

Appendix 9.G: OWESG Assessment

This Appendix relates to Chapter 9 LVIA of the EIA. In response to the EIA Scoping Request, the following table responds to the ten landscape and visual criteria set out in The Highland Council's Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG). Each criteria is considered in respect of the potential effects that would arise as a result of the Development.

Table 9.G.1: Assessment of Effects on Representative Viewpoints

No	Criterion	Measure	Response
1	Relationship between Settlements/ Key locations and wider landscape respected.	The extent to which the proposal contributes to perception of settlements or key locations being encircled by wind energy development.	The Revised Consented Development is situated a minimum of 2.6 km to the south of the settlement of Reay. The Horizontal Angle Blade Tip ZTV in Figure 9.10 shows that in views from Reay, the Revised Consented Development would occupy either 40 to 50 degrees or 30 to 40 degrees of the full 360 degree view available. Not only would this settlement not be encircled by the Revised Consented Development, but it would occupy only a small proportion of the wider available view from those locations where actual visibility would arise.
	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	Turbines are not visually prominent in the majority of views within or from settlements/ Key Locations or from the majority of its access routes.	While the ZTV in Figure 9.8b shows that the Revised Consented Development would be visible from Reay, actual visibility would be limited to parts of the southern edge and localised open areas within the settlement, owing to the screening effect of built form and tree cover, especially around Sandside House to the west. The proximity of Reay to the north coast and its close association with these coastal landscapes, combined with the separation distance of a minimum of 2.6 km and the limited extents of visibility, ensures that the turbines of the Revised Consented Development do not appear visually prominent in the majority of views from the settlement.
2	Key Gateway locations and routes are respected	The extent to which the proposal reduces or detracts from the transitional experience of key Gateway Locations and routes.	The key route that is relevant to this assessment is the A836. It runs along the north coast and is closely associated with the coastal landscapes it passes through. Although there are no distinct 'Gateway Locations' along this route, to the west of Reay, the road transitions from a coastal landscape characterised by farmland, settlement, wind farm developments and Dounreay Nuclear Power Plant, into a coastal landscape characterised by largely undeveloped open moorland. While the Revised Consented Development is recessed from the A836 and these coastal landscapes, it would have an indirect

No	Criterion	Measure	Response
			influence. These influences would occur in the section which is already heavily characterised by human influences and would not spread these influences into the section which is not so heavily characterised by human influences. In this respect, the Revised Consented Development would follow the existing pattern and avoid a situation in which it would otherwise detract from the transitional experience.
	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise detract from landscape characteristics which contribute to the distinctive transitional experience found at key gateway locations and routes.	As described above, the transition experienced along the A836 occurs over a west to east, or east to west, direction of travel as the A836 passes out of the more developed, settled and cultivated farmland into the less developed, less settled and uncultivated moorland, transitioning around Drum Hollistan, to the west of Reay. The presence of the Revised Consented Development to the south of the section where human influences are already readily evident, ensures that it would not overwhelm or detract from landscape characteristics which contribute to this transitional experience.
3	Valued natural and cultural landmarks are respected	The extent to which the proposal affects the fabric and setting of valued natural and cultural landmarks	Using landscape designations as an indicator of the presence of natural and cultural landmarks with a recognised value, there are no local or national designations such as National Scenic Areas, Special Landscape Areas or Gardens and Designed Landscape within a 9 km radius of the Revised Consented Development. The small hill of Beinn Ratha is, nonetheless, a natural landmark in this area and while the Revised Consented Development will have an effect on its setting (not its fabric), this effect will occur in a context in which other large scale developments along the northern coast are readily evident.
	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	The development does not, by its presence, diminish the prominence of the landmark or disrupt its relationship to its setting.	The Revised Consented Development does not diminish the prominence of the landmark Beinn Ratha or disrupt its relationship to its setting, owing to the contained location of the proposed turbines within a relatively low-lying landscape, and the presence and influence of operational Baillie Hill, Forss and Strathy North Wind Farms, as well as Dounreay Nuclear Power Plant.
4	The amenity of key recreational routes and ways is respected.	The extent to which the proposal affects the amenity of key recreational routes and ways (e.g. Core Paths, Munros and	While there are no key recreational routes in this local area, local core paths have the potential to be affected by the Revised Consented Development. These are typically short in extent and occur across the local landscape around Reay. While the Revised Consented Development would

No	Criterion	Measure	Response
		Corbetts, Long Distance Routes etc.)	have an effect on the visual amenity of local walkers on these paths, it would be seen from a context in which human influences are readily evident in the form of small scale settlement, but also nearby large scale wind farms and Dounreay Nuclear Power Plant.
	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of key routes and ways.	The Revised Consented Development does not overwhelm or significantly detract from the visual appeal of key routes and ways, owing to their contained extents within an afforested area, such that they would occupy 30 to 40 or 40 to 50 degrees of the wider 360 degree views available. Furthermore, the main attraction from many of the core paths is in the opposite direction to the northern coast and the North Atlantic beyond.
5	The amenity of transport routes is respected	The extent to which the proposal affects the amenity of transport routes (tourist routes as well as rail, ferry routes and local road access)	The A836 is the key transport route with potential to be affected. The extent to which the Revised Consented Development will affect the amenity of road-users on the A836 route will be moderated by the presence of closer range operational wind farms, such as Baillie Hill and Forss, being readily visible from sections, and the more detached location of the Revised Consented Development, recessed from the coastal route of the A836.
	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of transport routes	The Revised Consented Development will not overwhelm road-users or significantly detract from the visual appeal of the A836 as they will be contained in an afforested area, that is recessed from the coastal route of the A836 and be seen in the context of other large scale energy developments including Baillie Hill and Forss Wind Farms and Dounreay Nuclear Power Plant.
6	The existing pattern of Wind Energy Development is respected.	The degree to which the proposal fits with the existing pattern of nearby wind energy development, considerations include: Turbine height and proportions, density and spacing of turbines within developments, density and spacing of developments, typical relationship of development to the landscape previously	While there is a concentration of wind farm developments and other large scale energy developments in the coastal landscape, this is not a pattern with which the Revised Consented Development would want to fit, especially in respect of the potential impacts within the more sensitive coastal landscapes. The location of the Revised Consented Development in the Coniferous Woodland Plantation LCT is sufficiently well recessed from the coastal landscapes and utilises the broader scale and simplicity that this landscape has to offer. The proposed turbines would be larger in scale than the operational turbines in the coastal landscapes, although again the broader scale and simplicity of this landscape would be able to accommodate these larger

No	Criterion	Measure	Response
		instituted mitigation measures, Planning Authority stated aims for development of area.	proportions and the separation distance from the coast would help to moderate their effects.
	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	The proposal contributes positively to existing pattern or objectives for development in the area.	The Revised Consented Development contributes positively to the existing pattern or objectives for development in the area, by maintaining a well-contained group in the relatively low-lying afforested area, which is recessed to the south of the A836 and the northern coastal edge.
7	The need for separation between developments and/or clusters is respected	The extent to which the proposal maintains or affects the spaces between existing developments and/ or clusters	Existing developments, including the closest operational wind farms and the Dounreay Nuclear Power Plant, are all located in the coastal landscapes. The Revised Consented Development is located in an afforested area that is separate, distinct and well-contained landscape, such that it maintains a good level of separation and does not contribute to cumulative effects on the coastal landscapes.
	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	The proposal maintains appropriate and effective separation between developments and/ or clusters	The location of the Revised Consented Development in the Coniferous Woodland Plantation LCT, at a distance of more than 4 km from the closest operational wind farm, avoids any issues associated with clustering or expansion.
8	The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected	The extent to which the proposal maintains or affects receptors' existing perception of landscape scale and distance.	The Revised Consented Development is recessed from the coastal edge and within a broad expanse of afforested land which has the scale and simplicity to accommodate the 21 proposed turbines without the sense that they are impinging on the mores sensitive coastal landscapes to the north or sweeping moorland landscapes to the south.
	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	The proposal maintains the apparent landscape scale and/or distance in the receptors' perception.	The combination of the concentration of visual receptors along the coastal edge and the unremarkable nature of the Site, means that there are very few visual receptors within the first 5 km of the Site, in which there would be the greatest likelihood for perceptions of scale to be challenged. Even from the closer range settlements and roads along the northern coastal edge, there is sufficient distance to maintain that sense of separation and to moderate the perceptions of scale.
9	Landscape setting of	The extent to which the landscape setting	The setting of nearby wind energy developments would not be affected by the Revised Consented

No	Criterion	Measure	Response
	nearby wind energy developments is respected	of nearby wind energy developments is affected by the proposal.	Development. Baillie Hill Wind Farm is the closest operational wind farm which is located in the Mixed Agricultural and Settlement LCT, which is characterised by farmland and rural settlement. The Revised Consented Development would be located in the Coniferous Woodland Plantation LCT, which is characterised by sweeping moorland landform and blanket forestry cover. The distinct nature of these two setting and the minimum separation distance of over 4 km ensures that the landscape setting of this closest wind farm will be limited.
	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	Proposal relates well to the existing landscape setting and does not increase the perceived visual prominence of surrounding wind turbines.	The Revised Consented Development would be appropriately located in a broad area characterised by underlying sweeping moorland and overlying coniferous woodland plantation. Through its scale and simplicity, this landscape has the capacity to accommodate the Revised Consented Development without impinging on the more sensitive coastal landscapes to the north, or the more sensitive open moorlands and peatlands to the south. The distinct and well-contained location of the Revised Consented Development ensures that it does not increase the perceived visual prominence of surrounding wind turbines.
10	Distinctiveness of Landscape character is respected	The extent to which a proposal affects the distinction between neighbouring landscape character types, in areas where the variety of character is important to the appreciation of the landscape.	The variety of character is important to the appreciation of the landscape as the coastal landscape to the north and the sweeping moorlands to the south are notably more scenic than this intermediate low-lying area that is characterised by blanket forestry. The Revised Consented Development would be contained in the Limekiln Coniferous Woodland Plantation LCT, such that it would not affect the distinction between the neighbouring landscape character types.
	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	Integrity and variety of Landscape Character Areas are maintained.	The containment of the Revised Consented Development in the Coniferous Woodland Plantation LCT, would associate it with an appropriate location and help maintain the integrity and variety of the more sensitive surrounding landscape character areas.