Environmental Impact Assessment Report

Teindland Wind Farm

Volume 1

Chapter 5: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Document prepared by Envams Ltd for: Teindland Wind Farm Ltd

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Contents

5 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL

5.1 INTRODUCTION

5.1.1 Background

Abseline was commissioned in May 2024 to prepare a landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) of Teindland Wind Farm (the Development) on land owned by Forestry and Land Scotland approximately 3 km north of Rothes, Moray (the Site).

This assessment defines the landscape and visual baseline environments and any known future changes; assesses their sensitivity to change; describes the key features and design rationale of the Development in relation to the mitigation of landscape and visual effects; describes the nature of the anticipated changes to the landscape and views and assesses the effects arising during construction, operation and decommissioning.

5.1.2 The Site and Development

Figure 1.1 (Site Location) places the Development within its local context. The site is located within an area commercial coniferous forestry approximately 2 km to the north of Rothes. The Development is described fully within Chapter 4 – Development Description; of relevance to this chapter, it includes the construction, 40 year operation and decommissioning of 12 wind turbines – 4 with 200 m tip height, and 8 with 230 m tip height, and associated infrastructure including tracks, substation, hardstandings and battery storage. As the turbines are over 150 m in height, aviation lighting will be required on the nacelles of the turbines. This requirement has been minimised through design and only 4 turbines will be lit.

5.1.3 Competence

This chapter has been prepared by Chartered Landscape Architects at Abseline. Key individuals working on this project have over 23 years of experience as chartered landscape architects. The Practice is a Landscape Institute registered practice and all work is prepared and reviewed internally by senior, highly experienced landscape planners with Public Inquiry experience.

To inform the assessment, site visits were made to locations including representative viewpoints, the Site and wider study area by the assessment team.

5.1.4 Stakeholder Consultation

A Scoping request was submitted to the Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit (ECU) in July 2022, setting out the proposed scope of the LVIA, and a Scoping Opinion was issued in October 2022. The Scoping process was undertaken prior to Abseline's involvement in the project and, given that c. 18 months had also passed since the Scoping Opinion was issued, a review of the LVIA scope was undertaken. A document setting out a revised scope for the LVIA, also taking on board consultee comments/requests made through Scoping, was prepared and circulated to NatureScot and Moray Council in summer 2024 for further comment/agreement.

NatureScot responded in July 2024 confirming that they had no further comment to make. Outcomes of the further consultation with Moray Council are detailed in Table 5.1 below.

The ECU's Scoping Opinion draws on topic specific comments provided by statutory consultees. A summary of comments relevant to this chapter is provided in

Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1 Summary of Stakeholder Consultation

Issue	How this is addressed
NatureScot	
There are key sensitivities within the study area and the LVIA should include assessment of effects on the following:	
• The Speyside Way, one of Scotland's Great Trails, which passes close to the development site. A sequential cumulative assessment should be assessed as part of the LVIA.	Effects on the Speyside Way are considered at section 5.7.4.
• Landmark hills such as Brown Muir and Ben Aigan as well as effects on views from Speyside in general.	Views towards these landmark hills are discussed within the assessment of effects in section 5.7 and Technical Appendix (TA) A5.2 where relevant. Ben Aigan is also included as representative viewpoint 4.
• Elgin and its setting which was a key issue in the consideration of Brown Muir Wind Farm.	Effects on visual receptors in and around Elgin are considered in section 5.7.
• The A96 including cumulative and sequential effects.	Effects on the A96 are considered in TA A5.2. Viewpoint 11 near Mosstodloch has been included to represent effects on users of this main road route.
Due to the height of the turbines a full lighting assessment should be provided as described in Annex 1 of our guidance document. The lighting assessment should include lowlight photomontages.	Night-time effects are considered at section 5.7.6 and low light photomontages have been provided for viewpoints 2 (Rothes), 9 (Craigellachie) and 16 (Inchberry).
We request a high resolution version of the ZTV with a OS 1:50 m basemap, the ZTVs provided with the scoping report do not follow our visual representation of wind farm guidance. We will then be able to comment on viewpoints including the lowlight/night-time viewpoints.	High resolution ZTVs, prepared in line with NatureScot guidance, were provided alongside the revised LVIA scope document. NatureScot confirmed in July 2024 that they had no further comments to make.
Moray Council	
The Moray Onshore Wind Energy (MOWE) Non-Statutory Guidance 2020 and Landscape Capacity Study 2017 are strategic level guidance. The wind farm would be located in an area of commercial woodland lying close to Brown Muir Hill. This hill forms a prominent landmark feature in views across the well-settled coastal plain of Moray and siting turbines of this size in close proximity to this hill may affect the focus it provides in views. We would wish to see the effects of the proposal on the character of Brown Muir Hill specifically addressed in the LVIA.	Local guidance is considered at sections 5.3.2 and 5.4.1 while effects on the character of Brown Muir are considered as part of the relevant landscape character type (10 - Upland Moorland and Forestry) at section 5.7.3.1.
Detailed consideration should be given to the landscape and visual effects of felling and restocking proposals (both adverse and beneficial) in the LVIA.	Full details of proposed changes to forestry within the Site are described within TA A4.1 – Forestry. Changes to landscape fabric arising from the Development are considered at sections 5.1.6.1 and 5.7.1 and any effects on receptors arising from changes to forestry are considered as part of the effects on the receptor in question within section 5.7.

Issue	How this is addressed
ZTVs should be produced showing lighting visibility and intensity (assuming directional intensity mitigation will be put in place).	A ZTV showing potential visibility of proposed aviation lighting, not intensity, is included as Figure 5.8. Intensity is a highly variable property which cannot be accurately calculated as it depends on a range of intangible factors including the exact light fitting being used (which is not specified) and the prevailing atmospheric conditions at any given time. The presence or absence of other sources of light at the observation location or within the surrounding landscape and the subjective comparisons that may be made with these also influence how the visual effects of aviation lights are experienced in reality, and the simple fact of seeing a light is more important in giving rise to visual effects than its brightness, making mathematical models of intensity a tool of limited value for assessment.
We would wish to see an assessment of night-time lighting effects from all viewpoints (including a table showing numbers of lit turbines visible from each representative viewpoint) with night-time visualisations produced from up to three representative viewpoints. These viewpoints should be agreed with the Council once the details of the lighting scheme is confirmed.	An assessment of effects arising from aviation lighting on night-time receptors is provided at section 5.7.6. Night-time visualisations have been provided from three viewpoint locations, as agreed with Moray Council, and the position of aviation lights are illustrated on the wirelines for all LVIA viewpoints. Tables showing numbers of lit turbines have not been provided. The requirement for such tables was previously set out in NatureScot pre-application guidance for onshore wind development but current guidance on assessing the effects of visible aviation lighting does not include this. Tables are of little utility to the assessment of effects on receptors and the same information is more usefully provided by the wireline visualisations for each viewpoint.
The Scoping Report does not set out a proposed method for assessing cumulative effects or a list of operational, consented and application-stage wind farms that will be considered in the LVIA… We request that the applicant provides a comprehensive table of wind farm developments to be to be agreed with the Council.	The assessment of cumulative effects, included at section 5.8, has been undertaken in line with current best practice guidance, including NatureScot's 'Assessing the cumulative landscape and visual impact of onshore wind energy developments' (2021). A set of criteria for the inclusion of developments within the cumulative assessment, rather than a list which may become outdated, was set out within the revised LVIA scope document and agreed with Moray Council.
The Scoping Report proposes a 45 km study area for the LVIA. While this is an accepted distance for a development of this size, we would recommend that the detailed assessment of landscape effects focusses on a smaller area of up to 20 km. A great many Landscape Character Types (LCTs) are identified for detailed assessment in paragraph 2.10 of the Scoping Report and the Council would prefer to see a thorough and detailed assessment of fewer LCTs lying closer to the proposal where there is potential for significant effects.	A ZTV showing an initial 45 km study area, as required by NatureScot guidance, is included as Figure 5.1. As requested by Moray Council, the LVIA focusses on a 20 km detailed study area.
Similarly, the Council would recommend focussing the detailed assessment of designated landscapes in Moray on the following Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) where potential for significant effects is greatest: • The Spey Valley and Gordon Castle Policies SLA • The Spey Valley SLA • Lossiemouth to Portgordon Coast SLA	Assessment of designated landscapes, as set out at section 5.7.5, includes those identified by Moray Council.

Issue	How this is addressed
The Council consider that Inventory listed Garden and Designed Landscape (GDLs) with potential visibility and lying within 20 km of the proposal should be considered in the LVIA. We are particularly concerned about potential effects on Gordon Castle GDL due to its closeness to the proposal and the potential for open views from the walled garden and more open policies around the castle. The Council would expect to see a detailed assessment of potential effects on the character and from views to and from this valued landscape.	Effects on the historic significance of GDLs and their setting, including Gordon Castle GDL, are considered within Chapter 8 – Archaeology and Cultural Heritage. The LVIA considers GDLs as indicators of landscape value and, where they are readily accessible to the public (as with Gordon Castle), effects on visual receptors within these areas are considered in TA A5.2.
A detailed ZTV should be provided in the EIA-R based on an OS 1:50,000 scale map base within 15 km of the proposal to allow more accurate appraisal of potential visibility in the local area.	Figures 5.2, 5.5, 5.6 and 5.8 show ZTVs on 1:50,000 scale mapping for the 20 km detailed study area requested by Moray Council.
The viewpoints shown on Figure A9 and listed in Table 2 of the Scoping Report should be supplemented with the following additional representative viewpoints: • Gordon Castle Garden and Designed Landscape • The A96 west of Fochabers • B9015 near Dipple • Spey Bay • Duke of Gordon Monument, Elgin • Charlestown of Aberlour • A95 South-west of Aberlour • Rothes Golf Course	A revised list of viewpoints was proposed within the revised LVIA scope document and agreed with Moray Council via correspondence. This included some locations which were included as illustrative views (in TA A5.3) rather than main representative viewpoints.

5.1.5 Study Area and Scope

It is accepted practice that the extent of the study area for a development proposal is broadly defined by where it will be visible. In this case a detailed study area of 20 km has been adopted, as agreed with Moray Council (shown on Figures 5.2 onwards), with a 45 km study area used for context and shown on Figure 5.1.

The final list of viewpoints agreed through consultation is provided in Table 5.5 in this chapter.

5.1.5.1 Night-Time Assessment

The Development includes a requirement for visible aviation lighting for which assessment of potential night-time impacts is provided in section 5.7.6. The methodology for that assessment is included within TA A5.1 and the scope of the night-time assessment was agreed with consultees to include night-time photomontages at Rothes (viewpoint 2), Cragiellachie (viewpoint 9), and Inchberry (viewpoint 16).

As set out within TA A5.1, effects on landscape character are not considered as notable effects on character at night are unlikely to arise, and effects on designated areas focus on those qualities that are likely to be appreciated at night. In relation to visual effects the assessment considers locations where visual receptors are most likely to be present at night. The sensitivity of both visual receptors and designated areas may not be the same during the night as it is in the day.

5.1.5.2 Cumulative Assessment

Cumulative assessment relates to the assessment of the effects of more than one development (as set out within TA A5.1). Operational developments are included in the baseline, consented development forms part of the future baseline, unless there is some uncertainty regarding the future construction of consented developments in which case they may be considered as the first scenario of the cumulative assessment.

The main focus of the cumulative assessment is on developments in planning. The full list of developments considered within the cumulative assessment is provided within Section 5.8 and illustrated on Figure 5.9.

5.1.5.3 Residential Amenity

As set out within LI TGN 02/19 'Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA)[1]:

> *"Changes in views and visual amenity are considered in the planning process. In respect of private views and visual amenity, it is widely known that, no one has 'a right to a view.'*
> *…*
> *It is not uncommon for significant adverse effects on views and visual amenity to be experienced by people at their place of residence as a result of introducing a new development into the landscape. In itself this does not necessarily cause particular planning concern. However, there are situations where the effect on the outlook / visual amenity of a residential property is so great that it is not generally considered to be in the public interest to permit such conditions to occur where they did not exist before."*

The methodology for and assessment of effects on residential visual amenity for the most affected properties within 2 km is included at TA A5.4.

5.1.6 Assessment Scenarios and Potential Effects

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

5.1.6.1 Construction

The construction of the Development would take place over a 12-month period, following enabling works that would include any required tree felling. It would involve the delivery of materials and components to Site; groundworks to form the tracks, turbine foundations and hardstands; a permanent anemometer mast; and the construction of the substation and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) compound and control building. Cranes would be used to erect the turbines and would be onsite for a small part of the construction period.

Effects during enabling works and construction on landscape fabric would arise from:

- Localised felling to facilitate access and delivery of components and at the construction compound, BESS and substation areas, and the meteorological mast;
- Localised removals of forestry within a radius around turbine bases, where that radius depends on the actual turbine dimensions, calculated to ensure that blade tips do not encroach within 50 m of trees. For turbines that are 200 m to tip, this may mean a radius of c. 104 m, and for turbines that are 230 m to tip, this may mean a radius of c. 68 m;
- Groundworks for the turbine foundations, BESS, substation compound, tracks, meteorological mast and hardstandings;
- Changes to vegetation for habitat management within the cleared areas around turbine bases, and
- The use of crane(s) to erect the turbines.

Effects during enabling works and construction on landscape character would arise from:

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

Effects during enabling works and 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 enabling works and construction on designated landscapes would arise from:

[1] Landscape Institute (2019). Technical Guidance Note 02/19 Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA). Available at: https://www.landscapeinstitute.org/technical-resource/rvaa/ [accessed: 240604].

- Short-term changes to the special qualities as a result of the construction activity taking place within and close to nearby areas.

Potential night-time effects during enabling works and construction would arise from:

- Limited site-based and vehicular lighting within the standard working hours.

5.1.6.2 Operation

The Development would be in operation for up to 40 years. Effects during operation on landscape fabric would arise from:

- Growth of new planting where provided as part of the Habitat Management Plan.

Effects during operation on landscape character would arise from:

- The presence and motion of the wind turbines and the associated infrastructure within the Site.

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.

Potential night-time effects during operation would arise from:

- Visibility of red aviation lighting on the turbine nacelles and towers.

5.1.6.3 Decommissioning

Effects during decommissioning would be short-term (estimated to take 8 months) and similar to those arising during construction except in reverse. The decommissioning process is set out in chapter 4 – Development Description, section 4.6. The wind turbines would be dismantled and removed and turbine bases would be broken up to c. 1 m below ground level. All land affected will be re-instated, in accordance with good practice at the time. It is not anticipated that the access tracks would be removed. The control / substation building may, if the landowners prefer, be left for their use beyond the life of the wind farm, or otherwise will be removed as for other above-ground infrastructure.

5.1.7 Supporting Information and Terminology

Supporting Technical Appendices (TAs) and figures have been prepared as listed below. These are important to the assessment and should be read alongside this chapter.

The following TAs are presented in Volume 3 of this EIAR:

- TA A5.1: Methodology;
- TA A5.2: Non-significant Effects;
- TA A5.3: Illustrative Views; and
- TA A5.4: Residential Visual Amenity Assessment.

The following figures are presented in Volume 2a of this EIAR:

- Figure 5.1: ZTV Study (Bare Ground);
- Figure 5.2: ZTV Study (incl. Woodland & Settlements);
- Figure 5.3: Topography & Landcover;
- Figure 5.4: Landscape Character, Existing & Consented Wind Farms;
- Figure 5.5: Landscape Character & ZTV;
- Figure 5.6: Visual Receptors & ZTV;
- Figure 5.7: Existing Light Environment & Night-Time Receptors;
- Figure 5.8: ZTV study – Aviation Lighting;
- Figure 5.9: Cumulative Sites;
- Figure 5.10: Cumulative ZTV: Operational & Consented Wind Farms; and
- Figure 5.11: Cumulative ZTV: Aultmore and Kellas Drum.

Photography, wireline representations and photomontages are presented in Volume 2b: Visualisations of this EIAR.

Key terms used within the assessment are described in Section 5.2 and TA A5.1 which sets out the methodology. A glossary is provided within TA A5.1 and as Chapter 17.

5.2 METHODOLOGY

The full methodology is described in TA A5.1, which also references the key guidance documents which inform the approach. A summary of key points is provided below.

5.2.1 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. The application includes a 50 m micro-siting allowance (subject to not reducing the minimum distance between a given property and its nearest turbine, and not encroaching on other environmental constraints); this is taken account of in the assessment and would not alter the conclusions.

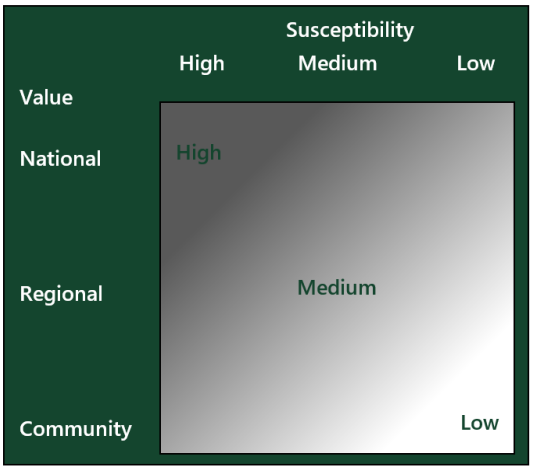
5.2.2 Visualisations

The method of visualisation selected has been informed by NatureScot 'Visual Representation of Wind Farms' (2017). The methodology of production for the visualisations (undertaken by Kintra Studio) is described in TA A5.1.

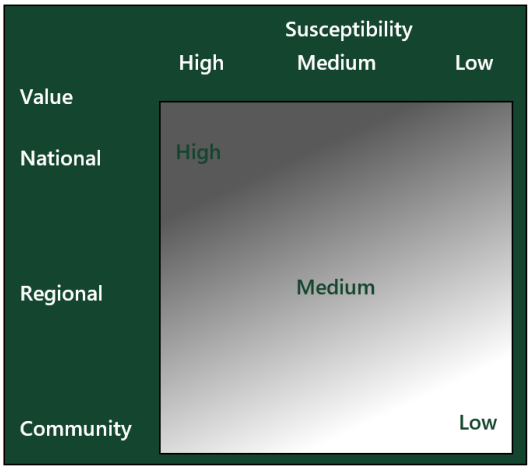
5.2.3 Sensitivity

Sensitivity judgements take account of consideration of the value and susceptibility of the receptor as illustrated by the diagrams below. Where sensitivity is judged to lie between levels, an intermediate assessment will be adopted. As comparison of the two diagrams indicates, a slightly greater weight is given to susceptibility in judging sensitivity of visual receptors.

Landscape Sensitivity



Visual Sensitivity



5.2.4 Magnitude

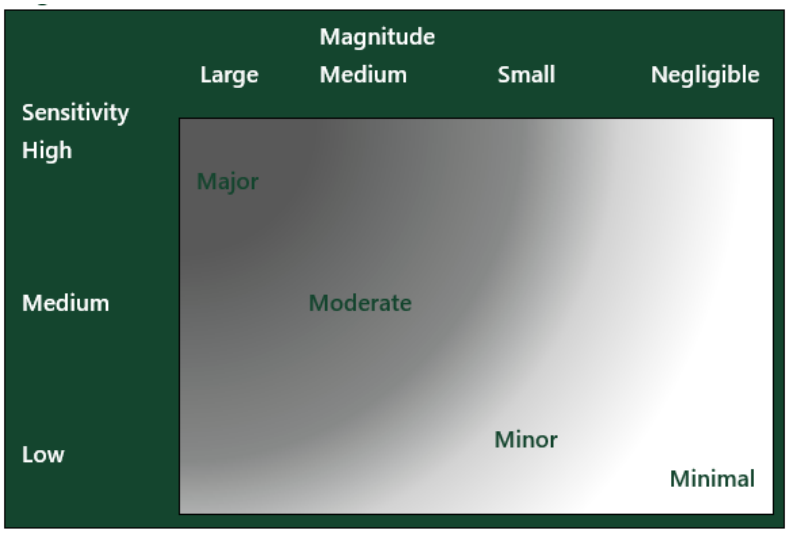
Magnitude of change (Large, Medium, Small, Negligible) judgements take account of the degree of change arising from the proposed development at any particular location in terms of its size or scale; extent of the area or receptor that is influenced, and the duration and reversibility of the change.

The maximum scale of change on the receptor is the primary factor in determining magnitude. However, for particularly widespread and/or long-lasting effects the magnitude judgement may be slightly greater than the scale of change; or for effects that are constrained in geographic extent and/or short-lived the magnitude of change may be slightly lower than the scale of change.

5.2.5 Level of Effect

The level (Major, Moderate, Minor, Minimal) of any identified landscape or visual effect reflects a professional judgement as to the relative importance of the effects identified, taking account of the sensitivity of the receptor and the predicted magnitude of change as illustrated by the diagram below.

Level of Effect



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 indication that some effects are 'significant' should not be taken to imply that they should warrant refusal in any decision-making process.

5.2.6 Beneficial/Adverse

Landscape and visual effects can be beneficial, adverse or neutral (different but neither better nor worse taking all factors into account). Taking a precautionary approach in making an assessment of the 'worst case scenario', the assessment considers that all effects which would result in a notable difference to the existing features, character, views or special qualities would be adverse unless indicated otherwise. It should be noted however that people's individual responses to change arising from development can vary markedly.

5.3 PLANNING POLICY

5.3.1 National Planning Policy

Relevant national planning policy is set out within National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)[2]:

Policy 11 Energy is of specific relevance to the 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 does not refer to Policy 4 in relation to local designations. Policy 4 sets out criteria identifying that the *"objectives of designation and 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

[2] Scottish Government (2023). *National Planning Framework 4*. Available at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/ [accessed 240604].

qualities for which landscapes have been designated may be outweighed by *"social, environmental or economic benefits of national importance"*. In relation to locally designated sites, Policy 4 identifies that any significant effects on their integrity may be outweighed by *"social, environmental or economic benefits of at least local importance"*.

Although not planning policy, the Onshore Wind Policy Statement (OWPS)3 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."*

5.3.2 Local Planning Policy

Relevant local planning policy is described within the Moray Local Development Plan (LDP) 2020[4]. Key policies relevant to this assessment include:

- **DP1 Development Principles** – is a wide ranging policy applicable to all forms of development. It sets out, inter alia, that development proposals should demonstrate how they will *"conserve and enhance the natural and built environment* […]*, retain original land contours and integrate into the landscape"* and that proposals must not adversely affect neighbouring properties due to an *"overbearing loss of amenity"*.
- **DP9 Renewable Energy** – which states that wind energy development should not have *"unacceptable significant adverse impact on landscape character or visual amenity".* It requires wind development to 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 'justification/notes' also references the Wind Energy Landscape Capacity Study in relation to considering the effects of wind energy development.
- **EP1 Natural Heritage Designations** – which adopts the same criteria towards nationally designated landscapes as NPF4.
- **EP3 Special Landscape Areas and Landscape Character** – sets out that development within Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) will only be supported where *"they do not prejudice the special qualities of the designated area set out in the Moray Local Landscape Designation Review"*. It further requires that development in these areas follows principles set out in Policy DP1 and should minimise *"adverse impacts on the landscape and visual qualities the area is important for"*. In relation to landscape character more generally, outside of SLAs, this policy notes that *"developments must be designed to reflect the landscape characteristics identified in the Landscape Character Assessment of the area in which they are proposed."*

Parts of the detailed study area also fall within the administrative boundaries of Aberdeenshire and Highland Council. Each of these authorities also identify locally designated landscapes within their policy, as illustrated on Figure 5.2.

[3] Scottish Government (2022). *Onshore Wind Policy Statement*. Available at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/onshore-wind-policy-statement-2022/ [accessed 240604].

[4] Moray Council (2020). *Moray Local Development Plan 2020*. Available at: http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_133431.html [accessed 240604].

5.3.3 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.

5.3.4 Other relevant guidance and documents

Other published documents relevant to this assessment include the following documents which have informed this assessment and/or the design of the Development in relation to the mitigation of landscape and visual effects:

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

Baseline studies are further considered in section 5.4.1.

5.4 BASELINE

LVIA is an iterative process; baseline studies informed both design and early assessment before the final design and final assessment were prepared as documented in this chapter. This section provides a review of documented baseline studies (as listed at 5.3.4 above) and a baseline description of the Site and its landscape and visual context. The baseline description of the individual landscape and visual receptors is provided alongside the assessment in section 5.7 for ease of reference.

5.4.1 Baseline studies

5.4.1.1 Review and Use of Landscape Sensitivity Studies

As listed at 5.3.4, there are two landscape sensitivity studies which 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's 'Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Guidance' (NatureScot, 2022)[10] is taken into account. This guidance 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 …*

[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 [accessed 240604].

[6] Moray Council (2023). *Moray Wind Energy Landscape Sensitivity Study*. Available at: http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_80938.html [accessed 240604].

[7] Aberdeenshire Council (2023). *Landscape Sensitivity Assessment – Onshore Wind Energy Development in Aberdeenshire Planning Advice PA2023-03*. Available at: https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans-and-policies/planning-advice/ [accessed 240604].

[8] Moray Council (2018). *Moray Local Landscape Designation Review*. Available at: http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_121575.html [accessed 240604].

[9] Aberdeenshire Council (2023). Appendix 13 Special Landscape Areas. Available at: https://online.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/ldpmedia/LDP2021/Appendix13AberdeenshireSpecialLandscapeAreas.pdf [accessed 240604].

[10] NatureScot (2022). *Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Guidance*. Available at: https://www.nature.scot/doc/landscape-sensitivity-assessment-guidance-methodology [accessed 240604].

LVIA." This guidance also specifically notes that "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…"

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 TA A5.1). Landscape Institute TGN 02/21 'Assessing landscape value outside national designations' (2021)[11] 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 the MWELSS are used to inform the assessment as set out in Table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2 Use of Criteria in MWELSS

Criterion	Relates to	Comments
Scale	Susceptibility	-
Landform	Susceptibility	-
Landcover	Susceptibility	-
Built Environment	Susceptibility	The previous version of this guidance, the 'Moray Wind Energy Landscape Capacity Study' (MWELCS, 2017)12, had one criterion 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. For example, the main host landscape type has changed from being rated as low susceptibility in relation to 'built environment' to high between to 2017 and 2023 studies. 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). 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 an LCT and is only relevant for the host LCTs.
Visual Amenity	Susceptibility	This criterion includes a mix of information. - 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	-

The Moray LLDR provides a review of local landscape designations and is broadly in line with current NatureScot guidance in relation to such studies. As this study considered landscape value across the whole of Moray 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 as an indicator of value to reach a judgement in relation to landscape sensitivity.

The Aberdeenshire Landscape Sensitivity Assessment takes a similar approach to the MWELSS although uses a slightly different set of criteria in evaluating landscape

[11] 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 [accessed 240604].

[12] Moray Council (2017). *Moray Wind Energy Landscape Capacity Study*. Available at: http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_81378.html [accessed 240604].

susceptibility and value. As set out at section 5.7.2, no landscape character types within Aberdeenshire have been identified as requiring detailed consideration within this assessment and, as such, no further consideration is given to the use of the Aberdeenshire Landscape Sensitivity Assessment.

5.4.1.2 Review and use of Local Designation Studies

In addition to the Moray LLDR, Appendix 13 of the Aberdeenshire LDP provides a similarly up to date review of landscape designations within Aberdeenshire. As set out within TA A5.1, 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 however, as set out at section 5.7.2, no designated landscapes within Aberdeenshire have been identified as requiring detailed consideration within this assessment.

5.4.2 Site and Context

As illustrated by Figure 5.3, the Site is located within Teindland Wood, an area of commercial forestry to the north of Rothes and to the west of Inchberry. Within the Site, the landform comprises a series of rolling hills that increase in height towards the southern boundary; namely Hill of Orbliston (150 m AOD), Gallows Slack (179 m AOD), Findlay's Seat (264m AOD), Hunt Hill (261 m AOD) and Teindland Hill (253 m AOD). Located nearby to the west, outside of the Site and the commercial forestry, sits the locally distinctive landform of Brown Muir (339 m AOD) which is topped by a transmitter mast.

Collectively these hills sit between the Glen of Rothes to the west and the Spey Valley to the east and south. Nearby settlement is focussed along these valleys, including the closest settlements to the site: Rothes (2.1 km, south), Inchberry (2.4 km, northeast), Lhanbryde (5.7 km, north), Fochabers and Mosstodloch (5.9 km, northeast) and Craigellachie (6.9 km, south). The main transport routes nearby also follow the valleys with the A941 passing along the Glen of Rothes to the west before following along the Spey Valley to the south of the site and the B9015 and B9013 running through the Spey Valley to the east of the site, along with the Aberdeen-Inverness railway line. Networks of minor roads spread out from the main roads following the valleys, extending up valley sides and linking areas of dispersed rural settlement.

In the wider area, the surrounding landscape becomes more elevated and hilly to the south with elevations generally increasing as illustrated by Figure 5.3. Landcover is a mix of commercial forestry on lower lying hills, giving way to more open moorland at higher elevations and areas of enclosed farmland cut through with riparian woodland within the valleys. To the north, the landform drops towards the coast becoming dominated by lower lying, gently undulating farmland. Settlement is more widespread here with frequent villages and extensive dispersed rural settlement. The nearest larger town is Elgin, located around 8 km to the northwest.

Within 10 km there are a number of existing and consented wind farms also situated on the area of lower lying hills that sit between the more elevated uplands to the south and the coastal plains to the north. The closest of these to the Site include Hill of Towie (8 km, southeast) and the Rothes group of wind farms (7.3 km, southwest). Smaller scale single and small groups of turbines can also be found within the detailed study area, typically on lower lying valley sides or in areas of undulating farmland and most notably in areas to the east of the site, beyond the Spey Valley.

As shown by Figure 5.4, the majority of the proposed turbines would be located within LCT10 Upland Moorland and Forestry, with a single turbine (T5) at the northern end of the layout within LCT4 Rolling Farmlands and Forest. LCT4 forms a transition between the flatter coastal landscape to the north and the more undulating hill and valley landscape types to the south.

There are no National Parks or National Scenic Areas located within the detailed study area. As illustrated by Figure 5.2, seven of the turbines along with the substation and BESS would be located within the Spey Valley SLA and there are a number of other locally designated landscapes in the detailed study area. There are also several GDLs, the closest of which is Blackhills House located 3.2 km to the north of the Development.

5.5 DESIGN AND MITIGATION

5.5.1 Relevant Guidance

Design guidance (as described at 5.4.1 above) has informed the evolving design and mitigation of landscape and visual effects as set out below.

5.5.2 Moray Wind Energy Landscape Sensitivity Study (MWELSS, 2023)

The MWELSS does not provide detailed wind farm design guidance but provides some high level advice in relation to the siting of turbines in each LCT. Relevant advice relating to the two host LCTs can be summarised as follows:

- Turbines should avoid significant intrusion on prominent skylines;
- Turbines should not be sited on or detract from landmark hills; and
- Within the Rolling Farmland and Forests LCT, the greatest opportunities for turbine development are in transitional areas adjacent to the Upland Moorland and Forestry LCT.

5.6 MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENT MEASURES

Measures included within the design to prevent or reduce landscape and/or visual effects are set out in Table 5.3 below.

Table 5.3 Embedded Mitigation Measures

Measure	Description
Turbine layout	The turbines are set within commercial forestry with all except one located within the less sensitive Upland Moorland and Forestry LCT (see section 5.7.3). The single turbine within the Rolling Farmland and Forests LCT is located in a transitional area and contained within the same block of forestry, where there is no readily apparent change in character. Turbines are concentrated within the central part of the Site and set back from the northern and eastern edges of the site to reduce the proximity and mitigate visual impacts on the adjacent Spey Valley. This also reduces proximity to areas of more complex landform and landcover and, in more distant views from the north, provides a greater degree of separation from landforms which form the more distinctive aspects of skylines in these views – notably Ben Aigan, Ben Rinnes and Brown Muir.
Turbine heights	Four of the turbines are proposed with a reduced tip height in order to mitigate visual impact on views from the Spey Valley east of the Site, longer distance views form the north and a number of the closest residential properties.
Visible Aviation Lights	Tall structures over 150 m in height are typically required to have red aviation lights fitted for the purpose of civil aviation safety. In this case, a reduced requirement of only 4 cardinal turbines with nacelle lights and no tower lights has been agreed with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), as discussed further in section 5.7.6. Aviation lights will also automatically dim from 2000 cd to 200 cd in good visibility conditions.

5.7 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

This section sets out the effects that the Development would have on landscape and visual receptors. Some receptors are only briefly discussed and for these receptors effects *"have been judged unlikely to occur or so insignificant that it is not essential to consider them further"* (GLVIA3, para. 3.19).

Effects on landscape character and visual receptors are set out before those on designated areas as it is common for designations to encompass both character and visual considerations within their special qualities or purposes of designation.

Effects during construction, decommissioning and for the completed development are considered for each landscape and visual receptor. 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 on site during groundworks and the use of cranes to erect/dismantle the turbines. While standing turbines are on site, 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.

The Development is proposed for 40 years of operation and is thus temporary and mostly reversible (foundations are buried, but typically not removed during decommissioning). However, the timescale of operation is treated as being 'Permanent' within this assessment as it exceeds the 25 year period defined as Long-Term the methodology (see TA A5.1: Methodology).

Where effects on receptors are judged to be not significant they are described in TA A5.2 and summarised below.

5.7.1 Effects on Landscape Fabric

Changes to landscape fabric would mainly consist of the felling of commercial forestry before its planned date. Some of these areas would then be kept free of forestry and not replanted i.e.around turbine bases and alongside tracks. A larger area of forestry in the northwest part of the Site (to be used as the construction compound) would be felled and replanted and/or allowed to regenerate after construction, as shown in TA A4.1 – Forestry. Cleared areas around the turbine bases would be managed to deliver biodiversity enhancements as part of the proposed habitat management measures (as set out in Chapter 6 – Ecology).

These changes would affect landscape elements and features of low sensitivity and would be very limited in their extent. Effects on landscape fabric would not be significant.

5.7.2 Geographic Distribution of Effects

5.7.2.1 ZTV studies

Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) studies have been prepared to indicate the potential visibility of the Development; inform viewpoint selection and site assessment work; and ensure that this assessment focusses on the most important / significant effects. Where receptors are outside of the area of visibility indicated by the ZTV studies, no effects would arise and they are not considered further.

Figure 5.1 provides a bare ground ZTV study for a radius of 45 km from the proposed turbines as recommended by NatureScot guidance. This indicates extensive screening by terrain beyond 15-20 km from the Site in all directions except across the sea to the north. Within 20 km there would also be notable screening by terrain beyond 10 km to the southwest, southeast and east.

Figure 5.2 shows a ZTV study including OS mapped woodlands (modelled at 15 m high) and buildings (modelled at 7 m high) for the agreed 20 km study area. This indicates that the primary area of visibility would arise within 12 km to the west and north, 8 km to the east and 17 km to the south, but that within this area there would be large areas with little or no visibility due to screening by woodland and terrain. The most extensive areas of visibility would arise from the coastal farmland areas to the north of the Site, and there would be channelled views along the Spey Valley to the south and northeast of the Site. To the southwest and southeast of the Site, the main areas of visibility coincide with upland areas which host operational and consented wind farms, as shown by Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.10 shows a cumulative ZTV study with existing and consented wind farms. This indicates that from open upland areas, the Development would often be seen with the existing and/or consented wind farms, but would be less frequently visible than existing wind farm development from the south of the study area. The Development would give rise to new areas of visibility along the Spey valley, Strath Isla and within the coastal farmlands to the north of the Site.

5.7.2.2 Viewpoint Analysis

Viewpoint analysis has been undertaken from 20 viewpoints. The final list of viewpoints was prepared following consultation with Moray Council and NatureScot. Viewpoint descriptions

and analysis are provided on the viewpoint cover sheets and Table 5.4 below provides a summary of the scale and nature of the changes to views at each viewpoint. TA A5.3 shows additional illustrative views A to H.

The viewpoint locations are shown on Figures 5.1-5.8 and 5.10-5.11, and visualisations are provided for each of the viewpoints. All changes to views are assumed to be Adverse in nature.

Table 5.4 Viewpoint Analysis Summary

No.	Viewpoint	Distance, Direction	Scale of Changes to Views
1	A941 NW of Rothes	2.4 km, SW	Large
2	Provost Christie Drive	2.6 km, S	Large
3	Rothes Golf Course	3.7 km, SW	Large/medium
4	Speyside Way near Woodhead of Cairnty	2.9 km, E	Large
5	Ben Aigan	4.8 km, S	Large/medium
6	Earth Pillars Viewpoint	4.7 km, NE	Large/medium
7	Speyside Way at Fochabers	6.2 km, NE	Medium/small
8	Mulben	6.4 km, E	Small
9	Craigellachie	7.2 km, S	Medium/small
10	A941 at Elgin	8.5 km, NW	Small
11	A96 W of Mosstodloch	5.5 km, N	Medium
12	Miltonduff	11.3 km, NW	Negligible
13	Duffus Castle	15.5 km, NW	Small/negligible
14	Ben Rinnes	16.9 km, S	Small/negligible
15	Meikle Balloch Hill	18.0 km, SE	Negligible
16	Inchberry	2.7 km, NE	Large
17	Gordon Castle Walled Garden	7 km, NE	Small
18	Spey Bay	11.6 km, N	Small
19	A95 SW of Charlestown of Aberlour	11.2 km, S	Negligible
20	Duke of Gordon Monument	10.6 km, NW	Small

Each of the viewpoints is a ‘sample’ of the potential effects, representing a range of visual receptors including people at the viewpoint and nearby, at a similar distance and/or direction. From the ZTV and viewpoint analysis it can be seen that changes to views would arise as follows:

- The extent of Large and Large/medium scale visual changes, where the Development would form a major alteration to key elements, features, qualities and characteristics of the view such that the baseline will be fundamentally changed, would generally be limited to low-lying views from the valleys to the east, southwest and south within 4 km; the upper valley sides of the Spey to the east within 5 km. The extent of these effects within this area would be limited by extensive forestry and an area of limited visibility to the northwest of the Site as shown by Figure 5.2.
- Beyond this area, Medium and Medium/small scale changes to views would arise within up to 7-8 km to the north and northwest and in channelled views along the valley of the Spey to the south. In other directions effects would reduce more rapidly to Small scale due to the presence of extensively forested uplands, nearby existing and consented windfarms to the southwest and southeast and limited visibility along the valley and A85 corridor to the east.
- Beyond this area Small scale changes would arise up to 12 km in lower lying coastal areas to the north and northwest, including where there are open views to the southeast from Elgin; and in the limited areas of visibility within valleys to the south and southeast within up to 10 km.

The ZTV and viewpoint analysis also inform the consideration of effects on character. Typically, the scale of change to character at a particular location will be slightly less than the changes to views, as character derives from a more holistic experience of the landscape, not just views. The degree to which a proposal changes character depends on a combination of:

- The degree to which it is 'in keeping' with the existing character;
- Proximity and visibility; and
- The importance of views towards the site to the existing character.

These factors vary by character type and are considered below.

5.7.3 Effects on Landscape Character

Descriptions for each of the assessed character types are provided below, based on review of the baseline documents discussed in Section 5.3.4.

5.7.3.1 LCT 10 Upland Moorland and Forestry (includes Site)

As shown by Figure 5.5 most of the turbines are located at the eastern extent of this LCT, which hosts multiple operational and consented wind farms further to the west. The LCT is described within the MWELSS as comprising:

"gently undulating plateau-like landform with smooth even slopes although some more defined and higher hills are present on the outer edges of this Assessment Unit. This landscape is predominantly large scale, sparsely settled and covered with a simple pattern of coniferous forestry and moorland although some smaller scale farmed and settled areas are present on the outer fringes of this landscape in the upper Lossie valley and Upper Knockando areas. Visibility of the interior of these uplands is restricted from surrounding roads and settlement but the outer edges of parts of this landscape are prominent from the coastal plain of Moray and from the Spey valley. While the skyline of this upland area is generally even, the distinctive hills of Mill Buie and Brown Muir Hill form landmark features in views from the north. Carn na Cailliche and Hunt Hill on the southern edge of these uplands abutting the Spey valley are less well-defined but important in the containment they provide to the extensive operational wind farm development sited within the lower-lying upland core in the eastern part of this Assessment Unit."

It further notes that *"A large number of operational and consented wind farms already strongly influence character and views in this landscape."*

Applying the approach set out within the review and use of landscape sensitivity studies, landscape susceptibility criteria for this LCT are as set out within Table 5.5 below.

Table 5.5 Susceptibility – LCT 10 Upland Moorland and Forestry

Criterion	Rating from MWELSS	Comment (quotes taken from MWELSS / MWELCS)
Scale	Medium	*"A large scale gently undulating upland plateau … Slightly lower hills occur on the northern edge of this AU. While this AU is not extensive in area, it lies adjacent to the similarly large-scale Open Rolling Uplands AU. Scale is reduced within occasional narrow glens such as the Glen of Rothes and at the transition with the upper Lossie Valley and the Spey valley where landform and landcover is more complex and settlement is present."*
Landform	Medium	*"These uplands form a simple undulating plateau with broad gentle slopes, shallow basins and rounded summits. Landform is more complex at the transition with the Rolling Farmland and Forests … where incised valleys, more knolly topography and lochans occur. The narrow and incised Glen of Rothes and steep-sided and pronounced hills of … Brown Muir … form landmark features on the edges of this AU."*
Landcover	Medium/low	*"Extensive coniferous forestry and grass/heather moorland with occasional boggy basins between hills. Enclosed farmland and small woodlands are present within the upper Lossie valley, the Upper Knockando area and Glen Rothes."*

Criterion	Rating from MWELSS	Comment (quotes taken from MWELSS / MWELCS)
Built Environment (from MWELCS)	Low	*"A very sparsely settled landscape with isolated farms …"* The MWELCS notes the presence of the A941 and *"narrow minor roads"* albeit with generally restricted access in the upland core. It notes the presence of operational wind farms and other electricity infrastructure.
Landscape Context	High	*"This landscape forms a relatively low backdrop of extensively forested and open hills to the more richly patterned and smaller scale Rolling Farmland and Forest to the north, the Narrow Wooded Valley of the Findhorn to the west and the Broad Farmed Valley covering the Spey valley to the south. These uplands form a distant long low ridge seen from the well-settled Coastal Farmlands to the north. Visibility into the interior of these uplands is limited from these surrounding landscapes. The more defined hills of … Brown Muir … stand out as easily recognisable and frequently visible 'landmark' hills on the edge of this AU."* The Site is located adjacent to Brown Muir hill.
Visual Amenity	High	*"Views from more settled lowland areas and valleys into the interior of these uplands are restricted in places by more defined or higher 'edge' hills, such as Brown Muir ... These are important in views from surrounding settled lowland areas and also visually contain operational wind farm development sited in this AU and the adjoining Open Rolling Uplands AU. There are views to the outer edges and skyline of this AU from the A95 and the B9102 in the Spey valley, which comprise a promoted tourist route, and the B9010 in the upper Lossie valley and from settlement and recreational routes in these valleys."*

Considering the criteria above, susceptibility of the 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 by Figure 5.5, this LCT encompasses the Glen of Rothes and Brown Muir Hill at the eastern extent of the LCT. The LCT extends beyond the 20 km LVIA study area to the west and there are operational and consented wind farms within the centre and the western end of the LCT.

Figure 5.6 illustrates the extent of visibility of the Development within the LCT. Large scale changes to character as a result of the proximity of the Development would arise within the Site and across the east and northeast slopes of Brown Muir. Medium scale changes to character would arise on the east-facing valley sides beyond the A941 as a result of the nearby presence of the turbines across the valley, as illustrated by viewpoint 1. Beyond these areas, effects would rapidly reduce to Negligible due to greater distance and the proximity of existing and consented wind farms to the areas of visibility within this LCT, beyond 5 km from the Development.

Permanent, Large and Medium scale changes to character would arise within a Localised extent of the LCT. The magnitude of impact would be Large/medium and effects would be **Major/moderate, Adverse and significant**.

5.7.3.2 LCT 4 Rolling Farmlands and Forest (includes Site)

As shown by Figure 5.5, this LCT is located to the north of the LCT 10 Upland Moorland and Forestry, it forms an east to west band that is broader in the west and narrows to the east, where it wraps around the eastern extent of LCT 10. The LCT is described within the MWELSS as:

"…a complex and often contrasting rolling landform. The eastern part … forms gently rolling hill slopes fringing the higher Upland Moorland and Forestry. The deeply incised valleys of the upper Lossie and Pluscarden, contained by pronounced steep-sided wooded ridges, occur in the middle part of this landscape while the western area features more complex hummocky landform with low hills, becoming more subdued west of the Findhorn. A separate smaller wooded ridge at Quarrel wood also extends to the north-east, curving around the edge of Elgin. …

The mosaic of farmland and often well-managed diverse estate-influenced forest is a key characteristic and this, together with the rolling landform, results in a small to medium scale. Fields on upper valley sides and slopes are commonly enclosed by stone walls and gorsey hedges with remnant trees. Narrow winding roads respond to the rolling landform

or are aligned through the major valleys. There is a strong sense of enclosure in this landscape due to the rolling landform and the extensive forest. Many historic buildings, including distilleries, estate and farm buildings, are present in pockets of farmland set within forest and also associated with the broad floodplain farmland within the upper Lossie and Pluscarden valleys. Extensive wooded policies and parkland are associated with the Altyre estate and Darnaway Castle."

Applying the approach set out within the review and use of landscape sensitivity studies, landscape susceptibility criteria for this LCT are as set out within Table 5.6 below. The MWELSS does not provide consideration of sensitivity to turbines over 150 m for this LCT and the ratings for turbines between 100-150 m are used as a guide for this landscape. The boundaries for this LCT differ between the MWELSS and MWELCS, commentary taken from the MWELCS summarises the relevant LCTs that have been combined within the MWELSS:

Table 5.6 Susceptibility – LCT 4 Rolling Farmlands and Forest

Criterion	Rating from MWELSS	Comment (quotes taken from MWELSS / MWELCS)
Scale	High	*"The landform is generally rolling and includes low hills, knolls and deep valleys and this, together with extensive woodland cover, reduces openness and the scale of the landscape. A dispersed pattern of small farms and houses, enclosed fields and small woodlands, provide ready scale references. Scale increases at the transition with the Upland Moorland and Forestry where settlement is sparser and hill slopes broader and more gently undulating."*
Landform	High	*"…very varied landform with extensive areas of rolling small hills, deeply incised valleys of the Lossie and Pluscarden with their broad floodplains and broader gently undulating hill slopes with occasional more rounded small hills which rise gradually to the Upland Moorland and Forestry to the south. More pronounced hills occur … in the west and the long steep-sided ridges containing the Pluscarden valley… narrow valleys are occasionally filled with small water bodies."*
Landcover	High-medium	*"…particularly well-wooded in the west where diverse estate-influenced forests are a distinctive feature. A distinctive pattern of small pocket pastures occur within extensive woodland in this part of the AU. Steep scarp slopes are densely wooded in the Pluscarden and upper Lossie valleys, contrasting with open farmland on the broad valley floor. Areas of mixed woodland and parkland are also associated with the extensive designed landscapes of Altyre and Darnaway but also the smaller policies of Kellas and Pluscarden Abbey. Farmland is more marginal and coniferous plantations become more extensive at the transition with the Upland Moorland and Forestry AU to the south."*
Built Environment (from MWELCS)	High-medium	The MWELCS describes a *"well-settled"* landscape in the east that becomes less settled to the west and at the transition with the adjacent Upland moorland and forestry. It notes *"very narrow and winding"* public and private roads alongside the presence of historic buildings and features within the centre and western extent of the LCT. Susceptibility is rated as High within the centre of the LCT and High/medium within the east and west – including the area within and closest to the Site. .
Landscape Context	High-medium	*"… forms a relatively narrow band of small rolling hills, deeply incised valleys contained by prominent long ridges and undulating hill slopes between the higher hills of the Upland Moorland and Forestry and the low-lying coastal plain of the Coastal Farmlands and, in the west, either side of the Findhorn valley. The steep-sided landmark hill of Brown Muir located within the Upland Moorland and Forestry provides a prominent backdrop to this LCT and … Heldon Hill … backdrops the Coastal Farmland."*
Visual Amenity	High-medium	*"Woodland and landform limits views from roads and settlement … although upper hill slopes and tops provide extensive views over the Coastal Farmland to the Moray Firth. … This landscape forms a narrow band of hill fringes widely visible from roads and settlement in the Coastal Farmland AU to the north."*

Considering the criteria above, susceptibility of the LCT is judged to be High/medium given the transitional nature of the part of this LCT within the Site. Parts of the LCT are located within SLAs, where it is judged to be of Regional value; most of the LCT is undesignated and is judged to be of Community value. On balance, the LCT is judged to be of High/medium sensitivity.

As illustrated by Figure 5.5, part of the Development lies within the eastern end of this LCT, which extends beyond the LVIA study area to the west. There are no operational or consented wind farms within the LCT. Large and Medium scale changes to character would arise as a result of the presence a turbine within the LCT and the nearby turbines in the adjoining LCT within the main area of visibility to the north of the Site and south of the woodland at Blackhills, as shown by Figure 5.6 in TA A5.3, and in the small open fields to the east of the Site at the edge of the LCT. Beyond this area, visibility from within the LCT would be more patchy, with the Development seen as turbine blades beyond woodland and rising ground as shown by illustrative view G in TA A5.3, creating a sense of separation and giving rise to Small scale changes to character within approximately 6 km. Beyond this, reducing visibility and the proximity and visibility of existing and consented wind farms would reduce changes to character to Negligible scale.

The Permanent changes to character described above would result in Large and Medium scale changes to a Limited transitional extent of the LCT, creating a stronger association with the adjacent LCT to the south, and Small scale changes to a Localised extent of the LCT. The magnitude of impact would be Medium and effects would be **Major/moderate, Adverse and significant**.

5.7.3.3 LCT 6 Broad Farmed Valley (1.1 km, SE)

This LCT lies to the east of the Site, adjacent to the Rolling Farmlands and Forest and the Upland Moorland and Forestry as shown by Figure 5.5. It extends to the south-west. MWELSS describes the LCT as follows:

> *"The Spey forms a broad sinuous central river aligned through a narrow, incised channel in the south-west but opening out north of Craigellachie to wind across a wider floodplain set between steep-sided and densely forested hills. The course of the Spey is traced by diverse mixed woodlands of birch and pine with policy woodlands associated with a number of estates also located on lower valley sides. Numerous tributary rivers and burns run through narrower valleys to the Spey. Broader undulating valley sides with more gently sloping terraces accommodate mixed farmland and small woodlands. Larger arable fields tend to occur on lower valley sides with smaller pastures and coniferous plantations on upper slopes. The Spey valley is well-settled and features distinctive planned settlements, castles and distillery buildings. The hills of Ben Rinnes, Roy's Hill and Ben Aigan form prominent landmark features seen from the Spey Valley."*

The MWELSS does not provides consideration of sensitivity to turbines over 150 m for this LCT and the ratings for turbines between 100-150 m are used as a guide given that this is not the host landscape, so turbine size is less relevant. Factors contributing to higher susceptibility include the extensive settlement, including historic buildings; the relatively small scale of the landscape and small scale undulating terrain. Visual containment by the valley sides and vegetation limit outward views from the valley floor, but visibility is more open from valley sides.

Taking into account the criteria above, susceptibility of the LCT is judged to be High/medium. Most of the LCT is located within The Spey Valley SLA and is of Regional value and High/medium sensitivity.

As illustrated by Figure 5.6, and viewpoints 2,3,4 and 16, the proposed turbines would be seen above the forested valley sides, giving rise to Large/medium and Medium scale changes to views and Medium scale changes to character as a result of the changes to the valley skyline and sense of proximity to the turbines in lower lying areas within approximately 4 km. Beyond this distance, as illustrated by viewpoints 6, 9 and Figure 5.6, more limited visibility and a sense of separation would mean changes to character would rapidly reduce to Small scale from the upper valley sides to the east and areas south of Rothes within 5 km and Negligible scale elsewhere.

The Permanent changes to character described above would affect an Intermediate extent of the LCT, giving rise to a Medium magnitude of impact. Effects would be **Major/moderate, Adverse and significant**.

5.7.3.4 Other Landscape Character Types

Effects on the following character type are assessed to be not significant and are considered in detail in TA A5.2 and summarised below:

- **LCT 2 Coastal Farmland (1.8 km, N)** -This area of gently undulating farmland lies to the north of the Site forming the transition between the uplands and the coast and is judged to be of Medium sensitivity. As illustrated by Figure 5.6 visibility would be widespread across this area north of the Development, albeit frequently broken up by woodlands and local vegetation. As shown by viewpoints 7, 10, 11, 12 and 13, the proposed turbines would be seen on the forested inland skyline to the south. Effects would be **Moderate/minor, Adverse and not significant.**

Effects on the following character type are assessed to be negligible for the reasons stated below and are not considered in detail:

- **LCT 8 Upland Farmland (3.4 km E)** – As shown by Figure 5.6, there would be no visibility of the Development from the small forested part of this LCT within 5 km of the proposed turbines. There would be an area of visibility around and to the north of Mulben, where the proposed turbines would give rise to Small scale changes to views (as illustrated by viewpoint 8), but would also be seen in the context of closer views of Hill of Towie wind farm as illustrated by Figure 5.10. In this context, the effects of the Development on character would be Negligible,

Based on the geographic distribution of changes set out above, some of the character types within the study area as shown on Figures 5.4 and 5.5 would experience negligible effects due to limited visibility and/or distance from the Site as shown by Figure 5.5 and do not require detailed assessment:

- LCT 1 Coastal Margin (10.7 km, N);
- LCT 3 Rolling Coastal Farmland (10.4 km, NE);
- LCT 7 Narrow Farmed Valley (8.1 km, S);
- LCT 9 Low Forested Hills (various distances, E);
- LCT 12 Rolling Forested Hills (more distant units, S);
- LCT 13 Open Uplands with Steep Slopes (11.9 km, S) and
- Landscape character types within Aberdeenshire (14.6 km, SE).

In addition, the following LCTs would experience negligible effects due to the presence of existing and/or consented windfarms either within the LCTs and close to the main areas of visibility of the Development; and/or located between the LCT and the Development. In both of these situations the more nearby wind farms would mean that changes to character as a result of the Development would be Negligible:

- LCT 11 Open Rolling Uplands (13.5 km, SW);
- LCT 12 Rolling Forested Hills (including Hill of Towie wind farm - 3 km, SE); and
- LCT 14 Open Uplands with Settled Glens (13.1 km, SE).

5.7.4 Visual Effects

Three types of visual receptors are considered within this assessment:

- Groups – Based around settlements or rural areas and representing effects on the community within public spaces including streets and local recreational routes in that place. Views from groups of homes may also be noted in the descriptions, but as noted at Section 1.5, effects on these are a separate matter;
- Routes – Users of longer distance transport and recreational routes through the study area; and
- Specific viewpoints – Visitors to locations which are recognised and valued for the views available.

5.7.4.1 Rothes (2.1 km, S)

This small town is located to the south of the Site within the Spey valley. The land is low-lying in the east, near the river, and rises gently to the west. The A941 routes through the town which has a power station and industrial area on its northern edge. Straight roads throughout the town provide narrow views to the hills beyond, with open views available from the eastern edge of the settlement. People living in and visiting the town have a High

susceptibility and High/medium sensitivity to changes to views, which are of Regional value due to the town's location within The Spey Valley SLA.

As shown by viewpoints 2 and 3 and illustrative view A in TA A5.3, there would be open visibility of the proposed turbines from the northeast edge of the town at Provost Christie Drive and from the Core Path past the golf club. There would also be aligned views channelled between buildings from the High Street, Land Street and Spey Drive, each of which is aligned towards the Site. In these views to scale of the turbines would be seen to contrast with the nearby buildings. Permanent Large and Large/medium changes to views would arise for an Intermediate extent of the town including the High Street giving rise to impacts of Large magnitude. Effects would be **Major, Adverse and significant**.

5.7.4.2 Inchberry (2.4 km, NE)

Inchberry is a small linear settlement within the Spey Valley to the northeast of Rothes and southwest of Fochabers. Views from the settlement look along the valley and are contained by the forested valley sides, nearby to the west and more distant across the valley floor and the river to the east. Receptors in this location include local residents and visitors to the campsite who would have a High susceptibility to changes to views. Views are of Regional value taking account of the SLA designation and of High/medium sensitivity.

As shown by viewpoint 16, the proposed turbines would be seen along the skyline to the west, above the forestry, contrasting with the scale of nearby buildings and trees. Visibility decreases in other parts of the settlement away from the viewpoint location and the scale of change would reduce from Large to Large/medium and Medium. These Permanent changes to views would affect a Wide extent of the village. The magnitude of impact would be Large/medium and effects would be **Major/moderate, Adverse and significant**.

5.7.4.3 Rural area between Inchberry and Mulben and around Rothes (0.8 km SE)

This receptor group encompasses residents of rural properties, walkers using Core Paths and users of the minor roads between Inchberry and Rothes and approximately 2 km north and south of Rothes in the Glen of Rothes and Spey valley. Residents and visitors to this area have a High susceptibility to changes in views; the receptor group is mostly located within The Spey Valley SLA and views would be of Regional Value. Considering these two factors together, sensitivity is judged to be High/medium.

The landscape in this area encompasses the flat valley floor which contains the River Spey and most roads and settlements, alongside the elevated, partially wooded valley sides where access is more limited and the area more sparsely settled. As shown on Figure 5.6 visibility would be restricted to blades seen above rising ground and forestry and for the nearest parts of the valley sides and valley floor north of Rothes. Where these restricted views of the Development arise they would give rise to Medium scale changes to views. To the south and west of Rothes, visibility would be more widespread and, as shown by viewpoints 2 and 3, Large/medium scale changes to views would arise. There would also be increasingly close views of the proposed turbines for westbound drivers on the B9103 between Mulben and the B9015 as shown by viewpoint 8 and illustrative view F in TA A5.3. These changes would affect residents of farms, golfers and rural properties in this area and users of Green Lane and the Core Paths east and west of Rothes, as well as users of the B9103 - a Localised extent of the receptor group. The magnitude of impact would be Large/medium and effects would be **Major/moderate, Adverse and significant**.

5.7.4.4 Rural area between Inchberry, Brown Muir, Lhanbryde and Fochabers (1.0 km, N)

This receptor group to the north of the site includes residents of rural properties and small settlements, users of local roads including the B9103. and walkers at Brown Muir and using the Core Paths south of Lhanbryde. These receptors would have a High susceptibility to changes to views which are of Community Value and High/medium sensitivity. The gently undulating farmland in this area includes woodlands and shelterbelts which frequently contain views.

As shown by Figure 5.6, visibility of the Development would be greatest in the eastern part of this area where the flatter and more open valley floor allows more open views towards the Site, similar to those shown for nearby viewpoints 16 and 11 and illustrative view B in TA A5.3 which shows a view from the B9015 near Dipple. Elsewhere the turbines would more typically be seen above woodland. Large to Medium scale changes to views would arise for

a Wide extent of this receptor group. The magnitude of impact would be Large/medium and effects would be **Major/moderate, Adverse and significant**.

5.7.4.5 North East 250 (Promoted Scenic Driving Route) (1.7 km, E)

The North East 250 is a scenic driving route, promoted by Visit Scotland, that provides a circular loop around north-east Scotland. Within the study area it routes from the south to the north-east, passing through the Spey Valley close to the southern and eastern extent of the Site. Most of the route is located within SLAs and views are of Regional Value. Road users on this scenic route have a High susceptibility and a High/medium sensitivity to changes to views.

For those travelling north, as shown by Figure 5.6, the first views of the Development would arise as distant views of up to 8 blade tips as the route approaches Charlestown of Aberlour, giving rise to Negligible scale changes to views. There would then be a gap in visibility until the road approaches Craigellachie where there would be Small scale changes to views as a result of seeing the proposed turbines on the skyline ahead and to the right of the direction of travel as the road approaches and passes the village, with these views being similar to those illustrated by viewpoint 9. Between Craigellachie and Rothes the Development would be seen through gaps in the roadside trees, and more openly in winter, with the changes to views gradually increasing from Small to Large scale as the route nears Rothes and views would be similar to viewpoint 2. Passing through Rothes the turbines would continue to be seen whilst driving along the High Street, similar to those shown by illustrative view A in TA A5.3. Leaving Rothes and continuing north around the Site to Inchberry the Development would largely be screened by rising ground, forestry and roadside vegetation, with just occasional glimpsed views of the nearest turbines above and between this screening. Beyond Inchberry, northbound travellers would be beyond the Site. Taking account of these Permanent changes to views arising for approximately 9 km of the route, a Localised extent, the magnitude of impact is judged to be Medium and effects would be **Major/moderate, Adverse and significant for northbound road users**.

For those heading south, there would be occasional distant views of blade tips where the road runs along the coast towards Spey Bay, changes to views would be Negligible, in this section, increasing to Small scale near Spey Bay where views from the road would be similar to those shown for nearby viewpoint 18. Heading southwards along the wooded valley, there would be little or no visibility of the Development until the route reaches Mosstodloch, beyond which there would be more frequent and open views as shown by Figure 5.6, with the turbines seen on the forested skyline to the southwest giving rise to Medium and Medium/small scale changes to views as illustrated by nearby viewpoints 7 and 11 and illustrative view B in TA A5.3, which is located on the B9015 near Dipple. Visibility would continue as the route heads southwards to Inchberry where views would be similar to nearby viewpoint 16 where the turbines seen above the nearby forested valley sides giving rise to Large scale effects. Beyond this point, visibility would reduce as the road passes around the Site, with the Development largely screened by rising ground, forestry and roadside vegetation, and just occasional glimpsed views of the nearest turbines above and between this screening. Taking account of these Permanent changes to views arising for approximately 5 km of the route, a Limited extent, the magnitude of impact is judged to be Medium and effects would be **Major/moderate, Adverse and significant for southbound road users**.

5.7.4.6 Speyside Way (2.2 km, SE)

The Speyside Way is one of Scotland's Great Trails and follows the valley of the River Spey. Within the study area it routes broadly north to south, passing to the east of the Site. Within 5 km of the Site, large sections of the route pass within areas of woodland. Most of the route is located within SLAs and views are of Regional Value. Users along the route are judged to be of High/medium susceptibility and have a High/medium sensitivity to changes to views.

As shown by Figure 5.6 there would be little or no visibility of the Development from the south, where views towards the Development would be screened by woodland and the valley sides. There would be a short stretch of close open views of the turbines looking across the valley as the route descends from the woodland at Knock More towards the B9103 to the southeast of the Site, though views from the lower part of this section of the route are enclosed by high hedges. Similar open views would arise as the route ascends beyond the A9103, as shown by viewpoint 4. In the section of the route around and to the north of viewpoint 4, there are occasional open views from the route as is follows a local

road, decreasing in frequency and increasing in distance beyond Craigs of Quildell. Viewpoint 7 at Fochabers, where changes to views would be Medium/small scale, and viewpoint 18 at Spey Bay, where changes to views would be Small scale, illustrate the very few views available towards the Site from the north along this route. Permanent, Large scale changes to views would arise for parts of a 10 km (approx.) stretch of the route between Knock More and Craigs of Quildell, as represented by viewpoint 4, affecting a Localised stretch of the route, with effects otherwise limited to glimpsed more distant views. The magnitude of impact would be Large/medium and effects would be **Major/moderate, Adverse and significant**.

5.7.4.7 Ben Aigan (4.4 km, S)

Routes ascending this isolated hill near Rothes pass through forestry, but there are open views from the summit as illustrated by viewpoint 5. People ascending the hill to enjoy the views will have a High susceptibility to changes to views which are of Regional value and High/medium sensitivity considering the inclusion of Ben Aigan within the Spey Valley SLA.

As shown by viewpoint 5 and Figure 5.6, there would be open views of the Development from the summit and the upper north and west facing slopes that are free of forestry. The proposed turbines would be seen set within forestry on nearby lower-lying hills to the north and would appear closer than the more extensive existing and consented wind farms to the west, and larger than the turbines at Hill of Towie to the southeast, which would be more visible from the summit and south and east facing slopes. Permanent Large/medium scale changes to views would affect an Intermediate extent of the views available, taking account of no visibility from most of the ascent/descent and from south and east facing slopes. The magnitude of impact would be Large/medium and effects would be **Major/moderate, adverse and significant**.

5.7.4.8 Ordiequish Earth Pillars (4.7 km, NE)

This panoramic viewpoint is marked on OS mapping and provides an elevated outlook over and along the River Spey from an area of woodland on the eastern slopes of the Spey Valley. The viewpoint is located within an SLA and views are of Regional value. People visiting the viewpoint have a High susceptibility and a High/medium sensitivity to changes in views. The viewpoint is a small gap in the woodland and no interpretation or seating are provided.

As shown by viewpoint 6, located at the viewpoint, the Development would be seen along on the forested skyline seen beyond the river and valley in the foreground and beyond the nearby pylon line which crosses the view. The Permanent scale of change to views would be Large/medium and a Wide extent of the view would be affected given the turbines are seen within the primary focal area of the view. The magnitude of impact would be Large/medium and effects would be **Major/moderate, Adverse and significant**.

5.7.4.9 Other visual receptors

Effects on the following visual receptors are assessed to be Moderate, Adverse and not significant and are described within TA A5.2 and summarised below:

- **Mosstodloch (6.0 km, N)** – There would be visibility of the turbines from some of the open, gridded streets within this village. The main areas of visibility would be from the old main road on the southern edge and more open, aligned views from Stymie Road as shown by illustrative view E in TA A5.3.
- **Rural area between A96 and the coast between Fochabers, Elgin, Lossiemouth and Portgordon (5.2 km, N)** – The Development would be frequently visible on the forested inland skyline to local road users, residents and users of core paths in this area. Effects would gradually decrease with distance as illustrated by viewpoints 11 and 19.
- **Aberdeen-Inverness Railway (1.6 km, E)** – There would be close views of the Development as the route passes the northern part of the Site, similar to those shown from nearby viewpoint 16. Between Llhanbryde and Elgin there would be more intermittent views, similar to those shown from viewpoint 11, and more distant views from the line west of Elgin.
- **A941 (1.9 km, W) Northbound** – Road users would have views of the turbines ahead of the direction of travel when approaching Craigellachie (similar to those shown from Viewpoint 9) and at increasing proximity through roadside trees and more openly in

winter approaching and passing through Rothes, similar to those shown by illustrative view A in TA A5.3, until passing the site beyond viewpoint 1 where the turbines would be seen above the valley sides to the east.

- **A96 (5.2 km, N)** – There would be limited visibility from this route west of Elgin and east of Fochabers but some stretches of open views of the development on the skyline to the south as illustrated by viewpoint 11 between Elgin and Fochabers.

Effects on the following visual receptors are assessed to be Moderate/minor, Adverse and not significant and are described within TA A5.2 and summarised below:

- **Craigellachie (6.9 km, south)** – The proposed turbines would be seen along the forested valley skyline when looking north from Leslie Terrace and through trees in winter from the A95 as it passes around the north edge of the village.
- **Rural area between Fogwatt, Lhanbryde, Miltonduff and Kellas (3.8 km, NW) –** Views of the Development from this area would typically consist of blade tips seen above rising ground and/or areas of nearby woodland, as shown by viewpoint 12 and illustrative view G at Clackmarras in TA A5.3. More open views would be available from areas closer to the coast, where the turbines would be more openly seen beyond the skyline as shown by nearby viewpoint 10 at Elgin.
- **National Cycle Route 1 (8.0 km, N)** – The main area of visibility from this route would be between Elgin and Spey Bay where frequent views would arise of the turbines on the inland skyline formed to the forested uplands and open moorland of Brown Muir as shown by illustrative view D in TA A5.3.

Effects on the following visual receptors are assessed to be Minor, Adverse and not significant and are described within TA A5.2 and summarised below:

- **Fochabers (5.9 km, NE)** – There would be very limited visibility of the Development from this village where outward views are mostly screened by buildings and tree cover. Viewpoint 7 represents the infrequent views available through gaps in the trees near the western edge of the village.
- **Rural area north of Keith (9 km, E)** – The Development would be seen in the distance from west facing slopes and higher ground near Aultmore, on the forested skyline in the distance beyond more nearby small turbines and pylons.
- **Elgin (8.1 km, NW)** – The proposed turbines would be visible beyond the skyline formed by Brown Muir and forestry in views from the southern edge of the town and large and/or elevated open spaces as illustrated by viewpoints 10 and 20.
- **A941 (1.9 km, W) Southbound** – There would be distant views of the Proposed turbinesbeyond the skyline formed by forestry and Brown Muir for a short stretch of the route north of Elgin and on leaving Elgin as illustrated by Viewpoint 10. Beyond this there would be limited glimpses of blade tips between Eglin and Fogwatt and a brief more open and close view at viewpoint 1 before passing the Site.
- **A95 (5.4 km, SE) –** Road users heading south and west would have a short stretch of glimpsed views of the Development near Mulben as illustrated by viewpoint 8 giving rise to Minimal, Neutral and not significant effects. Road users heading north towards Charlestown of Aberlour would have more open but distant views of the turbines as illustrated by viewpoint 19, and slightly closer views through trees in winter from Cragellachie.
- **Gordon Castle Walled Garden (6.7 km, NE) –** There would be very limited glimpses of the proposed turbines where there are longer views over the wall and gaps between the surrounding trees, with viewpoint 17 from near the café being the most open view.
- **Duffus Castle (15.5 km, S)** – As shown by viewpoint 15, the Development would be seen beyond the forested skyline to the southeast from the elevated entrance to the castle, from the cobbled track ascending the castle mound and from areas close to the gap in the south wall.
- **Ben Rinnes (16.3 km, S)** – The proposed turbines would be openly visible seen to the north from the summit and most of the recommended ascent/descent route to the east. The turbines would be seen set within forestry on lower lying hills to the north in the context of closer operational and consented wind farms to the northwest and northeast.

Effects on the following visual receptors are assessed to be negligible for the reasons stated below and are not considered in detail:

- **All visual receptors beyond 12 km except visitors to Duffus Castle and Ben Rinnes**, due to distance and/or limited visibility as set out at section 5.7.2.2;
- **Visual receptors beyond 6.5 km southwest** due to existing and consented wind farms;
- **Visual receptors beyond 4 km southeast** due to limited visibility and existing wind farms;
- Settlements with very limited visibility due to the combination of built form and enclosing vegetation or terrain including **Dufftown, Keith, Lhanbryde** (see illustrative view E in TA A5.3)**, and Kingston**;
- **Peeps View (7.1 km, NE)** – This viewpoint is identified on OS maps and is located in forestry near Fochabers. The view available is relatively narrow and focussed northwest, away from the Site.
- **Charlestown of Aberlour and adjacent rural area (8.2 km, S)** – See detailed assessment provided within TA A5.2.
- **Portgordon and rural area around Buckie (11 km, NE)** – As shown by Figure 5.6, there would be patchy visibility from local roads and homes in this area. A very limited extent of Small scale changes to views would arise in the closest areas within 12 km of the turbines to the southwest of Portgordon; elsewhere changes to views would be Negligible.
- **Keith and Dufftown Railway (11.8 km, SE)** – There would be no visibility from this route as shown by Figure 5.6.
- **Moray Coastal Trail (11.0 km, N)** – This route follows the northern coastline and users of the route. Primary views are focused towards the sea and the occasional views of the Development between Spey Bay and Portgordon would give to a very limited extent of Small scale changes to views as illustrated by viewpoint 18.
- **A98 (7.0 km, NE)** - The A98 routes north-east from Fochabers on its route to Fraserburgh along the coast. Only road users heading towards Fochabers would have views towards the Development. The closest parts of the route are in woodland and intermittent visibility beyond roadside vegetation and intervening woodland would arise at distances of 11-19 km from the route south of Portgordon and Buckie. Changes to views would be at most Small scale from the closest parts of the route within 12 km (a Limited extent), and more typically Negligible scale.
- **Rothes Castle Viewpoint (3.1 km, S)** – this panoramic viewpoint marked on OS mapping is oriented to face south, away from the Site. Mature evergreen trees largely screen views to the north and would restrict visibility of the Development.

5.7.5 Designated Areas

Designated landscapes within the 20 km detailed study area are shown on Figure 5.2.

5.7.5.1 The Spey Valley (includes Site)

As shown by Figure 5.2, the Site is partly within this SLA which extends to include the upper valley sides of the Spey. These share little in common with the valley floor in terms of their character and views and do not in themselves particularly exhibit the special qualities, but provide an important immediate context. The designated area is extensive and continues southwards beyond the study area and north to Fochabers and an adjoining SLA. Table 5.7 below considers effects on each of the 'reasons for designation' as set out within the Moray Local Landscape Designations Review (LLDR):

"The diverse and handsome landscape of broad gently weaving river, floodplain farmland, wooded valley sides and distinctive settlements together with the romance associated with the Spey due to its connection with whisky distilling…"

Table 5.7 Special Qualities of The Spey Valley

Quality	Susceptibility	Effects
Diverse and handsome landscape	High – wind turbines may distract from appreciation of other landscape features and may be perceived as detracting features.	Large scale for a Localised extent – due to the presence of the wind turbines within the SLA and close views within 2-3 km where they will be a dominant visual feature.

Quality	Susceptibility	Effects
Broad gently weaving river and floodplain farmland	High/medium – reflecting the sensitivity of the character of LCT6 Broad Farmed Valley.	Medium scale for an Intermediate extent - as set out at 5.4.6.3 above, the proposed turbines would give rise to Medium scale changes to character for an Intermediate extent of LCT6, within approximately 4 km of the Development reducing to Small scale up to 5 km.
Wooded valley sides	Medium – these would not be physically affected, but turbines seen above the woodland may affect the sense of enclosure and scale.	Large scale for a Localised extent - the proposed turbines would be seen above the valley sides and would appear to contrast in scale in the closest views (within 2-3 km) – e.g. viewpoints 2 and 16, though in the closest areas of the valley there would be limited visibility as shown by Figure 5.2. These scale contrasts diminish with distance and from more elevated views as shown by viewpoints 3, 4, 5 and 6.
Connection with whisky distilling	None – turbines would not alter this association.	N/A.

Based on the detailed considerations set out above, the susceptibility of the special qualities of the SLA is judged to be High. Taking account of the Regional value of the SLA, sensitivity is judged to be High/medium. Considering the Permanent effects described above together, the magnitude of impact would be Large/medium and effects would be **Major/moderate, Adverse and significant**.

5.7.5.2 Other Designated Landscapes

Effects on the following designated landscapes are assessed to be not significant and are described within TA A5.2:

- **Lower Spey and Gordon Castle Policies (6.5 km, NE)** – Recreational visitors to this SLA would experience changes to views, giving rise to changes to that recreational experience. The visibility of turbines beyond or above the wooded setting to Fochabers provided by Gordon Castle policies may distract from the appreciation of the setting, but the turbines would be obviously distant. Effects would be **Moderate/minor, adverse and not significant**.
- **Ben Rinnes (10.4 km, S)** – The turbines would be seen in the context of existing and consented, closer wind farms and the only notable effects on special qualities would be changes to views which alter the experience of walking Ben Rinnes. Effects would be **Minor, Adverse and not significant**.

Based on the geographic distribution of effects set out in Section 5.7.2.2 and/or distance and lack of visibility as shown by Figure 5.2, or the reasons set out below, some designated landscapes within the study area would experience negligible effects and do not require detailed assessment:

- **Lossiemouth to Portgordon Coast (9.8 km, N)** - This SLA is relatively distant from the Development and the only changes to the features for which it is designated would arise from Small scale changes to views as illustrated by viewpoint 18. As shown by Figure 5.2, the main body of the SLA and more secluded central area would have no visibility of the proposed turbines, with the main areas of visibility being near Lossiemouth and near Spey Bay, particularly from the agricultural fields southwest of Kingston. Views of the turbines may distract from nearby features in these areas giving rise to Small/negligible scale changes to special qualities of Low susceptibility within a very Limited extent of the designated area.
- **Spynie (10.5 km, N)** – Figure 5.2 indicates some visibility of the Development from the agricultural fields within Spynie, around the manor house and palace and to the northwest of the Loch. The reasons for designation relate to the varied and interesting features within this landscape which are not susceptible to being altered by distant visibility of turbines over the surrounding woodlands.
- **Pluscarden Valley (11.1 km, W);**
- **Portgordon to Cullen Coast (13.2 km, NE);**
- **Burghead to Lossiemouth Coast (14.6 km, N);** and
- **Culbin to Burghead Coast (19.3 km, NW)**.

5.7.6 Night-time Effects

5.7.6.1 Introduction

The lighting requirements and embedded mitigation measures for the Development are described in Section 5.5 above.

The aviation lighting on the turbines would consist of steady red lights mounted on the top of the nacelles of the four cardinal turbines (1,4,8,12), as shown by Figure 5.8. These lights would be 2000 candela (cd) in poor visibility conditions, automatically dimming to 200 cd in good visibility (> 5 km).

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.

5.7.6.2 Baseline

Figure 5.7 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 area has relatively high lighting levels, particularly around the towns and bonded warehouses. The lighting at the bonds is particularly visible in this landscape, being brighter and more concentrated than other sources. In addition, there are red aviation lights on the mast at Knock More, and two masts near Burghead. NATS data also records lights as being present on some of the turbines at Rothes II wind farm, though these are only 25 cd and not particularly noticeable in the study area. A light is also recorded as being present on the Kellas Drum met mast, but that is not included in the consideration of effects for this assessment given that the met mast is a temporary, short-term structure.

At the time of their consents, reduced lighting schemes had not been agreed for Clash Gour and Rothes III wind farms, and both of these consented developments are assumed to have nacelle lights and tower lights on all of the turbines. The consented Garbet wind farm would also have nacelle lights on six of the turbines.

5.7.6.3 Geographic Distribution of Effects

Figure 5.8 shows potential visibility of the aviation lights on the Development, as described above. It illustrates that visibility of the aviation lights would be patchy and typically coincide with areas where there is existing lighting. Places where the lights would be seen from darker areas include the Spey valley within 5 km to the east; rural areas between the A96 and the coast (7-12 km north). Other places where notable visibility is indicated from dark areas tend to be open hills where visual receptors would be unlikely to be present at night.

Consideration of wirelines, night-time photomontages and site work, as well as the ZTV Study described above indicates that the main changes to views at night will arise in nearby parts of the Spey Valley to the east and northeast of the Site. More limited effects will also arise around the edges of Rothes where there would be close views of the aviation lights above the dark skyline to the north.

Other areas are close to existing lighting in settlements, or main road routes with the accompanying lights on traffic, and/or have visibility of the light on the Knock More mast or will have views of lights on Rothes III wind farm. In these areas changes to views would be Negligible or Small/negligible and would not give rise to significant effects.

5.7.6.4 Night-time visual effects

Core Paths and other outdoor recreational locations are generally unlikely to be used at night and are not considered. The main visual receptors likely to be affected by views of the aviation lighting are considered below.

5.7.6.5 Rothes (2.1 km, S)

As shown by viewpoints 2 and 3, there would be views of the aviation lights from the edges of Rothes, where they would be seen above the skyline to the north, typically along with the street lights in the town and the lights on the mast at Knock More. Elsewhere in the town, nearby street lights, traffic lights and lights in homes would be more noticeable light sources and changes to views would be Negligible scale. Permanent changes to views would be Small scale for a Limited extent of the settlement, giving rise to impacts of Negligible magnitude. Effects would be **Minimal, Neutral and not significant**.

5.7.6.6 Inchberry and Spey valley between B9103 and Fochabers (0.5 km, E)

As shown by viewpoint 4, 7 and 16, all four of the aviation lights would be seen along the skyline to the west or southwest, above the forestry. The area is presently dark with the main sources of light being occasional passing cars on the B9015 and lights at farms and occasional rural properties, though from parts of the area there are views of the lighting on the Knock More mast and during summer months there would be likely to be sources of light at the camp site at Inchberry. Permanent changes to views would vary from Large/medium to Medium over a Wide extent of the area. The magnitude of impact would be Large/medium and effects would be **Major/moderate, Adverse and significant**.

5.7.6.7 Rural area around Rothes and south of B9103 (0.8 km SE)

As shown by Figure 5.8, the main areas of visibility in this area would be from around the edges of Rothes, where the lights would be seen in the context of existing lighting as described above at section 5.7.6.5. Westbound drivers on the B9103 would mostly see the lights in the context of lighting at the distillery, only seeing them from a darker environment briefly before crossing the bridge over the Spey. Permanent changes to views would be Small scale for a Localised extent giving rise to impacts of Small magnitude. Effects would be **Moderate/minor, Adverse and not significant**.

5.7.6.8 Night-time effects on designated areas

The aviation lights would be seen from within the Spey Valley SLA as reported above, however the Special Qualities of the designated area do not relate to absence of light, and cannot be readily appreciated at night. Taking this into account, night-time effects on the SLA would be negligible are not considered further.

5.8 CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

5.8.1 Introduction

The cumulative assessment is based on the same landscape and visual baseline and receptor groups as the main LVIA, and the methodology is the same in terms of forming and expressing judgements. Two types of judgement may be provided:

- Additional effects –The effects that would arise from the addition of the Development to a baseline which includes the cumulative development(s) being considered; and
- Combined effects – The effects that would arise from the addition of both the Development and the cumulative development(s) being considered to the main assessment baseline.

Typically, only the additional effects need to be considered and the cumulative assessment is provided to inform decision-making in the event that one or more of the cumulative developments has been consented prior to the Development (i.e. the future baseline has changed). The combined effects may be relevant where two or more development applications are determined together. This is unlikely to be the case for this assessment given the differences in terms of the timing of applications for the Development and other applications considered in this assessment, and only additional effects are considered.

Landscape and visual receptors that are considered to receive effects of Small/negligible or Negligible magnitude from the Development are not included in this assessment, as an

effect of such low magnitude 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 are not relevant for consideration as part of this application.

5.8.2 Assessment Scenarios

All cumulative schemes within the 20 km study area are illustrated on Figure 5.9. Operational and consented developments have been included within the landscape and visual baseline within the main assessment. Those located within the study area include:

- Within 10 km - Rothes I-III (7-12 km, southwest); Hill of Towie (8 km, southeast);
- Beyond 10 km – Edintore (13.5 km, southeast); Berry Burn, Paul's Hill and Clash Gour (16.5 km and beyond, southwest); Cairnborrow and Garbet (18-20 km, southeast).

Wind farms in planning within the study area (also illustrated on Figure 5.9) include:

- Aultmore - 16 turbines of up to 200 m tip height (12.5 km, east);
- Cairds Hill – 4 turbines of up to 180 m tip height (13.5 km, southeast);
- Craig Watch - 11 turbines of up to 200 m tip height (19.5 km, southeast);
- Kellas Drum – 8 turbines of up to 185 m tip height (9 km, west);
- Rothes III – 3 turbines increase to 225 m tip height (8.5 km, southwest).

Proposals in scoping may not proceed to application with the same design as scoped, and may not become applications before the Development is determined and are therefore less certain and are not typically included in cumulative assessment. In this case there has been a scoping submission for Blackhills wind farm adjacent to the north of the Site. Given the early stage of the Blackhills project and its proximity to the turbines within the Development, its design is likely to vary before application and it is not considered further in this assessment, but the scoping layout is included in visualisations.

Of the projects in planning, the following are judged not to require detailed consideration in this cumulative assessment for the reasons set out below:

- Cairds Hill – This wind farm would be adjacent to the operational Edintore and relatively distant from the Site. The cumulative effects of the Development would not be likely to be altered by the addition of Cairds Hill to the future baseline.
- Craig Watch – This wind farm would be adjacent to and beyond the consented Garbet and distant from the Site. The cumulative effects of the Development would not be likely to be altered by the addition of Craig Watch to the future baseline.
- Rothes III – The turbines being altered by this application are in the centre of/behind the consented Rothes II wind farm and the cumulative effects of the Development would remain the same regardless of this change to Rothes III.

Taking account of the above considerations, this cumulative assessment considers the following development scenarios:

- Scenario 1 – The Development with operational and consented development – i.e. the effects of the Development compared to the current baseline – as described in the main LVIA;
- Scenario 2A – The Development with operational and consented development and Aultmore wind farm;
- Scenario 2K - The Development with operational and consented development and Kellas Drum wind farm; and
- Scenario 3 – The Development with operational and consented development and both Aultmore and Kellas Drum wind farms.

5.8.3 Cumulative ZTV Studies

Figure 5.10 relates to Scenario 1 and is described at section 5.7.2.1 above. Figure 5.11 shows combined visibility of the Development with both Aultmore and Kellas Drum wind farms. It indicates that each of the three developments it is more typically visible alone than in association with the other two schemes, due to forested uplands in broad north-south bands creating separation in the areas of visibility. The main areas of visibility of all three wind farms are typically either within one of the three sites or within another wind farm, or

relatively distant from all three sites, including along the coast and at Ben Rinnes. Areas of visibility relating to scenarios 2A and 2K are described at section 5.8.5 below.

5.8.4 Cumulative Viewpoint Analysis

The scale of effect at viewpoints arising from adding the Development to a baseline including the relevant cumulative developments for each scenario was considered, including on-site review. Only viewpoints where the effects of the Development are greater than Small/negligible have been considered for the reasons set out at 5.8.1 above. In every cumulative scenario, the scale of effects arising from the Development is judged to remain the same as for scenario 1. This arises due to the distances between the Development and cumulative sites in planning, as well as the proximity of proposed schemes, except Aultmore, to existing wind farms.

5.8.5 Geographic extent of cumulative effects

Based on the ZTV and viewpoint analysis provided above and the assessment of effects on character set out within section 5.7.3, the only changes to effects on landscape character arising in cumulative scenarios would be in areas of combined visibility of the Development with Aultmore or Kellas Drum, that are roughly equidistant from the Development and the cumulative sites and less than 12 km from the Development. As indicated by Viewpoint 18, in places with more open views towards Aultmore, both wind farms would be notable additions the skyline. However, as the Development is seen in a different direction to Aultmore and in association with a group of hills (including Ben Aigan and Brown Muir) on the skyline, the effects in this cumulative scenario would not notable vary from Scenario 1.

Figure 5.11 indicates that such areas are very limited for the Development and Aultmore, arising in patchy areas between Fochabers and Spey Bay. For the Development and Kellas Drum, there are patchy areas of combined visibility to the south of Elgin that meet these criteria. However, as indicated by viewpoints 10 and 12 which lie within this area, the effects of the Development remain the same in the context of Kellas Drum, largely because Kellas Drum is seen as a more nearby extension to an existing group of turbines, whereas the Development is a new cluster seen in association with Brown Muir.

5.8.6 Cumulative Effects on Landscape Character, Visual Receptors and Designations

Based on the ZTV, viewpoints and analysis of the geographic extent of cumulative effects provided above, the cumulative effects of the Development would remain the same as for Scenario 1 in all cumulative scenarios.

5.9 SUMMARY

5.9.1 Scope and purpose

This assessment describes the existing landscape and views, considers their sensitivity to change and identifies changes likely to arise from the Development, providing judgements of the importance of the effects arising.

Significant effects are summarised below and section 5.9.8 identifies where non-significant effects are summarised.

5.9.2 Design

The turbines are set within commercial forestry with all except one located within the less sensitive Upland Moorland and Forestry LCT. The single turbine within the Rolling Farmland and Forests LCT is located in a transitional area and contained within the same block of forestry, where there is no readily apparent change in character.

Turbines are concentrated within the central part of the Site and set back from the northern and eastern edges to reduce the proximity and mitigate visual impacts on the adjacent Spey Valley. This also reduces proximity to areas of more complex landform and landcover and, in more distant views from the north, provides a greater degree of separation from landforms which form the more distinctive aspects of skylines in these views – notably Ben Aigan, Ben Rinnes and Brown Muir.

Four of the turbines are proposed with a reduced tip height to mitigate visual impact on views from the Spey Valley to the east, longer distance views from the north and a number of the closest residential properties.

The aviation lights will automatically dim from 2000 cd to 200 cd in good visibility conditions and it has been agreed that the standard CAA lighting requirement (all turbines to have nacelle and tower lights) can be reduce to four cardinal nacelle lights only.

5.9.3 Effects on character

Significant (Major/moderate and Adverse) effects on landscape character would arise for the two host landscape character types; LCT 10 Upland Moorland and Forestry and LCT 4 Rolling Farmlands and Forest, and for the adjacent valley landscape to the south and east - 6 Broad Farmed Valley. These significant effects would arise as a result of changes to character due to the presence and proximity of the turbines in the area within 4-5 km of the proposed turbines.

5.9.4 Visual effects

Significant visual effects would arise for visual receptors within 5-6 km of the Development – including the settlements of Rothes and Inchberry; the rural area around these settlements and extending east towards Mulben, and the rural area to the north and northeast of the site between Inchberry, Brown Muir, Lhanbryde and Fochabers. For recreational receptors, significant effects would also arise for those climbing Ben Aigan, or visiting the viewpoint at Ordiequish Earth Pillars; walkers on the Speyside Way and road users on the Northeast 250 scenic road route. These effects on views would be Major/moderate and Adverse except at Rothes, where views from the north east edge of the settlement and along the High Street and Land Street would combine to give rise to Major Adverse effects.

5.9.5 Effects on designated areas

Significant effects would arise on the special qualities of the Spey Valley SLA which extends up the valley sides to include part of the Site. These significant effects would arise as a result of three of the four special qualities being notably affected within up to 2-4 km from the Development due to the nearby presence of the Development being seen above the being seen above the ‘wooded valley sides’, altering the character of the ‘broad gently weaving river and floodplain farmland’ and distracting from appreciation of the ‘diverse and handsome landscape’. The special quality of the ‘connection with the whisky distilling’ would not be affected. Although the effects identified are significant, their localised nature towards the northern end of the SLA would mean that the overall integrity of the SLA would not be significantly affected.

5.9.6 Night-time effects

There would be significant effects at night on visual receptors within the Spey valley between the B9103 and Fochabers. In this presently relatively dark area, all four of the aviation lights would frequently be visible above the forested skyline to the west or southwest.

Elsewhere, visibility of the aviation lights would typically arise in the context of existing light sources including street lighting, lights on traffic on A-roads, aviation lights on masts and consented turbines, and bright lights at industrial sites and bonds.

5.9.7 Cumulative effects

Cumulative effects with operational and consented wind farms are considered in the effects reported above and summarised in Table 5.8. Cumulative effects have also been considered with wind farms in planning, specifically Aultmore and Kellas Drum wind farms which are closest to the Site. No notable cumulative effects have been identified with wind farms in planning and in all development scenarios, the effects of the Development would remain as summarised for the main assessment. Blackhills wind farm has not been considered in detail as it is not yet an application, and the design would be expected to change prior to application.

5.10 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Only significant effects are listed in Table 5.8 below. For non-significant effects see TA A5.2 and summaries provided in this chapter at:

- Landscape character – 5.7.3.4;
- Visual receptors – 5.7.4.9;
- Designated landscapes – 5.7.5.2; and
- Visual receptors at night – 5.7.6.

Table 5.8 Main assessment – Significant effects

Receptor	Distance, Direction	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Level of Effect
Landscape Character				
LCT 10 Upland Moorland and Forestry	Includes Site	Medium	Large/medium	Major/moderate, Adverse
LCT 4 Rolling Farmlands and Forest	Includes Site	High/medium	Medium	Major/moderate, Adverse
LCT 6 Broad Farmed Valley	1.1 km, SE	High/medium	Medium	Major/moderate, Adverse
Visual receptors				
Rothes	2.1 km, S	High/medium	Large	Major, Adverse
Inchberry	2.4 km, NE	High/medium	Large/medium	Major/moderate, Adverse
Rural area between Inchberry and Mulben and around Rothes	0.8 km, SE	High/medium	Large/medium	Major/moderate, Adverse
Rural area between Inchberry, Brown Muir, Lhanbryde and Fochabers	1.0 km, N	High/medium	Large/medium	Major/moderate, Adverse
North East 250	1.7 km , E	High/medium	Medium	Major/moderate, Adverse
Speyside Way	2.2 km SE	High/medium	Large/medium	Major/moderate, Adverse
Ben Aigan	4.4 km, S	High/medium	Large/medium	Major/moderate, Adverse
Ordiequish Earth Pillars	4.7 km, NE	High/medium	Large/medium	Major/moderate, Adverse
Designated areas				
Spey Valley SLA	Includes Site	High/medium	Large/medium	Major/moderate, Adverse
Night-time effects				
Spey valley between the B9103 and Fochabers	0.5 km, E	High/medium	Large/medium	Major/moderate