4. Forestry

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4. Forestry

4.1. Introduction

4.1.1. This chapter identifies the likely impacts on Forestry receptors associated with the construction and operation of the Proposed Development and provides details of control measures where appropriate. The specific objectives of the chapter are to:

- describe the baseline forest environment;
- identify the potential direct and indirect impacts on forest receptors; and
- describe any mitigation or control measures proposed to address likely impacts.

4.2. Methodology

Information Source

4.2.1. Woodland assessment through desk study specifically included:

- Scottish Forestry Map Viewer, Scottish Forestry (SF) is the Scottish Government agency responsible for forestry policy, support and regulation, the map viewer enables view of what forest management plans or felling approvals are in place or have now expired.
- Datasets including the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland (NWSS) provide a baseline survey of all native woodlands, nearly native woodlands and Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) sites in Scotland showing type, extent and condition of those woods.
- Datasets for Ancient Woodland Inventory (Scotland) (AWI) categorise ancient woods recorded as being of semi-natural origin on either the 1750 Roy maps OR the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey maps of 1860.
- The Land Information Search (LIS) is a map-based tool that allows search for data such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Native Woodland that may fall within the area of interest.
- Sub compartment shapefiles provided by the forest manager.

4.3. Limitations and Assumptions

4.3.1. The open data forestry shapefiles have been used to identify the woodlands within the study area. There are minor differences between these, the Ordnance Survey mapping and aerial imagery.

4.3.2. No site walkover was undertaken to verify the current tree cover.

4.4. Study Area

4.4.1. The Forestry Study Area is illustrated in **Figure 4.1 Forestry Study Area.**

4.5. Legislation, Planning Policy and Guidance

4.5.1. The key legislation, policy and guidance listed below has been considered in the assessment:

- The Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal (2009) (CoWRP);
- Scottish Government's policy on control of woodland removal: implementation guidance (2019);
- UK Forestry Standard 5th Edition (2023); and
- National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) (2023) (see below);

4.5.2. Policy 6: Trees, woodland and forestry of NPF4 notes that development proposals should not be supported where they would result in:

- any loss of ancient woodlands, ancient and veteran trees, or adverse impact on their ecological condition;
- adverse impacts on native woodlands, hedgerows and individual trees of high biodiversity value or identified for protection in the Forestry and Woodland Strategy;
- fragmenting or severing woodland habitats, unless mitigation measures are identified and implemented; and
- conflict with Restocking Direction, Remedial Notice or Registered Notice to Comply issued by the Scottish Government Forestry Regulator, Scottish Forestry

4.6. Baseline

4.6.1. The Proposed Development lies within a single commercial conifer plantation. The access utilises the Limekiln Wind Farm track from outwith the forest.

4.6.2. Scottish Forestry Map Viewer identifies the Limekiln Plantation Long Term Forest Plan (LTFP) (Reference 16FGS09175) approved by Scottish Forestry on 28th August 2017. The contract ends on 28th August 2027. Felling Permission is from 2022 to 2027. The extent of the plan is 1,240.08 ha.

4.6.3. This LTFP has been amended taking account of the Limekiln Wind Farm as a Consented Development.

4.6.4. Limekiln Plantation is predominantly Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis* (Bongard) Carrière) and Lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta* Douglas ex Loudon) in mixture established over 1989 and 1990. The forest area includes 300.21 hectares of open ground and 134.86 of peatlands designated as SSSI, SAC and SPA. The baseline species is shown in **Figure 4.2 Forestry Baseline Species**.

4.6.5. The forest is adjacent to the Broubster forest (1,379 hectares) and Achaveilan North forest (116 hectares) within a planted coniferous complex totalling approximately 3,120 hectares.

4.6.6. There are no ancient woodland sites identified in AWI.

4.6.7. One small area of NWSS extends into the northern boundary of the plantation (National Grid Reference: NC 973 631). This upland birchwood is outwith the Site.

4.7. Future Baseline

4.7.1. In the absence of this Proposed Development the plantation would be managed on a commercial forestry basis with an operational wind farm embedded.

4.8. Impact and Features Scoped Out

4.8.1. Based on the baseline characterisation, the following receptors have been scoped out of the subsequent assessment. Natural heritage is detailed in Chapter 6. Ecology and Chapter 7. Ornithology. Forest landscape is covered by Chapter 5: Landscape and Visual.

4.9. Embedded Mitigation

4.9.1. Embedded mitigation through design has avoided ancient woodlands and native woodlands.

4.9.2. Existing forest and wind farm access tracks are to be used to access the Proposed Development.

4.9.3. Compensatory planting (CP) is accepted to mitigate any proposed permanent woodland loss. CP will follow the CoWRP Implementation Guidance which includes design to meet UKFS.

4.10. Appraisal

Construction Phase

4.10.1. To construct the Proposed Development including the proposed underground cable route there would be a requirement to fell and remove 2.59 ha of productive conifer, Sitka spruce and Lodgepole pine in mixture. These forestry compartments are planned Phase 3 felling, 2028 to 2032 in the LTFP. **Figure 4.3 Forestry Felling.**

Operational Phase

4.10.2. No further tree felling would be required.

4.10.3. Replanting in situ with Norway spruce (*Picea abies* (L.) Karsten) as the LTFP would take place during the operational phase. This replanting of the proportion of the felled area would leave 1.88 ha as unplanted open ground as safety buffers around the completed Proposed Development. This unplanted area (1.88 ha) would be taken forward as the area for off-site compensatory planting. **Figure 4.4 Forestry Replanting.**

4.11. Mitigation

4.11.1. Compensatory planting would be provided with an equivalent woodland area, on appropriate site types and with at least the equivalent woodland-related net public benefits, in line with the CoWRP Implementation Guidance.

4.11.2. The Highland Council (THC) have a strong preference that compensatory planting takes place in the Highland Region.

Table 4.1 Recommended Mitigation

Potential Impact	Mitigation Measure
Permanent removal of 1.88 ha of productive conifer.	Compensatory planting of equivalent woodland area (1.88 ha) with at least the equivalent woodland-related net public benefits.

4.12. Residual Effects

4.12.1. Given that compensatory planting would take place, then in a Scotland wide context there would be no loss of woodland and there would be no residual effect.

4.12.2. With compensatory planting taking place in the Highland Region there would be no loss of woodland to the Region and there would be no residual effect.

4.13. Conclusion

4.13.1. The Proposed Development utilises the existing access tracks however there is a requirement to fell and remove 2.59 ha of productive conifer for the construction of the Proposed Development.

4.13.2. No ancient or native woodland has been identified within felling areas.

4.13.3. Replanting on site would take place for 0.71 ha with productive conifer species matching the LTFP Restocking Plan. 1.88 ha of felled area would be left unplanted as open ground as a safety buffer.

4.13.4. The Applicant is committed to providing compensatory planting of equivalent woodland area (1.88 ha) with at least the equivalent woodland-related net public benefits.