	Moderate	Slight	Negligible
Receptor Sensitivity	High	Major	Major/Moderate	Moderate	Minor
	Medium	Major/Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/Minor	Minor/Negligible
	Low	Moderate	Moderate/ Minor	Minor	Negligible

Where the effect has been classified as Major or Major/Moderate this is considered to be equivalent to likely significant effects referred to in the EIA Regulations. The conclusion that some effects are 'significant' should not be taken to imply that they should warrant refusal in any decision-making process.

6.4.6 Distances

Where distances are given in the assessment, these are approximate distances between the nearest turbine and the nearest part of the receptor in question, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

6.5 Environmental Baseline and Potential Sources of Impact

6.5.1 Current Baseline

6.5.1.1 Introduction

An overview of the baseline study results is provided in this section with the full baseline description of the individual landscape and visual receptors being provided alongside the assessment in Section 6.5 for ease of reference.

Both this baseline section and the effects section describe landscape character and visual receptors before considering designated areas as it is common for designations to encompass both character and visual considerations within their special qualities or purposes of designation.

6.5.1.2 ZTV studies

Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) studies were generated based on the proposed design. **Figure 6.1** provides a bareground ZTV study to 45km as required by Naturescot guidance **Figure 6.2** and indicates areas of potential visibility taking into account screening by woodland and buildings. The analysis was carried out using a topographic model and including buildings and woodland with assumed heights as indicated on the Figure as visual barriers in order to provide a more realistic indication of potential visibility. **Figure 6.4** shows the terrain and areas of woodland included within the ZTV studies. The methodology for the preparation of ZTV studies is set out in **Technical Appendix 6.2: Visual Aids**.

The ZTV study was used to aid the identification of those receptors that are likely to be most affected by the proposed development and those that do not require detailed consideration. It should be noted that some areas shown as having potential visibility may have visibility of the development screened by forestry growth or new buildings, and some new views may have been opened up by felling or demolitions, however the broad pattern of visibility will remain similar across the study area despite these localised changes.



As shown by the ZTV study, visibility will be relatively widespread outside of the forested areas within 5km of the turbines. Areas to the north and south will have views of both groups of turbines, whilst to the east and west within 5km, views of the nearer group only will be more common.

Between 5-10km there are notable gaps in visibility to the east and west, again with visibility mostly restricted to the nearer groups where the development is visible, with the notable exception of higher ground at Knock Hill. To the south there will be widespread visibility of both groups of turbines from the area around Keith and views would also be available from the valley of the River Isla. To the north-east, visibility of the eastern group will extend along the valleys of the Burn of Deskford and Burn of Fordyce towards Cullen and Fordyce with visibility of both groups of turbines from areas of higher ground. This pattern will extend to Portsoy between 10-15km in this direction. To the north-west and north, there will be widespread visibility of both groups of turbines between Mosstodloch, Garmouth and Buckie, but more limited visibility from Findochty and Portknockie, where woodland to the south provides screening.

Between 10-20km, visibility will be less widespread and occurs in patchy areas – one lies to the east between Banff, Portsoy and Aberchirder; another extends south from Cornhill and Gordonstown towards Huntly. From areas to the south of the Site, patchy visibility will arise from north-facing slopes and along the valley of the River Isla. Visibility will be more widespread from areas to the west between Garmouth, Elgin and Rothes. This pattern of patchy visibility continues between 20-25km.

Effects on landscape or visual receptors outside the areas of visibility shown on the ZTV study will be Negligible and are not assessed in detail. Based on the relatively limited visibility beyond 15km and the viewpoint analysis set out within **Technical Appendix 6.3: Viewpoint Analysis** and **Table 6.8**, a 15km detailed study area is used within this assessment.

Figure 6.8 shows the location of existing and consented wind farms in the study area and **Figure 6.9** provides a ZTV study of existing and consented wind farms and the proposed development. In the area within 10km to the south of the Site, it will generally be seen along with Lurg Hill, Edintore and/or Hill of Towie wind farms and one or more of the single turbines in the area. In the area within 5km to the east of the Site, there will be combined views with Lurg Hill and nearby turbines (as shown by viewpoints 3 and 6). A notable area of new visibility, within which the proposed development will be the only wind farm visible, will arise to the north of the Site between the edge of the forestry and the coastal settlement. Beyond 10km to the east and west, combined visibility with more distant wind farms will arise.

6.5.1.3 Landscape Character

Landscape character areas in the 15km detailed study area are shown on **Figure 6.5**. The Site is located within Landscape Character Type 8a Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland, with most of the character types in the nearby areas being either of this type, 8 Upland Farmland or 4 Coastal Farmland (or its subtype 4a Rolling Coastal Farmland). The Site and surrounding landscape are typical of these character types, and there is an emerging pattern of consented and operational wind turbines in LCT 8a, including the existing consent for Aultmore wind farm on the Site, as shown by **Figure 6.6**. The consented Aultmore Wind Farm consists of 13 wind turbines with a blade tip height of 90/110 m, and includes provision for access tracks, borrow pits, substation/control building and temporary construction compounds in the eastern part of the Site.

Effects on the following character areas are considered within section 6.6, with baseline description provided alongside the assessment of effects for ease of reference:

- 9 Low Forested Hills (includes Site);
- 8 Upland Farmland (within 1km surrounding Site);
- 3 Rolling Coastal Farmland (1.2km, north-east and 2km, north);
- 2 Coastal Farmland (4.7km, north);
- 1 Coastal Margin (7.3km, north);
- 6 Broad Farmed Valley (7.4km, west);



- 1 (i) Knockhill and Aberchirder (5.3km, south-east);
- 11 (ii) Daugh of Cairnborrow (7.9km, south); and
- 26 (i) Cliffs of the North and South East Coasts (8.2km, north-east).

There are also a number of character types which are excluded from the detailed assessment, on the basis that visual effects are likely to be Negligible, for the reasons indicated below:

- 12 Rolling Forested Hills (8.4km, southwest) – the closest part of this LCT to the Site is occupied by Hill of Towie Wind Farm, which will be a nearby presence in areas with views of the proposed development;
- LCTs beyond 10km – due to the combination of limited visibility, increasing frequency of intervening wind farms and/or distance as indicated by the ZTV and viewpoint analysis (**Table 6.8**).

6.5.1.4 Visual Receptors

Visual receptors are “*the different groups of people who may experience views of the development*” (GLVIA, 3rd edition, para 6.3). In order to identify those groups who may be significantly affected, the ZTV study, baseline desk study and Site visits have been used.

The different types of groups assessed within this report encompass local residents; people using key routes such as roads; cycle ways, people within accessible or recreational landscapes including beaches; people using Public Rights of Way; or people visiting key viewpoints. In dealing with areas of settlement, Public Rights of Way and local roads, receptors are grouped into areas where effects might be expected to be broadly similar, or areas which share particular factors in common.

Representative viewpoints have been selected to aid the assessment of effects on visual receptors.

The Site is one of a number of forested hills set within a wider context of undulating farmland. The forested hills tend to have limited settlement and routes. Larger settlements are located within the river valleys inland and along the coast, with smaller settlements and a dispersed pattern of farms and homes within the lower lying farmland. Wide views are available from hill summits, whilst those from lower lying areas tend to be more contained to nearby hills. From the coast views inland tend to be curtailed by nearby woodlands and forested hills. There is a wide network of local roads through the farmland and an extensive network of Core Paths, generally focussed within and immediately around settlements along with undesignated ‘promoted paths’ and ‘existing paths’ which extend throughout the wider countryside. There are also a number of long distance recreational routes within the study area, as illustrated by **Figure 6.7** which are concentrated along the coast and Speyside.

Visual Receptor Groups

The following visual receptor groups are located within the 15km detailed study area and are likely to have visibility of the proposed development, as shown on the ZTV study on **Figure 6.2** and are considered further in section 6.6:

- Rural area within approximately 5km south and south-east;
- Rural area within approximately 5km north-west, west and south-west;
- Rural area within approximately 5km north;
- Rural area within approximately 5km east and north-east;
- Keith and surrounding rural area (5km, south);
- Buckie and Portgordon and nearby rural area (5km, north-west);
- Cullen and nearby rural area (5.5km, north-east);
- Bogmoor, Nether Dallachy, Garmouth, Spey Bay and Kingston and nearby rural area (7.7km, NW);



- Mosstodloch and rural area to the south-west (7.7km, west);
- Findochty and Portknockie (8.3km, north);
- Rural area between Banff, Portsoy, Gordonstown and Aberchirder (9km, east);
- Fordyce (9.1km, north-east);
- Portsoy (12.7km, north-east);
- Rural area 10-15km south-east;
- Lhanbryde and Urquhart (13.4km, north-west), and
- Rothes (15km, south-west).

There are also a number of receptor groups which are excluded from the detailed assessment, on the basis that visual effects are likely to be Negligible, for the reasons indicated below:

- Fochabers, Newmill – **Figure 6.2** indicates that views from these settlements would not arise due to screening by terrain and/or forests.
- Other areas of visibility shown on the ZTV study are mainly in areas of open hills or fields or are limited to small areas at a distance where effects would be expected to be negligible.

Key routes

As shown on **Figure 6.7**, the following longer distance road and rail routes lie within the 15km detailed study area:

- A96 (3.5km, south-west);
- A98 (4.7km, north-west);
- A95 (5.8km, south); and
- Rail line between Aberdeen and Inverness (5.2km, south).

Other roads in the study area (including the A990 which links the coastal settlements to the north of the Site) are more likely to be used for local journeys and are considered within the receptor group areas they lie within.

Recreational receptors

As shown on **Figure 6.7**, the following recreational routes lie within the study area:

- Core Path KT01 / Fishwives Road (passes through the Site);
- Isla Way (5.7km, south);
- Moray Coastal cycle route and National Cycle Route 1 (7km, north);
- North East 250 (7km, north and west);
- Speyside Way (7.4km, northwest); and
- Moray Coastal Trail (7.4km, north).

The Moray Way follows the Speyside Way and Moray Coastal Trail through the study area and is not considered separately.

Recreational landscapes within the 15km detailed study area include:

- Gordon Castle Garden and Designed Landscape (GDL) (4.6km, northwest as shown on Figure 6.2); and
- Sandend beach (10.8km, north-east).

Other GDLs within the 15km detailed study area are not recreational landscapes open to the public.



The following key routes and recreational landscapes are not considered further as effects are judged likely to be negligible for the reasons set out below:

- Moray Monster Cycle Trails (3.5km, west) – these routes are enclosed within forestry to the east of Fochabers and will have limited or no visibility.
- Keith and Dufftown Railway (6.1km, south) – as indicated by **Figure 6.2** there would be no visibility of the proposed development from this route.
- Cullen Sands (8.6km, north-east) and Strathleen Sands – as indicated by **Figure 6.2**, there would be no visibility of the turbines from these beaches.

Specific Viewpoints

The following specific viewpoints (panoramic viewpoints indicated on OS maps or locally promoted) are included within the assessment:

- Viewpoint 23, Castle Hill at Cullen (8.5km, south-east); and
- Viewpoint 17, Hill of Maunderlea (15.9km, east).

The following specific viewpoints are not considered further as effects are judged likely to be negligible for the reasons set out below:

- Viewpoint at Findlater Castle (10.4km, north-east) – the panoramic views look out to sea to the north and there would be limited or no visibility of the proposed development to the southwest as indicated by **Figure 6.2**.
- Viewpoints near Fochabers (5.8km and 7.8km, west) – both of these viewpoints look northwest away from the Site and would have views towards the Site screened by forest as shown by **Figure 6.2**.

6.5.1.5 Designated areas

As shown on **Figure 6.2**, the following designated landscapes lie within the 15km detailed study area:

- Portgordon to Cullen Coast SLA (4.3km, north);
- The Spey Valley SLA (4.3km, west);
- Lower Spey and Gordon Castle Policies SLA (4.6km, north-west);
- Lossiemouth to Portgordon Coast SLA (7.2km, north-west);
- North Aberdeenshire Coast SLA (8.1km, north-east);
- Deveron Valley SLA (Moray) (10.5km, south-east); and
- Deveron Valley SLA (Aberdeenshire) (10.7km, south-east).

6.5.2 Future Baseline

The future baseline includes changes to the pattern of forestry within the study area as the cycle of felling and replanting continues.

It is also expected that consented wind farms at Garbet, Lurg Hill, Rothes III, Clashindarroch II, Clash Gour, Pauls Hill II, Berry Burn Extension and Fyvie Community will become operational and form part of the future baseline considered within the main LVIA.

The future baseline also includes the consented wind farm (13 turbines at 110m tip height) within the eastern part of the Site. However, given that there is no scenario where the proposed development would be constructed alongside the previously consented scheme, for the purposes of this assessment it is not considered further.



6.5.3 Potential Sources of Impact

Effects arising from the proposed development are considered at the following key stages. The nature of the potential effects relevant to this assessment are described for each stage:

6.5.3.1 Construction

The construction of the project would take place over 18 months. It would involve the delivery of materials and components to Site; groundworks to form the tracks, turbine foundations and hardstands and the construction of the battery energy storage system (BESS), substation compound and control building. A crane would be used to erect the turbines and would be onsite for a small part of the construction period.

Effects during construction on landscape fabric would arise from:

- Localised removals and/or cutting back of hedgerows and trees where necessary to facilitate access and delivery of components;
- Localised removals of forestry within a 100m radius around turbine bases;
- groundworks for the turbine foundations, substation compound, tracks and hardstands; and
- the use of crane(s) to erect the turbines.

Effects during construction on landscape character would arise from:

- Short-term construction activity within the Site; and
- changes to landscape fabric as described above.

Effects during construction on visual receptors would arise from:

- Short-term movement of vehicles and plant including a large crane within and travelling to and from the Site to deliver and install the turbines and other Site infrastructure; and
- increasing similarity to the operational scheme as turbine construction is completed.

Effects during construction on designated landscapes would arise from:

- Short-term changes to the special qualities as a result of the construction activity taking place in a nearby area.

6.5.3.2 Operation

The proposed development would be in operation for 35 years. Effects during operation on landscape fabric would arise from:

- Growth of new planting where that is provided as part of the Outline Biodiversity Enhancement Plan (OBERP).

Effects during operation on landscape character would arise from:

- The presence and motion of the wind turbines and the associated infrastructure within the Site, and
- Retention of areas clear of forestry for 100m around turbine bases.

Effects during operation on visual receptors would arise from:

- Changes to views towards the Site to include the presence and motion of the wind turbines, both from static locations and when moving along routes (both existing and proposed) through the landscape.

Effects during operation on designated landscapes would arise from:

- Changes to the special qualities as a result of visibility of the wind turbines in a nearby landscape.



6.5.3.3 Decommissioning

Effects during decommissioning would be short-term (estimated to take 12 months) and similar to those arising during construction except in reverse. The wind turbines would be dismantled and removed and turbine bases would be broken up to below ground level while the access tracks would be retained in situ. The above ground elements of the control building/substation would be removed, whilst the foundations/hardstanding would also be left in situ but covered with topsoil and seeded over.

6.6 Assessment of Potential Effects

The effects on landscape character, designations and visual receptors during construction and decommissioning would arise for a Short-term period from a noticeable presence of vehicles and plant onsite during groundworks and the use of cranes to erect/dismantle the turbines. Once standing turbines are onsite, the most notable effects would arise from these and effects during the construction and decommissioning stages are assessed to be the same as during operation except where otherwise specifically noted in the assessment below.

6.6.1 Construction Effects

As noted in section 6.5.3.1 above, the effects during construction would be the same as during operation except for effects on landscape fabric which would involve reinstatement of tracks, turbine bases and hardstandings. These would affect a small proportion of the Site and commonplace elements of the landscape. Effects on landscape fabric would not be significant.

6.6.2 Operational Effects

Although the development is proposed for 35 years of operation and is thus temporary and mostly reversible (foundations are typically not removed during decommissioning), the timescale of operation exceeds the 25-year 'Long term' duration defined within the methodology. On this basis, effects during operation are assessed as having a 'Permanent' duration.

Effects which are of Moderate or greater significance are reported in this section (i.e. those which are significant or just below that threshold). Effects which are lower than Moderate are reported in **Technical Appendix 6.4: Effects Lower than Moderate**.

6.6.2.1 Viewpoint Analysis

Viewpoint analysis has been undertaken from a total of 23 viewpoints following consultation as detailed in **Table 6.1**.

The viewpoint locations are illustrated on **Figures 6.1 – 6.12**. Visualisations (comprising photographs of the existing view, wireframes and photomontages) are provided for Viewpoints 1 to 23. Wirelines are also provided for illustrative viewpoints A-C at a local road near Greenbank to the north of the Site, Findochty and Deveron Valley SLA. The methodology for the preparation of visualisations is set out in **Technical Appendix 6.2: Visual Aids**.

The full viewpoint analysis is contained within **Technical Appendix 6.3: Viewpoint Analysis**. The findings are summarised below in **Table 6.8**. In each case, distances are listed in relation to the nearest turbine.

Please note that **Technical Appendix 6.3** considers the nature and the scale of changes to character and views at each viewpoint location only. The sensitivity of receptors and wider extent of the effect (beyond the individual viewpoint location) and its duration are considered in the main body of the assessment text below as part of the consideration of the magnitude and significance of effects.



Table 6.8: Viewpoint Analysis Summary

Ref	Viewpoint	Distance, Direction	Scale of Landscape Effect	Scale of Visual effect
1	Core Path KT01 – Burn of Aultmore	2km, S	Medium	Large
2	Glen of Newmill	2.8km, S	Medium/small	Large/medium
3	B9018 Grange Crossroads	3.1km, SE	Small	Medium
4	Aultmore	3.6km, SW	Medium/small	Medium
5	Local road near Hill of Maud	3.5km, N	Medium	Large/medium
6	Kirktown of Deskford	4.1km, NE	Medium/small	Large/medium
7	Bin of Cullen	4.9km, NE	Medium/small	Medium
8	Broadley	4.9km, NW	Medium/small	Medium
9	Keith, Broomhill Road	5.6km, S	Small	Medium
10	A98, Arradoul	5.9km, N	Small	Medium/small
11	Buckie	6.1km, N	Small/negligible	Medium/small
12	Knock Hill	6.8km, SE	Small/negligible	Small
13	Speyside Way, west of Portgordon	7.6km, NW	Negligible	Medium/small
14	Meikle Balloch	8.1km, S	Negligible	Medium/small
15	NCR1, Durn Hill	10.2km, NE	Negligible	Small
16	B9131 east of Portsoy	13.9km, NE	Negligible	Negligible
17	Hill of Maunderlea	15.9km, E	Negligible	Negligible
18	Ben Aigan	13.4km, SW	Negligible	Negligible
19	Speyside Way near Garmouth	9.3km, NW	Small/negligible	Medium/small
20	A96 south of Keith	10.2km, S	Negligible	Negligible
21	B9015 near Fochabers	8.9km, W	Small/negligible	Small
22	Gordon Castle, walled garden	6.8km, W	Negligible	Negligible
23	Castle Hill at Cullen	8.5km, NE	Small	Medium/small

Each of the viewpoints is a ‘sample’ of the potential effects, representing a wide range of receptors – including not only those actually at the viewpoint, but also those nearby, at a similar distance and/or direction. From these viewpoints it can be seen that the distribution of effects will be as follows:

Effects on character:

- Large and Large/medium scale changes to character, where the windfarm will become the most dominant characteristic of the landscape, will be confined to the Site and the area within less than 2km. This mostly includes the forested area, but also extends beyond this into the adjacent valley to the west and the slopes below the forestry to the north and south. To the east the presence of existing and consented turbines in this area will contain the extent of changes to character to the forested hill which hosts the Site.
- Medium and medium/small scale changes to character will arise between 2-5km where the turbines will be a notable change to views but seen as being associated with the forested hill. As noted above, these changes will be more contained to the east of the Site due to the presence of existing and consented turbines.
- Small and Small/negligible changes to character will arise between 5-7km in most directions, though to just over 9km from some locations, and up to 3km east where the



turbines will be visible but perceived as a relatively distant feature. Beyond this distance, changes to character will be Negligible scale.

Effects on views:

- Large scale changes to views will arise within 2km, reducing to Large/medium between 2-4km, though some locations at this distance (Aultmore and Grange Crossroads) will have Medium scale changes to views due to more limited visibility or the presence of other turbines.
- Medium scale changes to view will arise between 3-6km, reducing to Medium/small between 6km and just over 9km as the turbines are increasingly seen beyond inland skylines from the coast and at a distance along with other wind farms in views from other directions.
- Small scale changes to views will arise between 7-10km as the turbines become a more distant feature in views and are more frequently partly screened. Beyond 10km, changes to views will be Negligible scale.

6.6.2.2 Effects on Landscape Character

Descriptions for each of the assessed character areas/types are briefly summarised below, along with further observations from Site-based work.

Based on the assessments of the scale of change to character at viewpoints as set out in section 6.6.2.1 above, some of the character types identified in section 6.5.1.3 will experience negligible effects and do not require detailed assessment:

- 1 Coastal Margin (7.3km, north) – As illustrated by **Figure 6.6**, there will be limited visibility from this area. Viewpoint 13 (where the scale of change to character will be negligible) is nearby inland and views from the area of visibility west of Portgordon will be similar. Areas of visibility to the east of Cullen are associated with the nearby settlement and the scale of change will be negligible in this context.
- 6 Broad Farmed Valley (7.4km, west) – As shown by **Figure 6.6**, there will be very limited visibility of the proposed development within 9km within this LCT as the nearer areas are wooded.
- 7 (ii) Western Coastal Farmland (4.1km, east) – The closest part of the LCT lies adjacent to Lurg Hill wind farm and the nearby turbines on the lower slopes of Lurg Hill. As shown by **Figure 6.6**, there would be limited visibility of the proposed development within 9km, with the potential for only a very Limited extent of Small scale changes to character near Fordyce.
- 1 (i) Knockhill and Aberchirder (5.3km, south-east) – The closest part of this LCT lies adjacent to Lurg Hill wind farm and the nearby turbines on the lower slopes of Lurg Hill and the proposed development would always be seen beyond those turbines from this LCT. As shown by **Figure 6.6**, there would also be limited visibility of the proposed development within 9km.
- 11 (ii) Daugh of Cairnborrow (7.9km, south) The closest part of this LCT has no visibility, and the main area of visibility within this LCT lies to the south of Edintore wind farm and the proposed development would always be seen beyond those turbines at distances of 11km or more from this LCT (as shown by **Figure 6.6**).
- 26 (i) Cliffs of the North and South East Coasts (8.2km, north-east) – This is an extensive LCT which wraps around the Aberdeenshire coast. There would be at most a very limited extent of small-scale effects in the nearest part of the LCT between Cullen and Sandend.

9 Low Forested Hills (includes Site)

As shown on **Figure 6.6**, one unit of this LCT includes the Site and there are four other units which are considered below. The LCT is described within the MWELSS as follows:



"This landscape comprises the predominantly forested broader hills and upland plateaux which contain the lower lying settled bowl of the Upland Farmland which encompass the Isla Valley and its northern tributaries. Although the majority of these upland areas have a simple landform of gentle slopes, broad indistinct summits and rounded ridges, the more defined conical 'landmark' hills of Bin of Cullen and Meikle Balloch also occur.

This landscape is sparsely settled with settlement confined to small farms on lower hill slopes. The lower areas of upland plateaux are densely forested and are not settled. The western forested plateaux form a backdrop to Fochabers, the Gordon Castle designed landscape and the Spey valley while the Bin of Cullen is an important feature in views from the coast."

Applying the approach set out at section 6.4.2.3, landscape susceptibility criteria for this character area are as set out within **Table 6.9**:

Table 6.9: Susceptibility – LCT 9 Low Forested Hills

Criteria	Rating from MWELSS	Comment (quotes are from MWELSS / MWELCS)
Scale	High-medium	<i>"The more expansive plateaux and broad ridges have a large-scale but this is reduced where ridges are narrower and where hills have more defined summits and are generally smaller in extent."</i>
Landform	High-medium	<i>"smooth, gently graded slopes and subtly rounded indistinct hill tops within broader plateaux. However, more distinctive hills with steeper slopes and defined summits also occur."</i> The host unit of this LCT is not one of the more defined hills (Lurg Hill, Meikle Balloch and Bin of Cullen are named in the MWELSS) and is considered to be of Medium susceptibility in relation to this criterion.
Land cover	Medium-low	<i>"simple land cover of extensive coniferous forestry with some small areas of moorland"</i>
Built Environment (from MWELCS)	Medium-Low	<i>"sparsely settled landscape with few prominent archaeological and historic built features"</i>
Landscape Context	High	Due to potential effects on <i>"adjacent smaller scale, settled landscapes and the coast"</i> , noting that <i>"In general, the simpler lower-lying plateaux within this AU make a lesser contribution to wider scenic character than the particularly distinctive 'landmark' hills of Bin of Cullen and Meikle Balloch."</i>
Visual Amenity	High	<i>"intrusive if sited on more defined hills which are likely to be popular with walkers and also form key foci in views."</i> As discussed in Table 6.2, the MWELSS also takes into account potential effects on visual receptors and relationships with adjacent landscapes in reaching this judgement. All of the hills within the LCT form skylines and are judged to be of High/medium susceptibility where not 'defined' hills, and High susceptibility otherwise.

Taking account of the criteria above, susceptibility of the host unit and Whiteash Hill is judged to be Medium. Susceptibility of the units containing the 'defined hills' identified in the MWELSS (Meikle Balloch and Bin of Cullen) is judged to be High/medium. **Table 6.10** sets out how judgements of susceptibility and value for each unit of the LCT combine to inform judgements of sensitivity.



Table 6.10: Sensitivity – units within LCT 9

Unit	Susceptibility	Value	Sensitivity
Aultmore	Medium	Community (undesigned)	Medium/low
Lurg Hill	High/medium	Community (mostly undesigned)	Medium
Bin of Cullen	High/medium	Regional (summits included within SLA)	High/medium
Whiteash Hill	Medium	Regional/community (partly within an SLA)	Medium
Meikle Balloch	High/medium	Community (undesigned)	Medium

Aultmore (includes Site) – This unit will host the proposed development and as set out in section 6.6.2.1 changes to character will be Large scale for a wide extent of the LCT, with all of the unit being perceived as part of a wind farm. The magnitude of change will be Substantial and effects will be Major/moderate, Adverse and significant.

Lurg Hill (2.2km, east) – This unit hosts Lurg Hill Wind Farm and other turbines on the lower slopes of Lurg Hill. Given the existing influence of these turbines, changes to character arising from the proposed development will be of Negligible scale and magnitude. Effects will be Negligible, Neutral and not significant.

Whiteash Hill (2.3km, west) – This unit is largely occupied by forest and will have very limited visibility of the proposed development from some of the forestry edges. Changes to character will be of Small scale for a Limited extent. The magnitude of change will be Negligible, and effects will be Negligible, Neutral and not significant.

Bin of Cullen (3km, north) – This unit is largely occupied by forest and is only likely to have views of the proposed development from the open summit of Bin of Cullen (viewpoint 7) where changes to character will be Medium/small scale. Taking into account the importance of views from the summit and the small area of the unit affected, changes to character will be Localised. The magnitude of change will be Moderate/slight and effects will be Moderate, Adverse and not significant.

Meikle Balloch (7.3km, south) – The lower slopes of Meikle Balloch are forested, but there is an open area around the summit from where the proposed development will be seen to the north – at similar distances and in a similar direction to the existing turbines at Lurg Hill and at a similar distance to Hill of Towie Wind Farm which lies to the south-west of Meikle Balloch. Changes to character will be Negligible scale (as identified in **Table 6.8** for viewpoint 14), the magnitude of change will be Negligible and effects will be Negligible, Neutral and not significant.

8 Upland Farmland (within 1km, surrounding Site)

The LCT forms the landscape context around the forested hill which hosts the Site. The LCT is described within the MWELSS as follows:

“encompasses the broad shallow valleys largely lying to the north of the River Isla. This landscape has a simple land cover of open farmland with large fields of pasture predominantly enclosed by post and wire fences. There is an even distribution of farms across this extensive area, accessed by a network of minor roads. This landscape is edged by the Low Forested Hills which often form a low dark backdrop to more settled and open farmland. The Bin of Cullen, Meikle Balloch and Knock hill form distinctive ‘landmark’ features prominent in views from this landscape. The planned settlement of Keith is located in this landscape.”

Applying the approach set out at section 6.4.2.3, landscape susceptibility criteria for this character area are as set out within **Table 6.11**. The MWELSS does not provide consideration of sensitivity to turbines of over 150m for this landscape and the ratings for turbines of 100-150m are used as a guide given that this is not the host landscape (so turbine size is less relevant):



Table 6.11: Susceptibility – LCT 8 Upland Farmland

Criteria	Rating from MWELSS	Comment (quotes are from MWELSS / MWELCS)
Scale	High	<i>"The gently undulating shallow valleys ... are expansive and open although the presence of a regular pattern of small farms and houses provide ready scale references and reduce the overall scale of the landscape. Some narrower and more contained valleys occur in places and small well-defined hills are occasional features."</i>
Landform	Medium	<i>"generally simple landform" although turbines could "detract from Knock Hill and from the smaller, yet distinctive, hills and ridges if sited on or close-by them."</i>
Land cover	Low	<i>"simple land cover of large fields of pasture and some arable land. Small geometric coniferous shelterbelts and woods pattern the farmland"</i>
Built Environment (from MWELCS)	Medium	<i>"Keith... is the only sizeable settlement ... although there is an even dispersal of farms across this character type. There are few obvious archaeological or historic features which make a strong contribution to landscape character. Existing tall wind turbines are situated in the north-eastern part of this landscape character type and high voltage transmission lines and large substation are highly visible features in the area around Keith."</i>
Landscape Context	N/A	This criterion is not relevant for non-host landscapes as set out at section Desk Study / Field Survey 6.4.2.3.
Visual Amenity	High	<i>"a very open landscape with long views possible from roads and elevated settlement ... The distinctive summits of Knock Hill, Meikle Balloch and Bin of Cullen ... form key foci in these views. The shallow valleys north of the River Isla are more contained"</i>

Taking account of the criteria above, susceptibility of this LCT is judged to be High/medium. The LCT is largely undesignated and is judged to be of Community value and Medium sensitivity.

As illustrated on **Figure 6.5**, this LCT wraps around the forested hill of the Site and extends more than 10km to the south. Viewpoints 1-5 are located in this LCT. Within the areas closest to the Site, changes to character will be Large/medium scale, with the turbines forming a dominant characteristic within this Localised extent of the LCT, albeit clearly associated with the nearby forestry rather than within the farmland. As illustrated by **Figure 6.6**, there will be widespread visibility of the proposed development in the part of the LCT to the north and east of the eastern cluster (as shown by viewpoint 5 and illustrative viewpoint A); and there will be widespread visibility of the smaller western cluster in the part of the LCT to the north-west, west and south-west (as illustrated by viewpoint 4). The area to the south within 5km will have the most open views, as shown by viewpoints 1-3. In a Wide extent of the LCT area within 5km, as set out in section 6.6.2.1 changes to character will be Medium and Medium/small scale. Beyond this area, there will be an Intermediate extent of small scale effects where the proposed development will be widely visible from the rural areas around Keith. Considering these effects together, the magnitude of change will be Substantial/moderate and effects will be Major/Moderate, Adverse and significant.

3 Rolling Coastal Farmland (1.2km, north-east and 2km, north);

This LCT lies between the coastal farmlands and the upland farmland and forested hills around the Site. The LCT is described within the MWELSS as follows:

"This landscape comprises rolling hill slopes and the valley of the Deskford Burn which fringes the higher and more simply patterned Low Forested Hills ... It has a varied landform with often interlocking steeper slopes and narrow incised valleys interspersed with occasional flatter areas and broader, more gently graded, slopes. Long belts of broadleaved trees and mixed woodlands characterise the policies of Cairnfield, Cullen and Letterfourie Houses, filling narrow valleys and enriching this landscape. The rolling landform, woodlands and pattern of medium-sized arable



fields and pasture and regularly spaced houses, farms and settlements give a small-medium scale landscape. The Low Forested Hills form low skyline ridges immediately containing this landscape."

Applying the approach set out at section 6.4.2.3, landscape susceptibility criteria for this character area are as set out within **Table 6.12**. The MWELSS does not provide consideration of sensitivity to turbines of over 150m for this landscape and the ratings for turbines of 100-150m are used as a guide given that this is not the host landscape (so turbine size is less relevant):

Table 6.12: Susceptibility – LCT 3 Rolling Coastland Farmland

Criteria	Rating from MWELSS	Comment (quotes are from MWELSS / MWELCS)
Scale	High	<i>"small hills cut by narrow valleys offers a degree of containment and reduces scale. ... a dispersed pattern of small farms and ... woodlands, provide ready scale references. The landscape becomes more open on upper hill slopes which are broader at the transition with the Low Forested Hills."</i>
Landform	High	<i>"Small rounded interlocking hills are cut by narrow incised burns ...Landform is generally more complex on the lower slopes with broader, more even gradients on upper slopes."</i>
Land cover	High-medium	<i>"Cultivated fields alternate with woodlands", "more extensive upland pastures on upper hill slopes".</i>
Built Environment (from MWELCS)	High	<i>"regular pattern of dispersed farms and houses and small settlements ... tucked down on lower hill slopes. Public roads are generally very narrow and winding..."</i>
Landscape Context	N/A	This criterion is not relevant for non-host landscapes as set out at section Desk Study / Field Survey 6.4.2.3.
Visual Amenity	High	<i>"a degree of visual containment offered by the rolling landform, incised valleys and woodlands The Low Forested Hills form an even and predominantly wooded low southern skyline."</i>

Taking account of the criteria above, susceptibility of this LCT is judged to be High. The LCT is largely undesignated, except for a small area to the north of one of the two units near Cullen and is judged to be of Community value and High/medium sensitivity.

Burn of Deskford (1.2km, north-east) – As indicated by **Figure 6.6**, there will be visibility of the eastern group of turbines from closest part of the valley floor and extending north towards Clunes Hill. The eastern sides of the valley will have more elevated views which will include both turbine groups, as will some more elevated locations on the western valley sides. The woodland on Clunes Hill and along the valley creates a gap in visibility around Lintmill. Viewpoint 6 is located in the centre of this unit and illustrates typical views from the main area of visibility; viewpoint 23 is located in an unusually elevated position towards the north end of this unit. As set out in section 6.6.2.1, the area which is closest to the Site is also close to operational and consented turbines at Lurg Hill and on the southern slopes of Lurg Hill, and changes to character will be Medium to Medium/small scale for a Wide extent of this unit to the south of Clunes Hill, reducing to Small scale in the Limited extent of visibility near Cullen. The magnitude of change will be Moderate/Slight and effects will be Moderate, Adverse and not significant.

Clochan and Drybridge (2km, north) – As indicated by **Figure 6.6**, there will be widespread visibility of the proposed development from within this unit of the LCT, though from the western half of the LCT within the valley, this will typically be of the western group of turbines rather than the entire array. Viewpoints 5 and 8 are close to but not within the LCT at illustrate the different appearance of the proposed development from the eastern (viewpoint 5) and western (viewpoint 8) areas of the LCT. In practice, visibility from within the LCT is slightly more limited than the ZTVs and nearby viewpoints illustrate due to localised screening by trees along roadsides and field boundaries. This unit of the LCT is located between 2km and 5km from the proposed development and as set out in section 6.6.2.1 changes to character will be Medium to Medium/small scale within this area, with



greater of these effects arising within the broader and more open upland areas closer to the Site and in the eastern end of the unit. These changes will arise across a Wide extent of the LCT and the magnitude of change will be Moderate. Effects will be Major/Moderate, Adverse and significant.

Other LCTs

Effects which are Moderate or greater (i.e. those which are significant and just below the threshold of significance) are reported above. Effects on the following LCTs are assessed to be Moderate/minor or lower and are described in full within **Technical Appendix 6.4** and summarised below:

- **2 Coastal Farmland (4.7km, north)** – Taking account of its High/medium susceptibility and Community value, this LCT is judged to be of High/medium sensitivity to the proposed development. There will be Medium/small scale changes arising from views of the turbines in the area around Broadley, reducing with distance to Small scale between Buckie and Portgordon, resulting in a Slight magnitude of change and effects that will be Moderate/minor, Adverse and not significant.

6.6.2.3 Effects on Visual Receptors

Based on the assessments of the scale of effects at viewpoints as set out at 6.6.2.1 above, some of the visual receptors identified in section 6.5.1.4 will experience negligible effects and do not require detailed assessment:

- Portsoy (12.7km, north-east) – Visibility will be limited to areas of open farmland on the headlands east and west of the town with no visibility from the settlement itself. As illustrated by viewpoint 16, the proposed development will be a relatively distant skyline feature and partly obscured by intervening topography and woodland. It would have no notable impact on the expansive coastal views in these locations.
- Rural area 10-15km south-east – The ZTVs indicate limited visibility within this area, generally confined to the more open and elevated hillsides and hilltops. Views will be similar in nature to those illustrated at viewpoints 12 and 14 but the increased distance from the proposed development and increased proximity to other operational turbines will result in markedly reduced effects.
- Lhanbryde and Urquhart (13.4km, north-west) – The ZTVs indicate limited and largely blade tip visibility from this area. The scale of change at much closer viewpoints in this direction (13, 19, 21, 22) would be no greater than Small and the increased distance and screening provided by the intervening landscape will result in markedly reduced effects.
- Rothes (15km, south-west) – Visibility from here will be markedly less than illustrated by the ZTVs given the extent of localised vegetation in and around the settlement. Views from here will be channelled along the Spey valley to the northeast with only a small number of partially obscured turbines seen. Effects at the open summit of the nearby Ben Aigan (viewpoint 18), where the proposed development is openly visible, will be negligible scale and effects arising from more limited visibility in the valley bottom would be less.
- Sandend beach (10.8km, north-east) – The ZTVs indicate very limited visibility from here and the focus of views is between the headlands and out to sea. The nearby viewpoint 15 illustrates that at slightly closer proximity and where the view is more open the scale of change would be Small. Given the increased distance and more limited visibility there would be no notable impact on views from the beach.
- (Specific) Viewpoint 17, Hill of Maunderlea (15.9km, east) – The proposed development will be seen on the skyline beyond existing and consented turbines at Lurg Hill, and on the lower slopes of Lurg Hill, appearing of a similar scale to the consented wind turbines and resulting in a negligible change to the view.



Visual Receptor Groups

Rural area within approximately 5km south and south-east – This group encompasses frequent, dispersed settlement and a network of local roads and paths to either side of the B9018 extending broadly between Lurg Hill and the A95 and west across to Glen of Newmill. Residents and visitors to this area have a High susceptibility to changes in views of Community value. Considering these two factors together, sensitivity is judged to be High/medium.

The landscape across this area is generally quite open and undulating with relatively limited vegetation cover and, as shown by **Figure 6.2** and **Figure 6.3**, there will be widespread visibility of the proposed development. This will mainly be focused on the larger eastern group of turbines, as illustrated by viewpoints 1, 2 and 3, with visibility of the western group of five turbines much more restricted. As illustrated by **Figure 6.3**, there will be no visibility of the proposed development within Newmill due to rising ground to the north although small numbers of blade tips may be seen from roads around the periphery of the village. Views of the proposed turbines will give rise to Large scale effects over a Localised extent of the group at closer proximity to the south of the Site, in the vicinity and to the south-east of viewpoint 1 where existing and consented turbines have little influence. The scale of effects will reduce with increasing distance across the group to Large/medium or, towards the eastern side where the existing and consented turbines located south of the Site and Lurg Hill are already prominent features in views, to Medium scale over a Wide extent. Taken together, these will result in a Substantial/moderate magnitude of change and effects will be Major/moderate, Adverse and significant.

Rural area within approximately 5km north-west, west and south-west – This group comprises the area extending north-west of Keith, incorporating the B9016, dispersed settlement and a network of local roads and paths to either side of this road as it runs west of the Site between the A98 and A96. The villages/hamlets of Clochan, Broadley and Aultmore also fall within this receptor group. Residents and visitors to this area have a High susceptibility to changes in view of Community value. Considering these two factors together, sensitivity is judged to be High/medium.

Figure 6.2 and **Figure 6.3** illustrate that up to five turbines will be visible across much of this area, generally being those within the western group, with visibility of larger numbers of proposed turbines confined to occasional more elevated locations including to the southwest of the A95 and near Loanhead, Foggie Moss and Forgie Hill where there are existing wind turbines, or in the more distant areas to the north of the group around Broadley, Enzie and areas west of Pathhead Wood. Viewpoint 4 illustrates that the western group of turbines will be visible seen over rising ground, partially screened by intervening vegetation, from the B9016 at Aultmore. Similar views of turbines, seen beyond rising foreground, will occur from the areas to the east of Aultmore; west of Pathhead Wood (where some blade tips of the larger eastern group of turbines will also be visible), and from along the B9016 as it passes through this area, with the proposed turbines becoming larger and more prominent at closer proximity as the road approaches and passes to the west of the Site.

Occasional more open views will occur from the area between the A96 and the B9016, looking across the shallow valley along which the B9016 runs, where the turbines will be seen in the forestry on low hills to the far side. Similarly open views will also occur in the northern part of the group in areas around Broadly, as illustrated by viewpoint 8, where some blade tips of the larger eastern group of turbines will also be visible above more distant forestry.

The proposed development will be visible from a Wide extent of this group and will give rise to a Large scale of change in areas at closest proximity, including from the B9016 as it passes the Site, reducing to Medium scale in more distant areas, such as at Aultmore (viewpoint 4) and Broadley (viewpoint 8), or where views are less open. Taken together, these will result in a Substantial/moderate magnitude of change and effects will be Major/moderate, Adverse and significant.

Rural area within approximately 5km north – This group extends broadly between Pathhead Wood in the west and Hill of Maud Crofts in the east. It encompasses the hamlet of Drybridge along with dispersed settlement, local roads and paths across agricultural land interspersed with frequent woodland and forestry. Residents and visitors to this area have a High susceptibility to changes in



view that are of Community value. Considering these two factors together, sensitivity is judged to be High/medium.

Figure 6.2 and **Figure 6.3** illustrate that visibility will be variable across this area, as a result of the undulating terrain and frequent woodland cover. In some areas, particularly at closer proximity to the Site, fewer proposed turbines will be visible while at greater distances more of the turbines will be visible, including views of both the east and west groups together. In the far west, from limited areas very close to Pathhead Wood, the western group of five turbines will be the most openly visible and prominent part of the proposed development although more widely across the group views will tend to focus more on the larger eastern group of turbines. At closer proximities, the western group of turbines will be substantially screened by localised landform, including Meikle Hill and Hill of Menduff, in combination with intervening forestry and woodland. In areas further east and north, while the western group of turbines may be more openly visible, they will appear more distant and less prominent than the eastern group. These will typically be seen beyond forestry on top of the low hills which form skylines to the south and will sometimes be partially screened by more nearby woodland and/or other localised vegetation or terrain, as illustrated by viewpoint 5 and illustrative viewpoint A. There will not generally be any visibility from the network of paths across Hill of Maud to Bin of Cullen unless passing through areas of recent felling or at the open summit at Bin of Cullen, as illustrated by viewpoint 7, where the elevated outlook will afford more open views towards the Site and across the wider surrounding landscape.

The proposed development will give rise to a Large/medium scale of change over an Intermediate extent of the group encompassing the more open and elevated areas, generally to the south and east of Drybridge. In more distant areas, generally north and north-west of Drybridge, and those with more limited visibility such as around the Hill of Menduff, effects will tend more towards Medium scale over an Intermediate extent of the group. Taken together, these will result in a Substantial/moderate magnitude of change and effects will be Major/moderate, Adverse and significant.

Rural area within approximately 5km east and north-east – This group encompasses the dispersed settlement and network of local roads and paths lying east of Hill of Maud Crofts that broadly follow the B9018 corridor from west of Lurg Hill in the south to Clune Hill in the north. Residents and visitors to this area have a High susceptibility to changes in view that are of Community value. Considering these two factors together, sensitivity is judged to be High/medium.

The group is largely contained within a broad, shallow valley with the B9018 running along its length. This agricultural landscape is undulating which, combined with frequent scattered woodlands and some roadside vegetation, create frequent areas of localised enclosure. **Figure 6.2** and **Figure 6.3** indicate that there will be relatively widespread visibility of the proposed development across this group, generally of no more than 11 turbines which will be those in the eastern part of the Site. The ZTVs illustrate some blade tip visibility of larger numbers of turbines from more elevated areas to the east of Kirktown of Deskford and although turbines in the western group will potentially be visible from these areas they will be relatively distant blade tips seen above forestry and will be a minor feature of views compared to the turbines of the more nearby eastern group. In reality, the landform and vegetation cover will reduce the degree of visibility with many of the turbines often partially or entirely screened beyond rising ground and vegetation, as illustrated at viewpoint 6 and by the marked difference in the extent of hub and blade tip visibility illustrated within this area on **Figure 6.2** and **Figure 6.3**. The eastern group of turbines will result in Medium scale changes to views over a Wide extent of the group although at closer proximity these will increase to Large and Large/medium scale over a Limited extent in an area to the west and northwest of Chapel Hill, extending up towards Aultmorehill Wood and Hill of Clashmadin. Taken together, these will result in a Substantial/moderate magnitude of change and effects will be Major/moderate, Adverse and significant.

Keith and surrounding rural area (5km, south) – This group includes the town of Keith and the surrounding rural area to the south, east and west, encompassing the network of roads, paths and dispersed rural settlement that extends broadly between Gowk Hill in the west, Balloch Wood in the east and the B9115 to the south. Although the landscape surrounding the town can be broadly described as rural there are numerous notable developments including extensive whisky bonds



around the edge of the town, several large substations and associated pylon lines, a large quarry and existing wind farms on nearby hills at Edintore and Hill of Towie. The network of Core Paths within and immediately surrounding Keith is particularly extensive and links to paths running around Dunnydruff Wood and Balloch Wood to the southeast of the town. Residents and visitors to this area have a High susceptibility to changes to views that are of Community value. Considering these two factors together, sensitivity is judged to be High/medium.

The ZTVs on **Figure 6.2** and **Figure 6.3** illustrate that visibility within Keith itself will be intermittent and, in reality, there will be very few notable views with the proposed development screened by buildings within the town. Although there are many roads aligned north-south these provide channelled views looking at the gap between the east and west groups of turbines rather than at the proposed turbines themselves – including the views from Mid Street noted in the Conservation Area Appraisal¹³. The exception to this is to the west of the River Isla, within Fife Keith, where roads are oriented more towards the north-east, are wider and have lower and more generously spaced buildings. In this area there will be channelled views (such as along Fife Street) towards the eastern group of turbines, at distances of 8km or more, with occasional glimpses between buildings of the western group of turbines. These will all be seen as relatively distant features associated with the low hills and forestry that lie to the north of the settlement, partially screened by the distant landform and forestry as well as foreground features within the settlement and will give rise to no greater than Medium/small scale changes to views within this Limited area.

Views will be more open from the rural areas surrounding Keith and the ZTVs indicate frequent visibility of most of the proposed turbines. These will typically be seen in successive views with, or in the context of, existing transmission infrastructure and turbines in the surrounding landscape and, in the closest parts of the group, will give rise to a Medium scale change to views, as illustrated at viewpoint 9, within a Localised part of the group extending across more open areas to the east and north-east of the town.

Core Paths extending to the south-east of the town will tend to have more intermittent visibility, often passing through woodland or along other vegetated routes. In more open and elevated sections east of Dunnydruff Wood and extending up over Meikle Balloch Hill, the increased distance from the proposed development and increasing proximity and prominence of existing wind farms will reduce visual effects to no more than Medium/small scale. The scale of change will similarly reduce across areas to the south and south-west of Keith, reducing further with increasing distance to Small or Negligible scale in the most distant parts of the group, as illustrated by viewpoint 20.

Taken together, the Medium scale change to views over a Localised extent of the group and the Medium/small or lesser scale of change to views over a Wide extent of the group will give rise to a Moderate magnitude of change and effects will be Moderate, Adverse and not significant.

Buckie and Portgordon and nearby rural area (5km, north-west) – This group encompasses the two settlements along with dispersed settlement and network of local roads and paths within rural areas to the south, as far as the A98 and extending west and south-west to the disused airfield at Nether Dallachy and Bridge of Tynet. A narrow strip along the coast falls partly within the Lossiemouth to Portgordon Coast and Portgordon to Cullen Coast SLAs, indicating views of Regional value, although more widely views from this area are of Community value. Residents and visitors to this area will have a High susceptibility to changes to views and sensitivity is judged to be High/medium.

Figure 6.2 and **Figure 6.3** indicate that there will be relatively widespread visibility from the southern edges of the two main settlements and the surrounding rural areas although there are frequent gaps in visibility arising from the presence of small woodlands and localised landform. Potential visibility from beaches and the coastal strip is very limited. Across this area, views of both the east and west groups of turbines seen together will regularly occur, as illustrated by viewpoints 10, 11 and 13, and they will tend to appear of equal prominence. This will give rise to Medium/small scale changes to views over an Intermediate extent of the group. To the eastern side of Buckie, around Rathven and

¹³ Moray Council (2010). Keith Mid Street Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Action Plan. Available at: <http://www.moray.gov.uk/downloads/file69460.pdf>



the nearby farmland and roads, the landform of Clean Hill and Hill of Maud along with associated areas of woodland will largely screen the nearer eastern group of turbines and within this Localised area, views of the more distant western turbines will give rise to no greater than a Small scale change to views.

Figure 6.2 and Figure 6.3 indicate that there will be some intermittent visibility from within the two main settlements which will generally be limited to where streets are aligned towards the Site, such as Buckie High Street and Barrhill Road, and will provide channelled views towards a relatively small number of turbines. In these channelled views, the turbines will be seen on top of low hills forming distant skylines and partially screened by intervening topography, vegetation and foreground features within the settlement. Similar views may also occur elsewhere within the settlements in gaps between buildings or at more open road junctions although will be fairly intermittent and will result in no more than Small scale changes to views in a Limited extent of the group.

Taken together, Medium/small and Small scale changes to views will occur over a Wide extent of the group. These will result in a Moderate magnitude of change and effects will be Moderate, Adverse and not significant.

Cullen and nearby rural area (5.5km, north-east) – This group extends north-east from Little Bin and Shirralls Wood, encompassing the coast, settlements and rural areas between Cullen and Sandend. Residents and visitors to this area will have a High susceptibility to changes in view which, given the majority of the area falls within the Portgordon to Cullen Coast and North Aberdeenshire Coast SLAs and the presence of the Cullen House GDL and several Conservation Areas, are judged to be of Regional value. Considering these factors together, sensitivity is judged to be High/medium.

Cullen is largely set out over sloping ground that descends towards the coast on its northern side and as a result the ZTVs illustrate that there will be little potential visibility within the settlement, with views limited to the southwestern settlement edge including from Old Church Road as it exists the village and from gaps between buildings on Findlater Drive. Here, views will be similar to those illustrated at the nearby viewpoint 23 with the eastern group of turbines seen on the skyline beyond the prominent Bin of Cullen landform. These views will be slightly less open than at the viewpoint, given their lower elevation and increased screening by the intervening forestry, but the scale of change to views will be little different. Views of turbines will continue across the area to the south, along the B9018 to Lintmill and the areas to the east although the degree of visibility will begin to markedly reduce as the elevation drops and intervening terrain and vegetation increasingly screen the proposed turbines, resulting in Small to Negligible scale changes to views here.

Figure 6.2 and Figure 6.3 illustrate that there will be more extensive visibility across the open, elevated areas to the north of the A98, extending towards the coast to the north and eastwards across to Sandend. Views in this area are expansive and the turbines will be seen as a relatively distant skyline feature seen in the context of other operational and consented wind turbines, giving rise to a Small scale change in views. Similar to Cullen, Sandend occupies north and east facing slopes that descend towards the coast and limit potential visibility of the proposed development and there is unlikely to be any notable views of the turbines which will be largely screened by the intervening landform.

Taken together, Small scale changes to views will occur over an Intermediate extent of this group resulting in a Moderate/slight magnitude of change and effects will be Moderate, Adverse and not significant.

Bogmoor, Nether Dallachy, Garmouth, Spey Bay and Kingston and nearby rural area (7.7km, north-west) – This group extends west from Upper and Nether Dallachy across to Maverston, taking in this group of settlements and the rural area to either side of the River Spey that lies between the coast and Sleepieshill Wood. The main areas of settlement within this group, along with the wider coastline fall within the Lossiemouth to Portgordon Coast SLA while the inland area southwest of Garmouth, largely comprising open farmland, is undesignated. Residents and visitors to this area will have a High susceptibility to changes to views which, given the large part of the group falling within the SLA, are of Regional value. Considering these factors together, sensitivity is judged to be High/medium.



The villages within this group are compact with closely spaced buildings which, combined with fences, walls and garden vegetation tend to prevent notable outward views; Nether Dallachy and Bogmore also have nearby woodland to the east and southeast which further restricts views in the direction of the Site. Notable views of the turbines from within the main areas of settlement will be unlikely although more open views will be possible from roads entering or leaving the villages and the from the areas of open farmland between and across the south-western part of the group. Viewpoint 19 is typical of these more open views with the closer western group of five turbines appearing more prominently on top of low hills that form the skyline and the larger eastern cluster of turbines appearing more distant and partly screened by intervening landform. The proposed development will give rise to at most Medium/small scale changes to views, tending more towards Small or Negligible in the more distant western areas, over a Wide extent, largely affecting users of roads and paths in the more open areas rather than people within settlements. This will result in a Moderate/slight magnitude of change and effects will be Moderate, Adverse and not significant.

Key Routes

Effects on all key road and rail routes are assessed to be lower than Moderate – see below.

Recreational Receptors

Core Path KT01 / Fishwives Road (passes through Site) – As shown by **Figure 6.7**, this route runs north-south through the Site between Drybridge (approximately 4km to the north) and Newmill (around 4.5km to the south). The route largely follows tracks and local roads and is signposted as 'Fishwives Road'. There is a proposal to re-route a short length of the path as shown on **Figure 6.7** as part of the Moray Council's Core Paths Plan Review¹⁴, with the proposed plan expected to be adopted by the end of 2023. Recreational walkers following this path will have a High susceptibility to changes to views which are of Community value. Sensitivity is judged to be High/medium.

Within the Site as it passes between the two groups of turbines, the path is partly enclosed by forestry, both on the existing and proposed routes. Recent felling has opened up a large part of the southern section through the forestry. As shown by **Figure 6.2**, views of the turbines from the south will be more open and will often encompass both groups of turbines. Viewpoint 1 illustrates effects from this part of the route just to the south of the section where views will open up fully to both turbine groups. Visibility from the north is more enclosed by trees and terrain with views of the eastern group, or just blade tips of the eastern group being more common. Changes to views will be Large scale within 2km of the turbines, between Burn of Aultmore and where the route turns eastwards around woodland close to Newton of Letterfourie. Beyond this distance changes to views will reduce to Large/medium scale with more distant and restricted visibility as shown by Illustrative viewpoint A. Together these changes will affect a Wide extent of the route and the magnitude of changes will be Substantial. Effects will be Major/moderate, adverse and significant.

Specific Viewpoints

Viewpoint 23, Castle Hill at Cullen (8.5km, south-east) – This viewpoint is located near Cullen and is accessed via a short footpath. As set out within **Technical Appendix 6.3**, there are panoramic views over the town, out to sea and inland, where the Bin of Cullen forms a prominent and nearby landmark. Visitors at this location would be seeking to enjoy the views and the viewpoint is located within an SLA and Garden and Designed Landscape, indicating National value. Considering these factors together, visual receptors at this location have High sensitivity.

The turbines will be seen adjacent to the lower slopes of Little Bin, an adjacent lower hill, and Bin of Cullen will remain the dominant element of the inland views and retain its landmark status. The scale of change to views will be Medium/small and will affect a Wide extent of the views from this visitor location. The magnitude of change will be Moderate/minor and effects will be Moderate, Adverse and not significant.

¹⁴ Draft Amended Moray Core Paths Plan 2018. Available at http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_117501.html (see Map 18 Aultmore)



Other visual receptors

Effects which are Moderate or greater (i.e. those which are significant and just below the threshold of significance) are reported above. Effects on the following visual receptors are assessed to be Moderate/minor or lower and are described in full within **Technical Appendix 6.4** and summarised below:

- **Mosstodloch and rural area to the south-west (7.7km, west)** – This group encompasses the village and the rural area extending south-west to the B9013, residents and visitors to the area have a High/medium sensitivity. Views of the turbines will be largely screened by the forested hills east of Fochabers and other localised vegetation with partial views of the closer western group of turbines giving rise to Small scale changes to views over and Intermediate extent. The magnitude of change will be Moderate/slight and effects will be Moderate/minor, Adverse and not significant.
- **Findochty and Portknockie (8.3km, north)** – This group encompasses the two villages and the rural areas extending between the coast and the Bauds of Cullen, residents and visitors are judged to have a High/medium sensitivity. Visibility will be limited to the open rural areas in the western part of the group. Rising ground to the south screens the closer eastern group of turbines with views of the more distant and smaller western group (as shown by Illustrative viewpoint B) resulting in Small to Negligible scale changes to views over a Localised extent. The magnitude of change will be Slight and effects will be Moderate/minor, Adverse and not significant.
- **Fordyce (9.1km, north-east)** – This group includes the village which is located within a valley, and the local roads within approximately 2km. Residents and visitors to this area have High/medium sensitivity. There will be very limited visibility from the village itself due to its low lying position and trees within the village. More open views will be available from the local roads particularly the road to the north-east which descends from Durn Hill (viewpoint 15). Changes to views will be Small scale for a Localised extent and the magnitude of change will be Slight/negligible. Effects will be Minor, Adverse and not significant.
- **Rural area between Banff, Portsoy, Gordonstown and Aberchirder (9km, east)** – This group includes the village of Boyndie and the local roads and dispersed properties between the three main settlements. Residents and visitors to this area have High/medium sensitivity. There will be patchy visibility of the proposed development across this area, mainly from the hills within this area. Changes to views will be Negligible scale beyond 10km as would views of up to 5 blade tips at distances of 7-10km to the southwest of Cornhill given intervening turbines at Lurg Hill. The magnitude of change will be Negligible and effects will be Minor, adverse and not significant.
- **A96 (3.5km, south-west)** - This route runs north-west to south-east through the study area via Elgin, Fochabers, Keith and Huntly. Road users on this route would primarily be undertaking longer journeys and have Low sensitivity. The main area of visibility would be from a Localised extent of the route north of Keith where the western turbine group will be briefly visible at distances of around 3.5-5.5km, giving rise to a Localised extent of Medium scale changes to views. The magnitude of change will be Moderate/slight and effects will be Minor, Adverse and not significant.
- **A98 (4.7km, north-west)** - This route runs west to east through the study area via Fochabers, Cullen and Banff. Road users on this route would primarily be undertaking longer journeys and have Low sensitivity. The main area of visibility will arise to the south of Buckie where there will be occasional views of the turbines distances of 6-7km giving rise to Medium/small scale changes for a Localised extent. The magnitude of change will be Slight and effects will be Minor, Adverse and not significant.
- **A95 (5.8km, south)** – This route runs south-west to north-east through the study area via Charlestown of Aberlour, Keith and Banff. Road users on this route would primarily be undertaking longer journeys and have Low sensitivity. The main area of visibility will arise to the east of Keith where there will be occasional views of the turbines at distances of 6-7km



giving rise to Medium scale changes for a Localised extent. The magnitude of change will be Moderate/slight and effects will be Minor, Adverse and not significant.

- **Rail line between Aberdeen and Inverness (5.2km, south)** – This route runs via Huntly, Keith and Elgin through the study area, frequently within valleys. Rail passengers often enjoy the views from windows but are also travelling at speed and have Medium sensitivity. Rail travellers have their views directed to either side of the route and the main area of visibility will be from near Keith where changes to views will be Medium/small scale. The magnitude of change will be Moderate/slight and effects will be Moderate/minor, Adverse and not significant.
- **Moray Coastal cycle route and National Cycle Route 1 (7km, north)** – As shown by **Figure 6.7**, this route runs along the coast and partly inland to the north of the Site. Cyclists using this route have Medium sensitivity. Small scale changes to views would arise between Garmouth and Portgordon for eastbound cyclists, and between Fordyce and Cullen and Findochty and Buckie for those heading west. The magnitude of change will be Slight/negligible. Effects will be Minor, Adverse and not significant.
- **North East 250 (7km, north)** – As shown by **Figure 6.7** this regionally promoted 250 mile driving route runs along the Spey Valley to the west and the coast to the north of the Site and tourists using it are of Medium sensitivity. The main areas of visibility for drivers heading north and east will be from south of Fochabers and between Spey Bay and Portgordon; and for those heading east and south will be from near Portsoy. These distant views will give rise to a Negligible magnitude of change and effects will be Minor/negligible, adverse and not significant.
- **Isla Way (5.7km, south)** – As shown by **Figure 6.7**, this route runs between Keith and Dufftown along Strath Isla. Walkers using the route would have High/medium sensitivity. Given the orientation of the route, effects will primarily arise for walkers approaching Keith who will see the turbines ahead giving rise to Small scale changes to views within this Limited extent of the route. The magnitude of change will be Negligible and effects will be Minor/negligible, adverse and not significant.
- **Speyside Way (7.4km, north-west)** – As shown by **Figure 6.7** this route runs west along the coast from Buckie to Spey Bay and southwards from these along the Spey Valley. Walkers following this path through SLAs have a High/medium sensitivity. As shown by **Figure 6.2**, there will be a very limited visibility between Garmouth and Portgordon and, as illustrated by viewpoints 13 and 19, there will be Small scale changes to views for eastbound walkers. The magnitude of change will be Negligible and effects will be Minor/negligible, adverse and not significant.
- **Moray Coastal Trail (7.4km, north)** – This route runs along the coast to the west of Cullen as shown by **Figure 6.7** and walkers following this path through SLAs have a High/medium sensitivity. As shown by **Figure 6.2** and viewpoints 13 and 19 there will be very short stretches of visibility of the proposed development giving rise to small scale changes to views. The magnitude of change will be Negligible and effects will be Minor, adverse and not significant.
- **Gordon Castle Garden and Designed Landscape (GDL) (4.6km, northwest)** – This landscape consists of the wider policies which surround the castle including woodland, farmland and parkland as well as the formal walled gardens. Visitors will have High sensitivity. As illustrated by **Figure 6.2** and viewpoint 22 (wireline), there is theoretical visibility of the blades of the western group of turbines from some of the parkland and farmland at the western edge of the designated area, but in practice this is likely to arise only across a small area of the farmland. The magnitude of change will be Negligible and effects will be Minor, Adverse and not significant.



6.6.2.4 Effects on Designated Areas

Based on the assessments of the scale of change to character and views at viewpoints as set out at 6.6.2.1 above, some of the designated areas identified in section 6.5.1.5 will experience negligible effects and do not require detailed assessment:

- Deveron Valley SLA (Moray) (10.5km, south-east), and Deveron Valley SLA (Aberdeenshire) (10.7km, south-east) – Both of these SLAs are located more than 10km from the Site. Visibility of the proposed development will not be widespread as illustrated by **Figure 6.2**. Where visibility does arise, changes to both character and views will be negligible scale with limited visibility of the turbines as shown by Illustrative viewpoint C. Outward views from this enclosed valley landscape towards the Site are not identified among the special qualities.

Portgordon to Cullen Coast SLA (4.3km, north)

As shown by **Figure 6.2**, this SLA is located to the north of the Site and includes a narrow strip of coast between Portgordon and Cullen, and an area east of Cullen which encompasses Cullen Castle GDL and the north slopes and summit of Bin of Cullen. Visibility of the proposed development within the SLA will be limited to views of the western group of turbines at distances of more than 9km from the area west of Findochty, and a small area nearby where the blades of some of the eastern group may also be visible; views from the summit of Bin of Cullen (viewpoint 7) and Castle Hill (viewpoint 23); and an area of visibility between Cullen and Lintmill at distances of 7.5km or more. **Table 6.13** considers effects on each of the special qualities of the SLA, which as a local designation is considered to be of Regional value.

Table 6.13: Effects on special qualities of Portgordon to Cullen Coast SLA

Special Quality	Susceptibility	Scale of effect
Distinctive pattern and character of small settlements	High – views of turbines could affect the landscape setting and character of settlements.	Small/negligible scale for a Localised extent – there will be some distant visibility of the western group of turbines from the edges of Findochty, but not otherwise from the smaller coastal settlements within the SLA.
Rocky coastal edge	Medium – views of turbines could distract from the rocky headlands, cliffs, stacks, arches and sandy beaches.	Small scale for a Limited extent – turbines will be visible from the coastal edge to the east of Cullen and to the west of Findochty at Craig Head.
Cullen House wooded policies as part of wider setting to the coast	Medium – views of turbines in views towards the wooded policies may alter the way the coastal setting is perceived.	Medium/small for an Intermediate extent - There is no public access to the grounds of Cullen House. In views towards the wooded policies from Castle Hill and the area southeast of Cullen (representing about half of the area where views towards the wooded policies will be important context), the turbines will be frequently visible, albeit clearly separated by rising slopes and forestry.
Bin of Cullen as part of wider setting to the coast	High – views of turbines from and in views towards the landmark hill may alter perceptions of the scale and landmark status of the hill.	Medium/small for a Localised extent - In views towards the Bin of Cullen from Castle Hill and the area southeast of Cullen (representing a small portion of the area within which Bin of Cullen forms important context), the turbines will be visible alongside Bin of Cullen but will appear smaller, the hill will remain the dominant feature.

Considering these effects together, there will be a Moderate/slight magnitude of change to special qualities of High and Medium susceptibility and High/medium sensitivity. Effects will be Moderate, Adverse and not significant.



Other landscape designations

Effects which are Moderate or greater (i.e. those which are significant and just below the threshold of significance) are reported above. Effects on the following SLAs are assessed to be of lesser importance (Moderate/minor or lower) and are described in full within **Technical Appendix 6.4** and summarised below:

- **The Spey Valley SLA (4.3km, west)** - Most of the special qualities of this SLA will not be affected and there will only be limited and relatively distant views of the turbines. These will give rise to small scale effects on the special qualities relating to the enclosure of the valley by woodland and scenic value within the area of visibility south-west of Fochabers. The magnitude of change will be Negligible and effects will be Minor, Adverse and not significant.
- **Lower Spey and Gordon Castle Policies SLA (4.6km, north-west)** - Some of the special qualities of this SLA will not be affected and there will only be limited and relatively distant views of the turbines. These will give rise to small scale effects on the special quality relating to recreational enjoyment from limited areas of visibility within 8-10km, and the appreciation of the contrasting character of the river valley and Castle Gordon policies in eastward views from north of Mosstodloch. The magnitude of change will be Negligible and effects will be Minor/negligible, Adverse and not significant.
- **Lossiemouth to Portgordon Coast SLA (7.2km, north-west)** - Most of the special qualities of this coastal SLA will not be affected and there will only be limited and relatively distant views of the turbines. These will give rise to small scale effects on the special quality relating to recreational enjoyment in the limited areas of visibility within 8-10km. The magnitude of change will be Negligible and effects will be Minor/negligible, Adverse and not significant.
- **North Aberdeenshire Coast SLA (8.1km, north-east)** - Most of the special qualities of this coastal SLA will not be affected and there will only be limited and relatively distant views of the turbines. These will give rise to small scale effects on the special qualities relating to recreational enjoyment and appreciation of historic sites in the very limited areas of visibility within 10km. The magnitude of change will be Negligible and effects will be Minor, Adverse and not significant.

6.6.2.5 Night-time Effects

Summary of Visible Aviation Lighting Requirements and Mitigation

As the proposed development comprises turbines of over 150m in height, these will require visible aviation lighting to be fitted. Through consultation with the Civil Aviation Authority ('CAA') a reduced lighting scheme has been agreed (see **Technical Appendix 14.1: Reduced Lighting Scheme**) which will comprise a single 2000 candela steady red light mounted on the nacelles of nine of the turbines (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 13, 15, 16) and no visible lighting on the remaining seven turbines, as illustrated by **Figure 6.11**. Mid-mast lights will not be required.

In addition to the reduced number of visible aviation lights agreed, the lights fitted would be capable of being dimmed to 10% of peak intensity when visibility around the proposed development exceeds 5km, i.e. in clear conditions the lights would operate at markedly reduced intensity.

Approach and Scope

There is a distinction between light pollution or nuisance and the effect of lighting on the character and amenity of the landscape at night. This is not a technical lighting assessment but focusses on the night-time effects resulting from the introduction of new artificial lighting.

This part of the assessment is still an emerging discipline regarding the scope and receptors which would be impacted as a result of the visible aviation lighting. Both the Landscape Institute GLVIA panel and the Scottish Government Aviation Lighting Working Group (ALWG) are currently working on guidance. It is clear that night-time impacts would occur on the visual amenity of the area, and that night-time effects are important for locations valued for their night skies, especially where



these are either part of a national landscape designation or recognised specifically for dark skies. There has been greater debate regarding the extent of impact on surrounding landscape character, though emerging consensus from the ALWG is that landscape character is not likely to be affected. Page 12 of Crystal Rig Wind Farm Phase IV Scottish Ministerial Determination Letter dated 24 March 2021) stated that:

"Reporters conclude that proposed aviation lighting would be a visual impact alone and consider that without being able to see and fully appreciate the features of the landscape and the composition of views, it is not possible to carry out a meaningful landscape character assessment. The Scottish Ministers concur with this conclusion."

As such, this assessment focusses on visual effects at night although some commentary on the potential effects on character is also provided below.

Potential Effects

The aviation lights would be visible as points of light, especially where there would be a high degree of contrast at the viewpoint (i.e. the lights were seen against a dark sky / dark landmass or where there would be little or no existing artificial light sources present).

During periods of greater ambient light, (e.g. sunset, twilight, dusk, dawn) there would be a reduced effect as the contrast of the aviation lighting against the background would be less. The lights would be switched on 30 minutes after sunset until 30 minutes before sunrise. This variation means that in summer the lighting would not be switched on when people are predominantly active and contrast with the background would be reduced. However, in winter the lighting would be switched on during peak active times.

Due to the location of the lighting on the turbines relative to the rotating blades, this can result in a blinking effect caused by the screening effect of blades as they travel past the lights. These effects are dependent upon the rotation speed of the blades, direction of wind and the location of the receptor. Where a number of lit turbines are present in the view, such blinking is likely to be at the same frequency but uncoordinated.

Sensitivity of Receptors

For landscape receptors, susceptibility is judged based on the degree to which they are currently characterised by darkness. Value is judged based on similar factors as for the daytime assessment unless suggested otherwise. For example, identification of a Dark Sky Park which would increase value; or if value is based on scenic qualities which are not appreciable at night, the value may decrease.

For visual receptors, the value attached to night-time views is considered to be low unless there is a particular feature that can be best appreciated in the hours of darkness. This may include views of stars and the night sky that are only possible in particularly dark areas or views of well-known landmarks that are lit up at night. The susceptibility of visual receptors also differs at night reflecting the different activities people undertake in the hours of darkness. For example, drivers using roads at night tend to be more focused on the road and the area illuminated by their headlights than during the day and may have oncoming headlights, cats eyes, or other reflective signage drawing their attention, resulting in lower susceptibility. This is particularly the case on unlit rural roads that may be narrow and winding. On the other hand, people taking part in activities requiring darkness, such as stargazing, would be of higher susceptibility.

Existing Night-time Environment of the Study Area

Figure 6.11 gives a broad impression of the level of existing lighting within the study area based on satellite observations of light pollution. It illustrates that the existing night-time environment in the study area is typically dark with brighter areas associated with towns and larger villages scattered throughout the study area. Street lighting in settlements is almost exclusively of a modern LED variety which limits sky glow but results in quite stark white lighting in the illuminated areas and a strong contrast with the dark areas beyond the settlement. This results in views from within settlements being dominated by the streetlighting, with little sense of the darkness beyond unless



the viewer is located at the settlement edge, and settlements appearing as very bright but well contained areas of light when viewed from the dark surrounding landscapes.

This is particularly apparent from the more elevated, local roads within 5km of the Site where lower lying settlements such as Buckie to the north and Keith to the south are prominent where there is a direct line of sight. In addition to standard street lighting there are also several sources of brighter commercial lighting, usually at or near settlements, including floodlighting at whisky bonds around Keith and at Malcolmburn, the harbour at Buckie and the Blackhillock substation. Outside of settlements and commercial sites the landscape is generally dark although there are frequent smaller sources of artificial light with older style orange tinged floodlights on agricultural buildings a frequent occurrence and external lighting on residential properties not uncommon. Night-time Site visits were undertaken during a harvest period and it was noted that floodlights on tractors working fields at night and flashing orange lights on agricultural vehicles transporting grain were a frequent and notable feature of the night-time rural landscape in the area.

Visible aviation lights on tall structures are also an existing feature within the study area with a number of existing wind turbines featuring low intensity red lighting, including those at Netherton and Myreton Crossroads around 2km south-east of the Site to the south of Lurg Hill. These lights are relatively dim and only particularly notable at quite close proximities within their local area. The transmitter mast at Knock More (approximately 12km to the south-west of the turbines) also features red aviation lights.

There are no Dark Sky Parks or Discovery sites within the study area and no other locally promoted star gazing sites have been identified. Where darkness or night skies are identified as valued qualities of locally designated landscapes these have been considered in the assessment of effects on designated areas at section 6.6.2.4.

Zone of Theoretical Visibility

Figure 6.12 illustrates the ZTV for the aviation lights on turbine nacelles within the proposed development and illustrates that the most extensive area of visibility is focused on areas to the south, extending from the Site to areas around Keith, extending up to around 10km from the turbines, and south-east across towards Knock Hill. Beyond this area, in southerly directions, visibility rapidly breaks up becoming intermittent and largely confined to more elevated areas of open farmland, away from most transport routes and settled areas.

In northerly directions, visibility is slightly more intermittent within 5km and fewer aviation lights would tend to be visible. Beyond 5km, visibility breaks up notably although there is a notable band of visibility extending west from Buckie and Portgordon where a large proportion of the aviation lights would be visible together. Visibility to the east and west tends to be much more limited with the landform of the two valleys that flank the Site combining with extensive areas of forestry to limit potential visibility of the aviation lights.

Night-time Effects on Landscape Character

In terms of the potential for landscape character effects at night, these are almost exclusively concerned with perceptions of darkness and an absence of development, as the key characteristics of landscapes which distinguish the landscape character areas described in character assessments are generally obscured after dark.

As detailed above, **Figure 6.12**, indicates that the primary areas of theoretical visibility of the aviation lights mounted at nacelle height and **Figure 6.11** shows the comparative light levels across the study area.

The landscapes affected would be those which are predominantly dark (away from roads and settlement and commercial sites) and are sufficiently close to the Site and distant from other lit wind farms and the transmitter mast at Knock More, such that the introduction of visible aviation lighting nearby would be fundamentally different to other sources of artificial lighting. These areas include those up to around 5km around the northern side of the Site, in areas where settlement and harbour lighting at Buckie is less evident, and up to around 2-3km south and south-west of the Site before lighting around Keith and nearby whisky bonds becomes the more strongly characterising



influence. Given the limited perception of landscape character at night, such effects would not be significant.

Night-time Visual Effects

The impact on visual receptors at night is different from the impact in the daytime presented in the main LVIA. The receptors potentially affected are different and their sensitivity may also be different.

People in settlements would remain of similar sensitivity. However, road users would attribute a lower value to the view, as amenity value would be limited from the roads at night, which reduces their overall sensitivity. Train carriages are lit internally at night and, when passing through dark areas (generally anywhere outside of stations or urban areas), reflections in the windows prevent outward views for passengers. Core Paths, cycle routes and other outdoor recreational locations are generally unlikely to be used at night and would have limited amenity value, as would promoted/scenic road routes, they are therefore not normally considered.

Views for people at night within the surrounding settlements and dispersed rural properties are judged to be of High susceptibility and Community value, resulting in a High/medium sensitivity to the proposed aviation lighting. As noted above, when travelling on the road network between settlements and rural properties, susceptibility is reduced and people undertaking this activity would be of Medium susceptibility to changes in views that are Community value and would be of Medium sensitivity to the proposed aviation lighting. The main visual receptors likely to have views of the aviation lighting and experience notable visual effects at night are considered below.

Rural area within approximately 5km in northerly directions – Figure 6.12 illustrates that there will be regular but intermittent visibility of up to three of the proposed aviation lights across this group with some areas, particularly to the north-east and north-west and at greater distances where up to six will be visible. There are some more isolated areas, directly north between the two clusters, where all of the proposed lights will potentially be visible, largely associated with more elevated areas of open farmland and a small number of isolated properties. The lights will be seen against a dark sky to the south. In the central part of the group there are few other sources of light, limited to occasional lights on isolated properties and farms, and the lights will be a prominent new feature in the night sky seen as two distinct groups (see viewpoint 5), giving rise to Large/medium scale effects over a Limited area.

In the western part of the group the settlement and port lights at Buckie, along with traffic travelling on the A98, are frequently visible looking northwards from the network of local roads over the higher ground in this area and are a prominent feature of the night sky. Some of the small villages/hamlets here, such as Clochan and Broadley, also have street lighting which can be locally prominent. The proposed aviation lights will be seen in the opposite direction to lights at Buckie and, in some areas, in the context of street lighting at small settlements (see viewpoint 8). It will be of a different nature to existing sources of light but in this area, where existing lights in the landscape have a greater influence on views, effects would be no greater than Medium scale over an Intermediate extent.

In the eastern part of the group the aviation lights on the cluster of turbines south of Lurg Hill are visible looking along the valley to the south. They are relatively dim given their low intensity and the distance although remain clearly visible in the dark sky. The proposed aviation lights on the eastern group of turbines (see viewpoint 6) will be seen at closer proximity and to one side of these existing lights. They will be closer, brighter and more prominent although would not be an entirely new feature given the presence of the existing aviation lighting. They would give rise to Medium scale changes to views over an Intermediate extent of the group.

Taken together, these effects would be of Moderate magnitude and would primarily be experienced by people travelling on the local road network between settlements and to/from dispersed rural properties who will have a Medium sensitivity. Overall, effects will be Moderate, Adverse and not significant.



Rural area within approximately 5km in southerly directions – **Figure 6.12** illustrates that although widespread, the degree of visibility of the aviation lights within this area will be variable. Some areas will have views of only a small number of the proposed aviation lights, generally those to the south-east and south-west of the Site, which would be associated with either the east or west group of turbines. Some areas will have views of most or all of the proposed lights, generally those areas directly south sitting between two groups of turbines, where the lights will be seen as two distinct groups looking in different directions. The lights will be seen against dark skies to the north with occasional lights associated with farms and rural properties in the intervening landscape. In the more northerly, central parts of the group where existing lights around settlements to the south and aviation lights on the cluster of turbines to the south of Lurg Hill are less noticeable or less frequently visible, the proposed aviation lights will be a notable new feature in the night sky and will appear markedly different to other sources of light in the dark landscape. This will give rise to a Large/medium scale change to views over a Limited extent of the group.

Further south and south-west, closer to Keith, Newmill and Aultmore, existing settlement lighting is a more frequent feature of views from the elevated rural areas and floodlighting at Blackhillock is also notable where it is seen in views past Keith. To the south-east the settlement lighting is less notable in views but the existing aviation lights on the cluster of turbines south of Lurg Hill are widely visible. In these areas, where existing lights in the landscape have a greater influence on views, effects would be no greater than Medium scale over a Wide extent.

Taken together, these effects would be of Moderate magnitude and would primarily be experienced by people travelling on the local road network between settlements and to/from dispersed rural properties who will have a Medium sensitivity. Overall, effects will be Moderate, Adverse and not significant.

Keith and surrounding areas (5.0km, south) – As illustrated by **Figure 6.12** there will not be any notable visibility of the proposed aviation lights from within Keith and, as noted above, where any views are possible the aviation lights are unlikely to be particularly noticeable in the context of bright street lighting. More notable visibility will occur from the eastern and northern settlement edge although, as illustrated by viewpoint 9, the lights would be seen above bright street lighting at Newmill and floodlighting at Keith Bond No. 2 and in the context of lights around the edge of Keith. In areas south of Keith, although a large proportion of the aviation lights would be visible, intervening settlement lighting would be far more notable as would floodlighting at Blackhillock substation where this is visible. Changes to views would be Small/negligible scale over a Wide extent of this group. The magnitude of change will be Slight and, considering the High/medium sensitivity, effects will be Moderate/minor, Adverse and not significant.

Buckie and Portgordon (6.0km, north) – As illustrated by **Figure 6.12** there will not be any notable visibility of the proposed aviation lights from within these settlements and, as noted above, where any views are possible the aviation lights are unlikely to be particularly noticeable in the context of bright street lighting. More notable visibility will occur from the peripheral areas of the settlements, as illustrated by the night-time photomontage at viewpoint 11. Here the lights would be seen as a relatively dim feature in southward views, markedly less notable than nearby lights around settlement edges and traffic passing on the A98. This would give rise to Small scale changes to views over a Localised extent. The magnitude of change will be Slight and, considering the High/medium sensitivity of people in the settlement, effects will be Moderate/minor, Adverse and not significant.

Rural areas west of Portgordon (6.2km, north-west) – The ZTV on **Figure 6.12** illustrates a patchy but relatively continuous band of theoretical visibility extending west of Portgordon, within approximately 3-4km of the coast, as far west as woodland at Binn Hill to the north-west of Garmouth where most of the proposed aviation lights will be visible. These will be most noticeable in views from areas away from the villages, where street lighting will remain the dominant source of lighting, and will be seen as two distinct groups against the dark sky inland, albeit often seen above prominent lighting around villages or less prominent lights associated with farms or rural properties in the intervening landscape. Although quite different in nature to existing sources of artificial light, the proposed aviation lights will be one of many sources of light seen in inland views from this area and will give rise to Small scale changes to views, reducing to Small/negligible scale with increasing



distance, over a Wide extent and the magnitude of change will be Slight. Views of the aviation lights will largely be experienced by people traversing the local road network in this area who will have a Medium sensitivity and overall effects will be Moderate/minor, Adverse and not significant.

Rural areas beyond 10km east – **Figure 6.12** indicates there will be intermittent visibility of a small proportion, typically no more than three, over a relatively broad area beyond 10km to the east. This visibility corresponds with areas of generally open farmland, criss-crossed by minor roads and with frequent rural properties and farms, that extends broadly south-west of Banff towards Aberchirder. In views from this area typically one to three lights will be visible as relatively distant features to the west, seen across a generally dark intervening landscape interspersed with occasional lights associated with rural properties and farms. This will result in no greater than Small scale changes to views over a Limited area in the closest part of the group, tending more towards Negligible in more distant areas over an Intermediate extent and, taken together, the magnitude of change will be Slight/negligible. Views of the aviation lights will largely be experienced by people traversing the local road network in this area who will have a Medium sensitivity and overall the effects will be Minor, Adverse and not significant.

6.6.3 Decommissioning Effects

As noted in 6.5.3.1 above, the effects during decommissioning will be the same as during operation except for effects on landscape fabric. These will affect a small proportion of the Site and commonplace elements of the landscape. Effects on landscape fabric will not be significant.

6.7 Mitigation

All mitigation with respect to landscape and visual effects is embedded in the proposed development, no additional mitigation measures are proposed.

6.8 Assessment of Cumulative Effects

6.8.1 Introduction

In line with GLVIA3 (paragraph 7.5) and NatureScot guidance on Assessing the Cumulative Impact of Onshore Wind Energy Developments, the assessment of cumulative effects should focus on whether there are any likely significant cumulative impacts which are reasonably foreseeable and which are likely to influence the decision making of the proposed development, rather than an assessment of every potential cumulative effect. As recommended by the NatureScot cumulative guidance, this assessment considers the “*additional cumulative change which would be brought about by the proposed development*”, assuming other schemes in scenario are already present.

6.8.2 Assessment Scenarios

The assessment of cumulative effects focusses on receptors considered within the main LVIA, where there is the greatest potential for significant cumulative effects to occur.

All cumulative schemes within the 25km search area are illustrated on **Figure 6.8** and viewpoint visualisations. Operational and consented developments have been included within the landscape and visual baseline within the main assessment and are listed in **Tables 5.2** and **5.3** in **Chapter 5: Approach to EIA**. Those located within 15km include:

- A number of single turbines and small clusters to the south and east of the Site;
- The consented Lurg Hill wind farm 2.9km to the east;
- Operational wind farms at Edintore (9.6km, south), Hill of Towie (10km, south-west); Boydie Airfield (14.7km, north-east) and Cairnborrow (15km, south).

Table 6.14 below sets out those schemes in planning or scoping stages within the 25km search area (also illustrated on **Figure 6.7**).



Table 6.14: Cumulative sites in planning and scoping within 25km

Wind Farm	Turbines	Tip height	Status	Distance, direction
Teindland	17	180m	Scoping	11.9km, west
Garbet (2023)	7	200m	Planning (amendment to consented scheme at 190m)	20km, south
Craig Watch	11	200m	Planning	20.4km, south
Kellas	10	Up to 200m	Scoping	22.6km, west
Glenfiddich	11	200m	Scoping	23.4km, south-west
Clashindarroch extension	22	Up to 200m	Planning	24.8km, south

All of the wind farms listed above except Teindland and are 20km or more to the south or west and all are associated with existing and/or consented wind farm clusters. In this context the addition of the proposed development to a baseline including one or all of these wind farms would be the same as for the main LVIA.

On the basis set out above, scenarios considered within this cumulative assessment are:

- Scenario 1 – Aultmore Wind Farm with operational and consented development – i.e. the effects of the proposed development when added to the current and future baseline – as described in the main LVIA.
- Scenario 2 – Aultmore Wind Farm with operational and consented development and Teindland Wind Farm – assuming that Teindland wind farm proceeds with the layout as scoped.

Cumulative effects are assessed on the same groups of landscape and visual receptors as the assessment for the main scheme. Landscape and visual receptors that are considered to receive effects of Slight/Negligible or Negligible magnitude from the proposed development are not included in this assessment, as an effect of such low magnitude manifestly adds nothing or very little regardless of the effects of other developments. If significant cumulative effects arise on those receptors, they would be as a result of other developments and as such are not relevant for consideration as part of this application.

6.8.3 Cumulative ZTV Studies

Figure 6.9 provides a ZTV study illustrating the combined theoretical visibility of existing and consented wind farms and the proposed development (Scenario 1). This scenario is considered within the main LVIA and the ZTV is discussed at section 6.5.1.2.

Figure 6.10 provides a cumulative ZTV study illustrating the combined theoretical visibility of the proposed development with Teindland wind farm. There are extensive areas where only one of the two wind farms would be visible. Patchy areas of combined visibility would arise to the north and northwest of Teindland Wind Farm towards Lossiemouth, Elgin and Garmouth. In this area one or both of the wind farms would typically be more than 10km distant, except in the area west of Fochabers around Mosstodloch (represented by viewpoints 21 and 22).

A second patchy area of combined visibility would arise to the southwest and south of the Aultmore Site; from north and west facing slopes around Keith (as represented by viewpoints 4 and 9) and along Strath Isla to the east of Keith. A third area of combined visibility would arise to the north of the Site, between the forestry and the coastal settlements of Portgordon, Buckie and Findochty. In these locations Teindland would be distant.



6.8.4 Cumulative Viewpoint Analysis

The scale of change to both landscape character and views at viewpoints arising from adding the proposed development to a baseline including Teindland wind farm has been considered for all 23 viewpoint locations. The only location where effects are identified as being different to the main LVIA in the presence of Teindland wind farm is viewpoint 21 B9015 near Fochabers where the change on landscape character would be on a Negligible scale (rather than Small/negligible as identified in the main LVIA).

6.8.5 Cumulative Effects on Landscape Character

Based on the ZTV and viewpoint analyses above, the only location where effects may be different in a cumulative scenario with Teindland Wind Farm from the proposed development alone is near Mosstodloch. Given the overlapping visibility and slight difference in effects identified at viewpoint 21, it is considered that effects on LCT 2 Coastal Farmland would remain unchanged as the reduction in effects in this part of the LCT would be very limited and it is not the primary source of the effects arising from the proposed development on this LCT.

6.8.6 Cumulative Visual Effects

This assessment considers two types of cumulative visual effect:

- Combined views which “occur where the observer is able to see two or more developments from one viewpoint”. Combined visibility may either be in combination (where several developments are within the observer’s arc of vision at the same time) or in succession (where the observer has to turn to see the various developments); and
- Sequential views which “occur when the observer has to move to another viewpoint to see different developments.”

Based on the ZTV and viewpoint analyses above, visual receptors where effects may be different in a cumulative scenario with Teindland Wind Farm from the proposed development alone are considered below:

Mosstodloch and rural area to the south-west (7.7km, west) – As set out within **Technical Appendix 6.4**, the proposed development will give rise to an Intermediate extent of small scale effects within this receptor group. At viewpoint 21, visual effects would not be altered in a cumulative scenario with Teindland wind farm. However, the viewpoint is located towards the northern end of this group and furthest from Teindland wind farm. In areas closer to the Teindland site, the Aultmore turbines would be more distant, and the Teindland turbines would have greater influence on views, reducing the scale of change arising from the proposed development to Negligible. The extent of Small scale effects arising from the proposed development would reduce to being Limited. The magnitude of change would be Negligible and effects would be Minor, Adverse and not significant.

6.8.7 Cumulative Effects on Designated Areas

Based on the ZTV and viewpoint analyses above, the only SLA where effects may be different in a cumulative scenario with Teindland Wind Farm from the proposed development alone is within the Spey Valley SLA to the southwest of Fochabers. However, as set out at section 6.6.2.4 above, effects on the SLA arising from the proposed development would be Negligible and that would not alter in the context of Teindland wind farm.

6.9 Summary

6.9.1 Landscape Character

There will be Major/moderate, Adverse and significant effects on the unit of LCT 9 Low Forested Hills which includes the Site, as a result of the proximity of the turbines which will become a



dominant feature, alongside the forestry, in this small area. Other units of this LCT will not be significantly affected.

There will also be Major/moderate and Adverse effects on LCT 8 Upland Farmland which surrounds the forested hills of the Site. These significant effects will primarily arise from the proximity and relatively wide visibility of the turbines within 5km, though there would also be changes as a result of views towards the turbines from the rural areas around Keith.

Major/moderate, Adverse and significant effects will also arise on the unit of LCT 3 Rolling Coastal Farmland near Clochan and Drybridge. These significant effects will arise as a result of views towards the turbines within 2-5km, particularly from the broader and more open upland areas closer to the Site and in the eastern end of the unit.

6.9.2 Visual Receptors

The area immediately surrounding the Site within approximately 1km is a forested upland with limited settlement or routes. There will be Major/moderate, adverse and significant effects on Core Path KT01 / Fishwives Road which passes through the Site between the two groups of turbines. The path is partly enclosed by forestry though recent felling has opened up a large part of the southern section through the forestry. There will be widespread and close views of the turbines for walkers using this route.

There will also be Major/moderate, Adverse and significant effects on visual receptors living, visiting or travelling through the rural areas within 5km of the proposed turbines. Visibility within this area varies, with the valleys to the east and west predominantly having visibility only of the nearer group of turbines, and receptors to the north and south more typically having views of both groups. Effects would reduce with distance, Large scale changes to views will arise within 2km, reducing to Large/medium between 2-4km, though some locations at this distance (Aultmore and Grange Crossroads) will have Medium scale changes to views due to more limited visibility or the presence of other turbines.

6.9.3 Designated Areas

There will be no significant effects on designated landscapes. There will be Moderate Adverse effects on the special qualities of the Portgordon to Cullen Coast SLA primarily as a result of the turbines being seen in views towards the wooded policies of Cullen House and towards the landmark hill of Bin of Cullen.

6.9.4 Night-time Effects

The area is well settled and there are a number of more prominently lit structures within the wider area around the Site, including bonded warehouses and a transmitter mast. Existing turbines to the east of the Site also have aviation lights, albeit these are only 25 candela and thus relatively dim. There would be no significant effects arising from views of the aviation lighting at night.

6.9.5 Cumulative Effects

Cumulative effects with existing and consented wind farms are considered within the main LVIA and are summarised above. Wind farms in planning are located 20km or more to the south and all are associated with existing and/or consented wind farm clusters and the proposed development would not give rise to cumulative effects with these. Teindland wind farm is in scoping and would be located approximately 12km to the west of the Site. There would be some very limited cumulative visual effects with this scheme in the area to southwest of Mosstodloch, where the non-significant effects of the proposed development would be reduced slightly in the context of a consent for Teindland wind farm.



6.9.6 Conclusion

Significant effects arising from the proposed development will be localised – affecting landscape and visual receptors within 5km of the turbine locations. No nationally or regionally important receptors will be significantly affected.

Table 6.15: Summary of Residual Effects

Only effects of greater than Negligible magnitude are included and significant effects are highlighted in **bold**

Receptor	Distance/direction	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Significance
Landscape Character				
LCT 9 Low Forested Hills – Aultmore unit (host)	Includes Site	Medium/low	Substantial	Major/moderate, Adverse
LCT 9 Low Forested Hills – Bin of Cullen unit	3km, north	High/medium	Moderate/slight	Moderate, Adverse
LCT 8 Upland Farmland	Within 1km, surrounding Site	Medium	Substantial/moderate	Major/moderate, Adverse
LCT 3 Rolling Coastal Farmland – Burn of Deskford unit	1.2km, north-east	High/medium	Moderate/slight	Moderate, Adverse
LCT 3 Rolling Coastal Farmland - Clochan and Drybridge unit	2km, north	High/medium	Moderate	Major/moderate, Adverse
LCT 2 Coastal Farmland	4.7km, north	High/medium	Slight	Moderate/minor
Visual Receptors				
Rural area within approximately 5km south and south-east	Within approximately 5km, south and south-east	High/medium	Substantial/moderate	Major/moderate, Adverse
Rural area within approximately 5km north-west, west and south-west	Within approximately 5km, north-west, west and south-west	High/medium	Substantial/moderate	Major/moderate, Adverse
Rural area within approximately 5km north	Within approximately 5km north	High/medium	Substantial/moderate	Major/moderate, Adverse
Rural area within approximately 5km east and north-east	Within approximately 5km east and north-east	High/medium	Substantial/moderate	Major/moderate, Adverse
Keith and surrounding rural area	5km, south	High/medium	Moderate	Moderate, Adverse
Buckie and Portgordon and nearby rural area	5km, north-west	High/medium	Moderate	Moderate, Adverse
Cullen and nearby rural area	5.5km, north-east	High/medium	Moderate/slight	Moderate, Adverse
Bogmoor, Nether Dallachy, Garmouth, Spey Bay and Kingston and nearby rural area	7.7km, north-west	High/medium	Moderate/slight	Moderate, Adverse
Mosstodloch and rural area to the south-west	7.7km, west	High/medium	Moderate/slight	Moderate/minor, Adverse



Receptor	Distance/direction	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Significance
Findochty and Portknockie	8.3km, north	High/medium	Slight	Moderate/minor, Adverse
Fordyce	9.1km, north-east	High/medium	Slight/negligible	Minor, Adverse
Core Path KT01 / Fishwives Road	Passes through Site	High/medium	Substantial	Major/moderate
A96	3.5km, south-west	Low	Moderate/slight	Minor, Adverse
A98	4.7km, north-west	Low	Slight	Minor, Adverse
A95	5.8km, south	Low	Slight	Minor, Adverse
Rail line between Aberdeen and Inverness	5.2km, south	Medium	Moderate/slight	Moderate/minor, Adverse
Moray Coastal cycle route and National Cycle Route 1	7km, north	Medium	Slight/negligible	Minor, Adverse
Designated Areas				
Portgordon to Cullen Coast SLA	4.3km, north	High/medium	Moderate/slight	Moderate, Adverse
Visual Receptors (night-time)				
Rural area within approximately 5km in northerly directions	Within approximately 5km in northerly directions	High/medium	Moderate	Moderate, Adverse
Rural area within approximately 5km in southerly directions	Within approximately 5km in southerly directions	High/medium	Moderate	Moderate, Adverse
Keith and surrounding areas	5km, south	High/medium	Slight	Moderate/minor, Adverse
Buckie and Portgordon	6km, north	High/medium	Slight	Moderate/minor, Adverse
Rural areas west of Portgordon	6.2km, north-west	Medium	Slight	Moderate/minor, Adverse
Rural areas beyond 10km east	10km east	Medium	Slight/negligible	Minor, Adverse

