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## 2. Site Description

### 2.1. Site Context

- 2.1.1. The Site is located south of Reay in the Highland Council administrative area, within the footprint of operational Limekiln Wind Farm. **Figure 2.1** shows the Site boundary and **Figure 2.2** shows the location and wider context of the Site.
- 2.1.2. The proposed BESS compound would be located on the reinstated temporary construction compound which was used for the construction of Limekiln Wind Farm. The proposed Substation Extension would sit immediately adjacent to the operational Limekiln Wind Farm Substation, wrapping around its northern edge. Access to the BESS compound and Substation Extension area would utilise existing wind farm tracks, reducing disturbance to soils and minimising environmental impact.
- 2.1.3. The Applicant is seeking to optimise the use of the existing grid connection infrastructure associated with Limekiln Wind Farm to support greater grid efficiency and flexibility. By locating the Proposed Development in close proximity to the existing wind farm substation (the proposed grid connection point), the design maximises electrical efficiency and minimises the length of cabling required, thereby reducing potential environmental impacts.
- 2.1.4. The Site is situated within a large coniferous woodland plantation known as Limekiln, where the operational Limekiln and Limekiln Extension Wind Farms (together known as Limekiln Wind Farm) are operational. **Figure 2.3** shows the Proposed Development in relation to the operation Limekiln Wind Farm. The underlying landform comprises relatively low and gently undulating hills characteristic of the wider sweeping moorland. The Site rises from 50 m AOD along the northern boundary to 200 m AOD along the southern boundary, while the sites of the proposed BESS and Substation Extension are at approximately 90 m AOD and 80 m AOD respectively. The wider landform follows a south to north alignment marked by the orientation of the low hill ridges and intermediate valleys with the flow of the watercourses north toward the Atlantic Ocean.

The Site's location within the coniferous plantation means that it is well separated from the majority of visual receptors in the area. The nearest settlement of Reay is located approximately 3 km north of the proposed BESS and approximately 2 km north of the proposed Substation Extension with no visibility of the Proposed Development due to the screening effect of the intervening coniferous forestry. While a small number of isolated rural properties are located closer to the Site, they are situated over 1 km away from the Proposed Development and the intervening forestry prevents visibility. The closest main and minor roads are the A836, and the Reay to Shebster road, which are also approximately 3 km from the Proposed Development and with no visibility.

- 2.1.5. There are no residential properties located within 1 km of the Site, the nearest residential property is Borlum House, c.1.95 km distance from the centre of the Site. See **Table 2.1** which gives approximate distances from nearby residential properties to the proposed BESS compound and Substation Extension.

**Table 2.1 Nearest Residential Properties located within close proximity**

Property Name	Distance and Direction from the nearest edge of the BESS compound	Distance and Direction from the nearest edge of the Substation extension
<b>Borum House</b>	1.44 km (north west)	2.0 km (north west)
<b>Milton</b>	1.81 km (north east)	2.3 km (north east)
<b>Achins</b>	2.25 km (north west)	2.9 km (north west)
<b>Loanscorribost</b>	1.66 km (north east)	1.9 km (north east)

### Designations in the Wider Locality

- 2.1.6. The Site and its surroundings lie well separated from any national and local landscape designations. The closest designation to the Site is the Farr Bay, Strathy and Port Skerra Special Landscape Area (SLA) which lies approximately 8 km to the north-west of the Site, while the Dunnet Head SLA lies over 20 km to the east.
- 2.1.7. East Halladale Flows Wild Land Area (WLA) is a mapped interest, the northern part of which lies approximately 1.7 km to the west of the site.
- 2.1.8. The Proposed Development does not intersect or overlap with any international, national, or local ecological designations. The closest international designation is c.1.3 km north of the Proposed Development (North Caithness Cliffs Special Protection Area (SPA)). There are a further three international sites within 10 km, including the Flow Country World Heritage Site located c. 4.8 km west of the Proposed Development.
- 2.1.9. The nearest national designation site is Sandside Bay Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). There are no other national designations within 2 km of the Site.
- 2.1.10. Sandside Bay SSSI is close to the Site boundary of the Proposed Development, c. 35 m from the northern point of the access track, it is located c. 2.3 km from the nearest area of the Proposed Development to be impacted by construction and so it is considered there will be negligible impacts to the SSSI from the Proposed Development.
- 2.1.11. There is one designated heritage asset, the Clach Clais an Tuire Standing Stone located within 2 km of the Proposed Development.

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## Landscape Character

- 2.1.12. The Application Site is located within the 'Sweeping Moorland and Flows' Landscape Character Type (LCT) (LCT 134), with the Farmed Lowland Plain LCT (LCT 143) set to the north, as identified by NatureScot in its 2019 classification. Some of the key characteristics of this landscape type set out in the accompanying description are as follows :
- The Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT covers an expansive area stretching from Strath More in the west, to the east coast at Wick, and from Strath Fleet in the south, to the north coast at Reay.
  - The Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT is generally characterised by the broad expanse of open moorland, with one of its key characteristics described by NatureScot as; 'a strong sense of remoteness is associated within the largely uninhabited, inaccessible core flows and moorlands of this landscape'.
- 2.1.13. The Proposed Development is located in the Limekiln coniferous plantation on the northern fringe of the LCT. This area is characterised by the enclosure of forestry in contrast to the openness of the core flows and moorland to the south. Furthermore, the rotational felling and restocking presents a heavily managed and modified landscape in contrast to the natural landscape of the flows. Limekiln Wind Farm is also located in this LCT making large-scale energy development an established feature of the baseline character.

## 2.2. The Site

- 2.2.1. The Site as shown in **Figure 2.1** rises from 50 m AOD along the northern boundary to 200 m AOD along the southern boundary, while the sites of the proposed BESS and Substation Extension are at approximately 85 m AOD. The wider landform follows a south to north alignment marked by the orientation of the low hill ridges and intermediate valleys with the flow of the watercourses north toward the Atlantic Ocean.
- 2.2.2. The Site covers a total area of approximately 32 hectares (ha).

### Land Use

- 2.2.3. The Site is located within the footprint of the Limekiln Wind Farm, which comprises a combination of operational wind energy infrastructure and commercial coniferous forestry. The land is currently managed for forestry purposes and as part of the operational wind farm. The Proposed Development will utilise existing wind farm tracks for construction and operational access; no new tracks are required. This minimises land disturbance and helps maintain the current land use.
- 2.2.4. The Site is well screened by surrounding coniferous plantation forestry, which provides effective visual containment and limits visibility from receptors in the wider area.