

# Ardersier Port Energy Transition Facility (ETF) Port Extension

Landscape and Visual Assessment – statement of agreed scope

PLANNING REFERENCE: 25/00226/SCOP

**DEVELOPMENT: ARDERSIER PORT – EXPANSION OF PORT FOR USE BY THE ENERGY INDUSTRY INCLUDING MARINE DREDGING, ERECTION OF OFFICES, INDUSTRIAL AND STORAGE BUILDINGS FOR THE MANUFACTURE, ASSEMBLY, DELIVERY, AND EXPORT OF PORT RELATED CARGO ALONG WITH ALL ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES INCLUDING VEHICULAR PARKING AND LANDSCAPING– SCOPING REQUEST**

## Introduction

The applicant submitted a scoping report to The Highland Council in January 2025.

The Highland Council provided a scoping opinion regarding the proposed development on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2025. Paragraphs 3.43 to 3.55 of the scoping opinion dealt with landscape and visual matters.

In response to paragraph 3.43 of the scoping opinion the applicant provided to The Highland Council a revised preliminary Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2025 to a 15 km radius with proposed representative viewpoints on a 1:25,000 OS base map. The proposed viewpoint locations were the same as those proposed in the applicant's scoping report but presented on a more legible map base.

A pre-application meeting with a focus on landscape and visual matters was held between the applicant and The Highland Council on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2025. The meeting discussed various aspects of the Council's Scoping Opinion. Following on from that meeting, this note provides a revised statement of agreed scope for the landscape and visual assessment. It sets out the assessments that the applicant now proposes to undertake.

## Statement of Agreed Scope

### Study Area

The applicant proposed a 15 km radius study area in its scoping report.

The Highland Council was silent in its scoping opinion on the proposed study area for the assessment.

Following discussions at the pre-application meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> April the applicant proposes to extend the study area for the landscape and visual assessment to a 35 km radius from the proposed development. This would ensure full coverage of the Moray Firth coastline to the headlands at Tarbet Ness and Burghead and also include the vicinity of the Kessock Bridge highway crossing north of

Inverness. The applicant proposed to include a small number of representative viewpoints in this wider area.

## ZTV

A ZTV will be provided to 35 km using 'bare earth' terrain data to understand potential areas of visibility at greater distances than 15 km and to allow for the identification of a small number of more distant representative viewpoints (see below). It remains the case, however, that the main focus, and the majority of the representative viewpoints used in the assessment, will remain within the original 15 km radius.

## Representative viewpoints

The applicant identified 20 proposed representative viewpoints in its scoping report.

The Highland Council's scoping opinion was silent on the 20 proposed viewpoints other than, in paragraph 3.44, requesting two viewpoints on the route of the A96.

At the pre-application meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> April and in reference to discussion regarding the wider study area:

- (i) The location of the two viewpoints on the A96 were discussed and agreed;
- (ii) It was agreed that a small number of viewpoints be identified at distances in excess of 15 km but that several of the originally scheduled viewpoints could be omitted (the Highland Council expressed concern that too many of the proposed viewpoints were too close to the site); and
- (iii) That approximately 20 viewpoints remained adequate to assess the landscape and visual effects of the proposed development.

As a consequence the applicant will adopt and assess the following representative viewpoints (original number given in brackets):

From the original schedule the following twelve viewpoints will be included in the assessment:

- (i) Easter/Wester Bog (2)
- (ii) Fort George (4) (relocated to the north eastern bastion of the monument)
- (iii) Cemetery between Ardersier and Baddock (5)
- (iv) Hilton of Delnies / The Secret Beach (7)
- (v) Rail Crossing near Flemington (8)
- (vi) Chanonry Point (10) (relocated to north of lighthouse)
- (vii) B9039 Old Military Road (South of Ardersier village) (close to entrance to dairy) (11)
- (viii) Headland North of Rosemarkie (13) (The Highland Council; indicated that this position could be omitted however the applicant wishes to include)
- (ix) Rosemarkie beachfront (14) (position close to café)
- (x) Nairn beach (15)
- (xi) Sutons of Cromarty (South Sutor) (18)
- (xii) Avoch (20)

For the avoidance of doubt, it was agreed at the pre-application meeting on 9th April that the following eight viewpoints identified in the scoping report are to be omitted from the assessment: Leitchfield (Starlight Centre) (1), Kirton Cemetery (3), B9092 at Wester Delnies (6), A96 (B9092 Junction) (9), B9091 (12), Airport Approach Road (16), Easterton (17), Alturlie Point (19).

The following four additional / relocated viewpoints were discussed at the meeting and will now also be included in the assessment:

- (i) A96 at western edge of Nairn (near new housing development in vicinity of Rucven Cottage)
- (ii) A96 east of airport (layby south east of Culblair)
- (iii) Vicinity of the Royal Distillery at Brackla
- (iv) Kessock Bridge / Craigton / North Kessock (a preferred alternative position to Alturlie Point on the waterfront near the bridge) (19)

The applicant will also include at least four longer distance viewpoints. These will be identified following running of a 35 km radius ZTV but may likely include:

- (i) Culloden Battlefield (for both landscape and visual; and heritage purposes)
- (ii) Findhorn
- (iii) Burghead
- (iv) One or more other long distance views (to be confirmed following running of 35 km radius ZTV)

## Agreement of representative viewpoints

In reference to paragraph 3.50 of the scoping opinion the applicant does not propose to consult with Community Councils in respect of this proposed development. The submitted assessment will be based on those viewpoints discussed and agreed with The Highland Council.

## Visualisation standards

Although not a wind energy development, in reference to paragraphs 3.47 and 3.48 of the scoping opinion, visualisations will be submitted consistent with The Highland Council's visualisation standards for wind energy development.

## Change in years 5 and 10 after completion

In reference to paragraph 3.49 of the scoping opinion the applicant proposes to present visualisations of the proposed development in year 0 only, noting that no mitigation in the form of new planting is proposed which would materially alter the appearance of the proposed development nor its level of visual effect in years 5 and 10.

## Nighttime effects

The applicant proposes to submit nighttime visualisations for the viewpoints at Rosemarkie Beachfront (14) and Nairn Beach (15).

## Cumulative and sequential visual effects

Following the production of a 35 km radius ZTV and a review of on shore wind energy development within that area, the applicant will submit a proportionate assessment of the cumulative and sequential visual effects of the proposed development noting that the transient and seasonal nature of the presence of

part assembled turbines mean that a comprehensive cumulative and sequential assessment (as would be undertaken over a wide area for a proposed on shore wind farm) is not necessary.

### Assessment criteria

The applicant's landscape and visual impact assessment will include a method statement and assessment criteria based on the principles set out in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). The visual assessment criteria for considering the magnitude of visual change at any viewpoint or on any visual receptor will include consideration of duration. The applicant's consideration of duration will be cogniscent of and reflect the transient and seasonal presence of part assembled off shore wind turbines (and any other tall structures or components). In this respect, the applicant anticipates that the magnitude of visual change will be assessed as less than would be the case for an on shore wind farm where turbines would be permanently present for the full duration of any consent. The assessment of magnitude of visual change will therefore consider the magnitude of visual change over the course of an operational season not a single, static, point in time.

# ARDERSIER PORT ENERGY TRANSITION FACILITY PORT EXTENSION



November 2025

## Appendix 7.2 Legislation, Policy and Guidance

## Appendix 7.2 Legislation, Policy and Guidance

### Ardersier Energy Transition Facility (Extension)

#### Introduction

The purpose of this EIA Appendix is to support EIA Chapter 7 of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIA). This EIA Appendix contains information about landscape, seascape policy.

The proposed development description is provided in EIA Chapter 3 (Project Description). The proposed development plan is provided in Figure 3.1 of EIA Chapter 3 (Project Description). An Environmental Constraints Plan is provided in Figure 1.3 of EIA Chapter 1 (Introduction).

#### National

##### *National Planning Framework 4*

The National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)<sup>1</sup>, published in February 2023, establishes the long-term strategic vision for land use and development across Scotland. It aims to create a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive planning system that balances the needs of communities, the environment, and the economy. NPF4 presents a vision of development that addresses both the opportunities and challenges posed by climate change, demographic shifts, and changing economic circumstances.

At its core, NPF4 outlines several critical principles:

- **Sustainability and Climate Change:** NPF4 aims for Scotland to achieve a net-zero economy by 2045, promoting sustainable development, renewable energy, sustainable transport, and resource-efficient construction.
- **Biodiversity and Environmental Protection:** NPF4 emphasizes protecting Scotland's biodiversity through habitat enhancement and restoration. Developers must integrate high-value habitats and achieve Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) through compensation where necessary.
- **Community and Infrastructure Development:** NPF4 focuses on building sustainable, inclusive communities with quality housing, healthcare, education, and transport, ensuring long-term social well-being.
- **Place-making and Design:** The framework encourages developments that respect local characteristics, cultural heritage, and landscape, prioritizing good design and functional spaces.
- **Economic Resilience and Growth:** NPF4 supports inclusive and sustainable economic growth, focusing on green technologies, digital infrastructure, and regeneration of economically challenged areas.

##### *Scotland's National Marine Plan (2015)*

Scotland's National Marine Plan (SNMP)<sup>2</sup> was produced by The Scottish Government "to manage human impact on the marine environment". The plan provides General Policies and Sectorial Policies. Policy GEN 7 Landscape/Seascape is of relevance to landscape, seascape and visual considerations in relation to the proposed development.

<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2023) National Planning Framework 4, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/> (Accessed 02/10/2025)

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government (2015) Scotland's National Marine Plan, <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2015/03/scotlands-national-marine-plan/documents/00475466-pdf/00475466-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00475466.pdf> (Accessed 02/10/2025)

GEN 7 Landscape / Seascape *“Marine planners and decision makers should ensure that development and use of the marine environment take seascape, landscape and visual impacts into account.”*

The supporting explanatory text includes the following:

*“The Scottish Government is committed to implementing the principles of the European Landscape Convention, which includes seascapes and applies an ‘all landscapes approach’ that addresses developed, altered and cultural landscapes as well as more natural scenic areas. This does not preclude development or change, but recommends that it is carried out appropriately for the area’s landscape character and visual amenity.”*

## Local

The site is located within The Highland Council. The current adopted Local Development Plan is the Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP), adopted April 2012<sup>3</sup>. The HwLDP is supported by development guidance documents. The Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2<sup>4</sup> adopted July 2024 was reviewed and no specific landscape, seascape or visual policies were identified.

### *Highland-wide Local Development Plan (Adopted April 2012)*

The HwLDP contains the following relevant policies:

#### **Policy 49 Coastal Development**

Policy 49 states *“Development proposals for the coast or for installations in nearshore waters should, in both their location and their design, show consideration to the range of existing interests ensuring best use of resources taking account of existing and planned marine activities and development. Proposals should not have an unacceptable impact on the natural, built or cultural heritage and amenity value of the area”* and that landscape impact and the effect on the setting of coastal communities is a factor the Council takes into consideration.

#### **Policy 57 Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage**

Policy 57 is primarily of relevance to cultural heritage but states the following *“For features of national importance we will allow developments that can be shown not to compromise the natural environment, amenity and heritage resource. Where there may be any significant adverse effects, these must be clearly outweighed by social or economic benefits of national importance. It must also be shown that the development will support communities in fragile areas who are having difficulties in keeping their population and services”*.

#### **Policy 61 Landscape**

Policy 61 states *“New developments should be designed to reflect the landscape characteristics and special qualities identified in the Landscape Character Assessment of the area in which they are proposed. This will include consideration of the appropriate scale, form, pattern and construction materials, as well as the potential cumulative effect of developments where this may be an issue. The Council would wish to encourage those undertaking development to include measures to enhance the landscape characteristics of the area. This will apply particularly where the condition of the landscape characteristics has deteriorated to such an extent that there has been a loss of landscape quality or distinctive sense of place. In the assessment of new developments, the Council will take account of Landscape Character Assessments, Landscape Capacity Studies and its supplementary guidance on Siting and Design and Sustainable Design, together with any other relevant design guidance”*.

#### **Policy 67 Renewable Energy Developments**

<sup>3</sup> The Highland Council (2012) Highland-wide Local Development Plan, [https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/development\\_plans/199/highland-wide\\_local\\_development\\_plan](https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/development_plans/199/highland-wide_local_development_plan) (Accessed 02/10/2025)

<sup>4</sup> The Highland Council (n.d.) Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2: Strategy and General Policies, [https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/28837/inner\\_moray\\_firth\\_local\\_development\\_plan\\_2\\_strategy\\_and\\_general\\_policies](https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/28837/inner_moray_firth_local_development_plan_2_strategy_and_general_policies) (Accessed 02/10/2025)

Policy 67 states *“the Council will support proposals where it is satisfied that they are located, sited and designed such that they will not be significantly detrimental overall, either individually or cumulatively with other developments (see Glossary), having regard in particular to any significant effects on the following [...] visual impact and impact on the landscape character of the surrounding area (the design and location of the proposal should reflect the scale and character of the landscape and seek to minimise landscape and visual impact, subject to any other considerations)”*.

### *HwLDP Development Guidance*

The following Development Guidance documents are relevant to landscape, seascape and visual considerations in relation to the proposed development.

#### **Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas (June 2011)**

This document produced by The Highland Council in partnership with Scottish Natural Heritage is a background paper to support the Highland wide Local Development Plan. The assessment introduction states *“This Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas (AHSLA) was undertaken to support the interpretation of policy within the Highland-wide Local Development Plan. It reviews the existing local landscape designations within The Highland Council area, known as Areas of Great Landscape Value, AGLV (now known as Special Landscape Areas, SLAs). It provides a brief citation for each area which summarises its key landscape and visual characteristics, the special qualities for which it is valued, its key sensitivities to landscape change, and possible measures for its enhancement.”*

#### **Highland Coastal Development Strategy (May 2010)**

The Highland Coastal Development Strategy document was produced by The Highland Council to inform the HwLDP. The aims of the strategy are:

- *“guide the sustainable development and use of Highland’s coastal zone whilst safeguarding its natural and cultural heritage assets;*
- *provide a strategic planning framework for the coast and nearshore area of Highland which takes account of national policy guidance and the need for more detailed plan coverage in appropriate areas;*
- *complement the statutory, terrestrial elements of the evolving Highland-wide Development Plan, the new Scottish Planning Policy and the implementation of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010. This recognises that the use of nearshore waters (particularly the more sheltered water) is relevant and often closely related to the use of the land adjacent.”*

# ARDERSIER PORT ENERGY TRANSITION FACILITY PORT EXTENSION



November 2025

## Appendix 7.3 Assessment Methodology

## Appendix 7.3 Assessment Methodology

### Ardersier Energy Transition Facility (Extension)

#### 1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this EIA Appendix is to support EIA Chapter 7 of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIA) This EIA Appendix contains detailed information about the assessment methodology and assessment criteria.

The proposed development description is provided in EIA Chapter 3 (Project Description). The proposed development plan is provided in Figure 3.1 of EIA Chapter 3 (Project Description). An Environmental Constraints Plan is provided in Figure 1.3 of EIA Chapter 1 (Introduction).

#### 1.2 Scope of the assessment

This assessment considers the effects on landscape and seascape character (the effect on the landscape and seascape resource) and on visual amenity (the effect on people's visual amenity in specific locations).

The assessment will consider both the construction and operational phases effects of the proposed development. It will consider the operational effects in year 1 immediately after completion of construction.

Separate consideration of effects over the longer term (typically residual effects in year 15 after any mitigation planting has begun to mature) will not be undertaken for this proposed development because, due to the location and specific landscape and seascape character context, mitigation of potential effects is unlikely to include areas of proposed new tree planting to screen the proposed development.

Cumulative effects will be considered as per the approach set out in the Statement of Agreed Scope (EIA Appendix 7.1).

#### Study area

The primary study area of 15km from the proposed development was determined through the production of a Zone of Theoretical Visibility and fieldwork observations. An extended study area of 35km from the proposed development has been included further to pre-application discussions between the applicant and The Highland Council for the consideration of visual effects which may occur at greater distances (see EIA Appendix 7.1).

#### Zone of Theoretical Visibility

A Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) was generated for the 35km study area using a 50m resolution Digital Terrain Model (DTM) created using OS Terrain 50 data. The viewer height for each ZTV has been taken as 1.6m accordance with GLVIA 3 best practice guidance.

The ZTV is a composite of ZTVs run at 40m, 170m and 330m to provide an indication of relative potential visibility of the under-assembly offshore turbines, with 330m representing an approximate potential blade tip height.

#### Data sources

##### *Desktop*

The following publication and data sources were interrogated to develop an understanding of baseline conditions

Mapping and websites

- Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 “explorer” mapping.
- Google Earth aerial imagery
- National Library of Scotland ‘Map images’ resource
- The Highland Council Open Map Data (Core Paths, Special Landscape Areas, Conservation Areas, Tree Preservation Orders and Wind Turbines)
- NatureScot Open Data Hub
- Historic Environment Scotland Portal
- The Moray Way – The Moray Way Coast Trail
- UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology Land Cover Map 2023

#### Policy documents and evidence base

- Adopted The Highland Council (2012) Highland-Wide Local Development Plan
- Adopted The Highland Council (2012) Highland-Wide Local Development Plan Proposals Map
- Adopted The Highland Council (2024) Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2

#### Published reports and documents

- NatureScot (2019) Scottish Landscape Character Types Map and Descriptions.
- NatureScot (2020) Description of Coastal character types – (including Caithness).
- NatureScot (2005) NatureScot Commissioned Report 103: An assessment of the sensitivity and capacity of the Scottish seascape in relation to windfarms.
- The Highland Council (2011) Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas.

### *Field assessment*

Fieldwork surveys were undertaken in December 2024 and July 2025 from public highways and publicly accessible areas and involved collection of information on landscape elements, landscape and seascape character, views and localised screening and capturing photography from agreed representative viewpoints.

### Representative viewpoints, photography and visualisations

Twenty four representative viewpoints have been selected and agreed through pre-application discussion with The Highland council (see EIAR Appendix 7.1). Representative viewpoint locations are identified on Figures 7.3 and 7.4 in EIAR Appendix 7.5. The representative viewpoints, which have been produced to the LI “Type 4” visualisation standard and to The Highland Council’s visualisation standards for wind energy, are provided by Figures 7.5.1a to 7.5.24e in EIAR Appendix 7.5

### Assessment Criteria

This assessment is based on the principles set out in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition) (GLVIA3).

### *Landscape and Seascape*

The following are treated within this assessment as the receptors for landscape and seascape effects:

- NatureScot Landscape Character Types
- NatureScot Coastal Character Types
- Sutors of Cromarty, Rosemarkie and Fort George Local Landscape Area (LLA) designation

It is acknowledged that individual landscape features or characteristics can be referred to as the ‘receptors’ of landscape change. However, within this assessment, loss of or changes to individual landscape features or characteristics are wrapped up into the overall assessment of the significance of the effect on landscape character type areas and coastal character type areas. The assessment of the effect on landscape and seascape will then be used to inform separate consideration of the overall

effect on the value and integrity of the Sutors of Cromarty, Rosemarkie and Fort George LLA designation.

#### Landscape and seascape value

Landscape Institute GLVIA3 (Box 5.1) and subsequent Technical Guidance Note (02/21) *Assessing landscape value outside national designations* (TGN 02/21) sets out a wide range of considerations that might inform an assessment of landscape value. In addition to formal designation at either a national or local level, these include the following factors (ordered and defined based on an assessment of which factors and aspects bear most relevance to the assessment of landscape and seascape value within the context of the proposed development:

- Landscape/ seascape condition (or quality) – the intactness of the landscape character area, the health of its key landscape features and general absence of detractors;
- Distinctiveness – a strong sense of identity taking account of rarity and representativeness;
- Natural heritage – presence of wildlife or habitats or ecological interest that contribute to a sense of place;
- Perceptual (scenic) – whether the area is visually appealing;
- Perceptual (tranquillity) – high levels of tranquillity or perceived tranquillity including a sense of remoteness or peace and quiet;
- Cultural heritage – preservation of historic landmark structures or designated landscape elements (whether or not formally regarded as heritage assets);
- Recreational importance – landscapes offering good accessibility and recreational opportunity;
- Association with particularly notable people, events or the arts; and
- Other landscape/seascape function – a particularly important contribution to other landscape functions such as ecosystem services or green infrastructure networks.

In this assessment the value of an area of landscape or seascape is defined as either High, Medium or Low with reference to the following criteria based on the factors listed above. The criteria are indicative and do not override the necessity for professional judgement supported by reasoned narrative. It is not necessary for every criterion to be met for an area of landscape or seascape to be placed in any one category.

#### High value landscape / seascapes:

- Most areas of nationally designated landscapes/seascapes (e.g. National Parks or National Scenic Areas) (unless other criteria suggest otherwise);
- Areas of locally designated landscapes/seascapes (e.g. Local Landscape Areas) where other criteria are also met;
- An intact, highly distinctive and possibly rare landscape/seascape which may be a good example and especially representative of the landscape/seascape character area within which it falls;
- Presence of particularly distinctive or unusual, prominent, and valuable individual landscape/seascape components or landmarks;
- A landscape/seascape area which clearly displays time depth with prominent evidence of special historical development or ecological richness;
- Likely to be generally perceived by most people as unusually scenic and/or tranquil; and
- May be widely regarded as an especially important area of landscape/seascape for recreation, for a special association with a particular person or event or for a special or unique landscape/seascape function.

#### Medium value landscapes and seascapes:

- Areas of nationally designated landscape/seascape (e.g. National Parks or National Scenic Areas) where other criteria suggest less than High value;

- Some areas of locally designated landscape/seascape (e.g. Local Landscape Areas) where other criteria for High value are not met;
- An ordinary or 'everyday' landscape/seascape area which is no more than typical of the landscape/seascape character within which it falls;
- A landscape/seascape area with some apparent time depth but with limited evidence of any special historical development or ecological richness;
- May be perceived by some people to display a moderate degree of scenic value or relative tranquillity; and
- May be regarded as locally important for recreation.

#### Low value landscapes and seascapes

- Landscape/seascape areas neither designated at a national or local level (it is likely that all areas that fall within a national or local landscape designation would be deemed to be either Medium or High value);
- A deteriorating or discordant landscape/seascape area with prominent detractors which is a weak example and not fully representative of the landscape/seascape character area within which it falls (interventions to restore or enhance the landscape/seascape are likely to be desirable);
- A depleted or eroded landscape/seascape area within which evidence of its historical development or ecological richness is largely absent; and
- Absence of perceived scenic value or tranquillity.

#### Landscape and seascape susceptibility

The susceptibility of a landscape or seascape character area to change refers to its ability to accommodate the type of development proposed without undue consequences for the maintenance of its existing character. The susceptibility of a landscape to change is specific to the nature of the proposed development, in this case, the extension of a consented port to accommodate the assembly of large off shore wind turbines. Susceptibility therefore refers to the interplay between the type of development that is proposed and the key characteristics of the landscape or seascape and is a measure of the likely ability of the landscape or seascape to absorb that type of development without its character being altered (i.e. the potential 'fit' between the type of development and the type of landscape or seascape).

Susceptibility criteria therefore focus on those aspects or characteristics of the landscape or seascape that might be most vulnerable to the changes likely to be caused by the type of development proposed. In this assessment, the susceptibility of an area of landscape or seascape is defined as either High, Medium or Low with reference to the following criteria. These criteria place particular weight on aspects of landscape or seascape character which are considered to be indicators of susceptibility to the type of development proposed, namely scale or height of built forms, uniformity, and visual openness.

#### High susceptible landscapes or seascapes:

- Presence of distinctive characteristics which would be vulnerable to the types of changes proposed;
- The type of development proposed (or similar land uses) are absent from the existing landscape/seascape and make no contribution to its existing character (the 'fit' or consistency between existing character and the proposed development is poor);
- A simple, distinct, and uniform landscape/seascape character;
- Visually open landscapes/seascapes, and specific to landscape, where there is an absence of a strong landscape framework and low levels of tree cover;
- Landscapes/seascapes generally free of built development or where built development is not visually prominent; and
- Absence of non-domestic large scale or tall buildings and built structures.

Medium susceptibility landscapes or seascapes:

- Presence of characteristics with some vulnerability to the type of changes proposed;
- The type of development proposed (or similar land uses) are largely absent from the existing landscape/seascape and make only a limited contribution to its existing character (the 'fit' or consistency between the character and the proposed development is limited);
- Moderate levels of complexity and variety of features and land uses;
- Moderate levels of visual openness;
- Moderate contribution by existing built development; and
- Only occasional presence of non-domestic large scale or tall buildings or built structures.

Low susceptibility landscapes or seascapes:

- Absence of distinctive characteristics with an ability to easily accommodate the type of changes proposed;
- The type of development proposed (or similar land uses) are present within the existing landscape/seascape and already contribute to its existing character (the 'fit' or consistency between existing character and proposed development is good);
- Existing character is defined by presence of complexity and variety of features and land uses;
- Visually enclosed landscapes with presence of strong landscape framework and high levels of tree cover / visually enclosed seascapes with presence of strong coastal framework.
- Landscapes/seascapes within which built development is frequently and visually prominent; and
- Frequent presence of non-domestic large scale or tall buildings or built structures.

#### Landscape and seascape sensitivity

The sensitivity of a landscape or seascape receptor to the proposed development is derived by combining its assessed value and susceptibility and will be assessed as High, Medium or Low. The relative weighting given to each is a matter of professional judgement backed up by narrative and clear reasoning within the assessment. Although a simple summing is unlikely to be appropriate, it is generally likely that the following will be the case:

High sensitivity landscapes/seascapes are generally likely to be:

- High value and high susceptibility
- High value and medium susceptibility; and
- Medium value and high susceptibility.

Medium sensitivity landscapes/seascapes are generally likely to be:

- Medium value and medium susceptibility;
- High value but low susceptibility; and
- Low value but high susceptibility.

Low sensitivity landscapes/seascapes are generally likely to be:

- Low value and low susceptibility;
- Medium value and low susceptibility; and
- Low value and medium susceptibility.

#### Magnitude of landscape and seascape change

The assessment of the magnitude of change likely to arise as a result of the introduction of the specific proposed development takes account of a range of considerations including the predicted:

- Degree of landscape/seascape change;
- Extent of landscape/seascape change;
- Duration of landscape/seascape change; and

- Potential reversibility (whether the change could, rather than will, be potentially reversed or whether the changes would be difficult to reverse and restoration the landscape/seascape to its current condition).

Duration is of particular relevance when considering the magnitude of change associated with the proposed development. The assembly of the offshore wind turbines will be seasonal and transient, the magnitude of change assessment will be cognisant of this and reflect this in the assessment outcome. The assessment of magnitude of change will therefore consider the magnitude of change over the course of an operational season, not a single, static, point in time. As such, it is likely the magnitude of change will be assessed as less than would be the case for an onshore or offshore wind farm where turbines would be permanently present in the landscape/seascape for the full duration of any consent.

The relative weight to be given to these considerations will vary and is a matter for professional judgements backed up by reasoning within the assessment.

The magnitude of change has been assessed during the construction phase and at year 0 when the proposed development will be operational. Separate consideration of effects over the longer term (typically residual effects in year 15 after any mitigation planting has begun to mature) will not be undertaken for this proposed development because, due to the location and specific landscape and seascape character context, mitigation of potential effects is unlikely to include areas of proposed new tree planting to screen the proposed development.

Within this assessment, the following criteria have been used to help determine the magnitude of landscape/seascape change within each landscape/seascape receptor at each project stage as High, Medium, Low or No Change.

High magnitude of landscape or seascape change:

- The proposed development would be a, and possibly the, defining feature of the landscape/seascape character which would be substantially altered;
- Substantial changes to key or defining characteristics of the landscape/seascape;
- The proposed development would be at substantial variance to the landform, scale, or pattern of the landscape/seascape and at substantial variance to landscape/seascape objectives and guidance contained in any relevant landscape/seascape policy;
- The extent of landscape/seascape features lost or altered would be extensive;
- A change likely to exert an influence over a large part of the character area; and
- Likely to be long term and irreversible.

Medium magnitude of landscape or seascape change:

- The proposed development would be a contributing feature of the landscape/seascape character which would be altered;
- Some limited changes to key or defining characteristics of the landscape/seascape; and
- The proposed development would be slightly at odds with the landform scale or pattern of the landscape/seascape and slightly vary from the landscape objectives and guidance contained in any relevant landscape/seascape policy.

Low magnitude of landscape change:

- The proposed development would be a generally unnoticed secondary feature to those existing features in the area that already define landscape/seascape character;
- Changes would generally not affect key or defining characteristics of the landscape/seascape;
- The proposed development would be largely consistent with the landform, scale or pattern of the landscape and with the landscape objectives and guidance contained in any relevant landscape/seascape policy;
- The extent of landscape/seascape features lost or altered would be limited;
- May be a highly localised change; and
- May be short term and reversible.

Negligible or No Change:

- No perceived change.

## *Visual*

The visual assessment is based on 24 selected representative viewpoints. The assessment considers in detail and determines the level and significance of the visual effect at each representative viewpoint location and then uses these conclusions to support a more general discussion on the extent of likely significant visual effects in relation to different categories of viewer such as residents and visitors to recreational locations. The level of significance of the visual effect upon each group of residents of or recreational location is however not given as the assessment rests on the representativeness of the viewpoints agreed.

### Visual sensitivity

Visual sensitivity is derived from consideration of the value likely to be attributed to different specific views by people, and their susceptibility to visual change (the latter based on their likely occupation or activity in a particular location). Visual sensitivity is defined as either High, Medium, or Low. Unlike for landscape or seascape character effects, visual value and visual susceptibility are more closely correlated. The following combined criteria are therefore used to determine the combined visual sensitivity at the different representative viewpoint locations.

High visual sensitivity:

- Recognised or important viewpoints (may be identified within policy or recorded as a viewpoint on OS or other relevant mapping);
- Designed views (may be associated with historic designed landscapes);
- Recognised tourist locations;
- Most residential locations;
- Recreational routes including core paths and national cycle routes (especially nationally or locally named long distance routes and/or well used core paths that give access to areas of high scenic value); and
- Important public open spaces or open access areas offering good visual amenity.

Medium visual sensitivity

- Some residential locations where the quality of existing visual amenity is poor;
- Recreational routes where the routes are unnamed local links of more limited amenity value;
- Incidental public open spaces and open access areas offering some visual amenity; and
- Roads that provide access to areas of higher scenic value.

Low visual sensitivity

- Locations where views are substantially affected by clearly apparent detracting features;
- Recreational route incidental links where likely levels of use are minimal or where the quality of existing visual amenity is poor;
- Roads generally;
- Open spaces dedicated to sport or similar activities;
- Places of work; and
- Commercial locations.

Magnitude of visual change

The assessment of the magnitude of visual change at each representative viewpoint likely to arise as a result of the introduction of the specific proposed development takes account of a range of considerations including:

- Distance from the proposed development;

- Predicted degree of visual change (including visual prominence and the extent to which the proposed development would be at odds with the existing view);
- Proportion of the existing view that would be altered;
- Likely duration of the change

Duration is of particular relevance when considering the magnitude of visual change associated with this proposed development. The assembly of the offshore wind turbines will be seasonal and transient, the magnitude of change assessment will be cognisant of this and reflect this in the assessment outcome. The assessment of magnitude of visual change will therefore consider the magnitude of change over the course of an operational season, not a single, static, point in time. As such, it is likely the magnitude of change will be assessed as less than would be the case for an offshore wind farm where turbines would be permanently present for the full duration of any consent.

The relative weight to be attributed to these considerations will vary and is a matter for professional judgements backed up by reasoning within the assessment.

The magnitude of visual change at each representative viewpoint has been assessed at the construction phase and at year 0 when the proposed development will be operational. Separate consideration of effects over the longer term (typically residual effects in year 15 after any mitigation planting has begun to mature) will not be undertaken for this proposed development because, the height of the development means areas of proposed new tree planting to screen the proposed development would not mature to a height to provide meaningful screening beyond that which already exists in the adjacent plantation woodland landscape.

Within this assessment the following criteria have been used to help determine the magnitude of visual change at each viewpoint and at each project stage as High, Medium, Low or No Change.

High magnitude of visual change:

- Total loss of or change to the current view;
- The proposed development would be dominant within the view and would become a defining feature within it;
- The proposed development would sit within a central and/or focal position within the composition of the view; and
- The proposed development would be discordant and at odds with the features of the existing view.

Medium magnitude of visual change:

- The proposed development would be prominent or noticeable within the view; and
- The proposed development would be partially at odds with and be slightly incongruous with the features of the existing view.

Low magnitude of visual change:

- The proposed development would be clearly visible but unobtrusive and incidental within the view;
- The proposed development would be largely consistent with the features of the existing view and largely absorbed within it; and
- The overall composition of the view would remain unaltered.

Negligible or No visual change;

- The proposed development would be barely perceptible and difficult to pick out within the view;
- The proposed development would be consistent with the features of the existing view and would go unnoticed; and
- Any visual change would be so small such that the view would be widely regarded as unaltered.

### 1.3 Significance criteria

The significance of an effect on a landscape or seascape character area or on a view is derived by combining sensitivity and magnitude. Combining these is a matter of professional judgement backed up by clear reasoning within the assessment. The level of effects is categorised as either Major, Moderate, Minor or Negligible and effects may be adverse or beneficial. Major and Moderate levels of effect are deemed to be significant.

The following matrix illustrates the general relationship between sensitivity and magnitude to judge levels of effect and their significance. However, the matrix provides a guide only and is subject to moderation (with clearly stated reasoning) through the application of the assessor’s professional judgement. For example, a low magnitude of change to a high sensitivity receptor or a high magnitude of change to a low sensitivity receptor may in some cases be deemed to be significant.

Table 1: Levels of effect and significance

Sensitivity of character area or view	Magnitude of change			
	High	Medium	Low	No Change
High	Major (Significant)	Moderate (significant)	Minor (Not significant)	Negligible (Not significant)
Medium	Moderate (significant)	Moderate (significant)	Minor (Not significant)	Negligible (Not significant)
Low	Minor (Not significant)	Minor (Not significant)	Minor (Not significant)	Negligible (Not significant)

Where the magnitude of change is either Negligible or No change, the level of effect is in all cases recorded as Negligible (including for High sensitivity landscape character areas and views).

#### Assumptions and limitation

There are no significant assumptions within, or identified limitations to, the assessments of landscape, seascape and visual effects.



# ARDERSIER PORT ENERGY TRANSITION FACILITY PORT EXTENSION



November 2025

## Appendix 7.4 Representative Viewpoint Assessment

## Appendix 7.4 Representative Viewpoint Assessment

### Ardersier Energy Transition Facility (Extension)

#### Introduction

The purpose of this EIA Appendix is to support EIA Chapter 7 of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIA). This EIA Appendix contains the detailed assessment of visual effects at the representative viewpoints that have been agreed with The Highland Council. EIA Appendix 7.3 (Assessment Methodology) provides further information about the visual assessment methodology and assessment criteria.

The proposed development description is provided in EIA Chapter 3 (Project Description). The proposed development plan is provided in Figure 3.1 of EIA Chapter 3 (Project Description). An Environmental Constraints Plan is provided in Figure 1.3 of EIA Chapter 1 (Introduction).

The 24 agreed representative viewpoint locations are identified on EIA Appendix 7.3 Figure 7.3 and Figure 7.4. The 24 representative viewpoints, which have been produced to the LI "Type 4" visualisation standard and to The Highland Council's visualisation standards for wind energy, are provided by Figures 7.5.1a to 7.5.24e in EIA Appendix 7.5

Each viewpoint assessment table provides a baseline description of the existing view followed by an assessment of the magnitude of change and significance of visual effect at year 0. EIA Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual) Section 1.7.1 addresses effects at construction. The distance stated is the distance between the representative viewpoint and the site boundary exclusive of the access track.