

Environmental Impact Assessment Report

Teindland Wind Farm

Volume 3

TA A6.1: Habitat Survey Report

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Teindland Wind Farm

Technical Appendix A6.1: Habitat Survey Report



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Introduction

The proposed Teindland wind farm is located approximately 10km to the south east of Elgin, Scotland (grid reference: NJ 293 541). A range of habitat surveys have been carried out to inform the planning and design stages of the proposed development. These included a habitat survey consisting of a National Vegetation Classification (NVC) survey and a Phase 1 habitat survey. In addition, a Groundwater Dependent Terrestrial Ecosystem (GWDTE) survey has also been carried out. The site, including a minimum 250m survey buffer from any proposed infrastructure is approximately 1537ha in size. The survey area is dominated by plantation forestry but also contains a variety of native woodland, mire and grassland communities. The core survey area and extended survey boundary are illustrated in Figure 1.

National Vegetation Classification (NVC) survey methods

The NVC survey was carried out over 10 days by Rory Whytock ACIEEM between the 29th of July - 2nd of August and the 26th – 30th of August 2024 in dry conditions with good visibility throughout. The survey area included all communities within the site boundary and a minimum buffer of 250m from proposed infrastructure. The additional buffer area has been surveyed in order to identify any wetland communities that may be negatively affected by any deep excavations from the proposed development.

The NVC communities within the survey area were mapped by eye and classified according to Rodwell (1998a, 1998b, 2003). Quadrats were set up for each habitat type where detailed floristic samples were recorded to allow the habitat to be categorised later into the appropriate NVC classification. Seminatural or man-made habitats have been categorised into their respective Phase 1 categories (JNCC, 2010).

Small areas of interest and general descriptions of features were made using target notes as per Phase 1 survey methodology (JNCC, 2010). The NVC survey area was mapped in the field then digitised using GIS to produce a detailed map of dominant and sub-dominant community composition.

Higher plant nomenclature follows that of Stace (2019), bryophyte nomenclature follows that of the Blockeel *et al.* (2021) and lichens follow Coppins (2002).

Groundwater Dependent Terrestrial Ecosystems (GWDTEs) survey methods

As described above, the NVC habitats were mapped according to their dominant NVC community, though many of these habitats were made up of mosaics of NVC communities. Hence when determining whether a particular habitat was potentially groundwater dependent the composition of the mosaic was considered.

In order to establish whether any of the identified communities were considered groundwater dependent, an evaluation was carried out. In the first instance, this involved identifying whether there was an obvious groundwater feature (i.e. a springhead). If this was not apparent, plant species that required base-rich conditions were checked for. If these were located, further investigations took place to check whether the community was associated with an obvious rain-fed surface water feature. Obvious surface water features include:

- Watercourses (drains/streams/valleys)
- Waterbodies
- Floodplains
- Downslope of a rain-fed community
- Adjacent to ponding locations such as marshes or swamps

If any of these features are present, they were followed upstream to establish whether the source of the feature is fed by a groundwater feature (springhead/no obvious rainwater fed topography) or not. If a groundwater source is found, the community is determined to be groundwater dependent.

Areas supporting communities which are potentially dependent on groundwater sources were also classified according to guidance issued by SEPA (2017).

Limitations

Dense areas of plantation forestry and areas of wind blow could not be surveyed in detail due to safety and physical access constraints. This does not present any significant limitations to the survey results however.

Habitat Survey Results

The NVC survey recorded a total of 13 communities. Where these communities were floristically distinct, they were assigned into corresponding sub-communities. The communities recorded during the survey were:

• Mires, flushes and springs: M4, M6, M15, M23 & M25

Dry heaths: H12Wet heaths: M15

Grasslands: U4, U6, MG6Tall herb communities: U20

• Woodland & Scrub: W1, W4, W23

A number of semi-natural habitats were not recorded as they are not included in the NVC system. These have been assigned into their respective Phase 1 Habitat categories. The habitats that did not fit into any of the NVC communities are:

Plantation woodland: A1.1.2, A1.2.2 & A1.3.2

• Felled woodland: A4.2

• Arable: J1.1

• Bare ground/forestry tracks: J4

Buildings: J3.6

The following sections describe the NVC communities recorded on site and detail the flora, structure and condition of each of the habitats. Maps of the survey results can be found in Figure 3 with target notes describing notable species or features found during the survey in Appendix A.

Mires, Flushes & springs (E1 & E2)

M4 Carex rostrata – Sphagnum fallax mire

This community occupies areas that are restricted to permanently wet areas. All M4 communities within the survey area were rather species poor and dominated by bottle sedge *Carex rostrata* as the vascular plant component and *Sphagnum fallax* as the dominant component of the bryophyte assemblage. Few other species were recorded within these communities, though common sedge *Carex nigra, Sphagnum cuspidatum, Aulacomnium palustre* and marsh violet *Viola palustris* were locally frequent in some areas. There are no sub-communities associated with this community.

M6 Carex echinata - Sphagnum fallax/denticulatum mire

These mires are situated in valley bottoms, sloping valley sides or channels within the site where water flows slowly. M6 communities are defined by the dominance of rush species such as *Juncus effusus* or *J*.

acutiflorus with a ground layer of *Sphagnum* species such as *S. fallax, S. cuspidatum* and *S. palustre*. M6 can be differentiated from similar NVC communities such as M23 *Juncus effusus/ acutiflorus – Galium palustre* mires as these typically lack the abundance of *Sphagnum* found in M6 communities.

This community has four sub-communities associated with it, two of which were recorded within the survey area. The M6c *Juncus effusus* sub-community is dominated by the species for which it is named and sphagnum species such as *S. fallax* and *S. palustre*. It is rather uniform in composition and species poor. The M6d *Juncus acutiflorus* sub-community is instead dominated by *Juncus acutiflorus* and is often more diverse than M6c communities. The single stand of M6d within the survey area is species poor however and contains a similar composition as the M6c community except *Juncus acutiflorus* is the dominant rush species.

M15 Trichophorum germanicum – Erica tetralix wet heath

This community is recorded in the buffer to the west of the survey area. The M15 community illustrates a wide variation in its flora including species that occur as dominants or co-dominants. Species that were recorded in high frequency included *Trichophorum germanicum*, *Erica tetralix* and *Calluna vulgaris*.

The M15b Typical sub-community was the only sub-community to be recorded within the survey area. It is similar in composition to M17 mire but occurs on rather shallow peat and Sphagnum species are less frequent. Other frequently occurring species included *Juncus squarrosus*, and *Vaccinium myrtillus*.

M15 communities are ordinarily associated with the wet heath (D2) Phase 1 habitats. Where it occurs on deep peat (> 50cm) this community is categorised as blanket bog. It is a poor representation of its type however due to its small size, fragmented nature and damage from long-term grazing management regimes.

M23 Juncus effusus/acutiflorus – Galium palustre rush pasture

M23 communities are sparsely distributed throughout the survey area. They are found mainly in valley bottoms that have gentle slopes with slow but constant water movement. This habitat is closely associated with M6 *Carex echinata – Sphagnum fallax* mires and is often found adjacent to them but M23 differs in having a greater diversity of rushes and a lesser amount of *Sphagnum* species.

Two sub-communities are described for M23 mires, one of which was recorded within the survey area. The M23b *Juncus effusus* sub-community is dominated by *J. effusus* but other species recorded within this community included *Viola palustris, Succisa pratensis, Galium palustre, Cirsium palustre* and Ranunculus repens. Though many of these species are only found where the density of *J. effusus* is low.

M25 Molinia caerulea – Potentilla erecta mire

This community occurs on moderately wet, shallow peat and is abundantly distributed throughout the western buffer. *Molinia caerulea* is the most dominant species within this community and can form large conspicuous tussocks. Bryophyte diversity is often poor and restricted to robust common pleurocarpous mosses such as *Hylocomium splendens* and *Hypnum jutlandicum*.

Only one sub-community was recorded within the survey area. The M25a *Erica tetralix* sub-community is derived from blanket bog communities and contain species typical of those communities such as *Empetrum nigrum, Calluna vulgaris* and *Erica tetralix*. Sphagnum species such as *S. fallax* can be present but it is occasional. Species poor stands dominated by little other species than *Molinia caerulea* are not assigned to a sub-community.

Dry heath (D1.1)

H12 Calluna vulgaris - Vaccinium myrtillus heath

H12 Calluna vulgaris – Vaccinium myrtillus heath was recorded in the buffer, west of the survey area. The community covered a moderate sized area that is uniform in its composition. It is a dry heath community with Calluna vulgaris and Vaccinium myrtillus as co-dominants and is found on a range of shallow peat substrates (<50cm in depth) but may occur on deeper areas of peat where long term muirburn regimes has dried out the peat surface and created a wet heath species community.

Dwarf shrubs are overwhelmingly dominant and provide little room for other plant growth. Cowberry Vaccinium vitis-idaea, viviparous sheep's fescue Festuca vivipara, fir clubmoss and wavy hair-grass Avenella flexuosa were also present but were patchy in their occurrence. The vegetation is thick and interspersed with a familiar common assemblage of robust bryophytes growing through the dwarf shrubs. Moss species recorded include Leucobryum glaucum, Rhytidiadelphus loreus, Hylocomium splendens, Pleurozium schreberi and Hypnum jutlandicum.

One of the three described sub-communities were recorded within the survey area. The H12a *Calluna vulgaris* sub-community has no real distinguishing species of its own.

Wet Heath (D2)

M15 Trichophorum germanicum – Erica tetralix wet heath

This community is vegetatively the same as that described previously but occurs on a peat depth less than 50cm.

Tall herb and fern (C1)

U20 Pteridium aquilinum – Galium saxatile community

Pteridium aquilinum is the overwhelmingly dominant species within this habitat. Fronds of Pteridium aquilinum carpet much of the ground and smother the growth of most other species. As such, species diversity was low throughout

Where *Pteridium aquilinum* fronds were growing in loose clumps, a grassy assemblage of *Agrostis capillaris*, *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, *Holcus lanatus* and *Festuca ovina* were all frequent. Pleurocarpous mosses formed conspicuous patches on the ground beneath the fronds. Species recorded included *Rhytidiadelphus loreus*, *Pleurozium schreberi*, *Hypnum jutlandicum*, *Hypnum cupressiforme s.s.* and *Hylocomium splendens* which were found to be frequent to abundant in places.

The U20a Anthoxanthum odoratum sub-community was the only one to be recorded within the survey area. They are located on well drained slopes located on moderately steep ground surrounding watercourses.

Woodland and scrub (A1)

Much of the survey area is dominated by coniferous plantation woodland. Large sections of this are mapped within the Ancient Woodland Inventory as long-standing woodland of plantation origin (class 2b). As part of the habitat surveys, an assessment was carried out to establish which areas are considered semi-natural and those that are not. No stands were considered as semi-natural by the definition defined by the Phase 1 Habitat definitions. However, some areas dominated by Scot's pine contain a ground flora superficially similar to W18 *Pinus sylvestris* – *Hylocomium splendens* woodland. These areas are illustrated in Figure 2.

Although superficially similar to W18 Pinus sylvestris – Hylocomium splendens community in composition, the uniform structure of the planted trees, semi-mature age, frequent to abundant non-native species regeneration, these were instead recorded as coniferous woodland plantation (A1.2.2) within the Phase 1 Habitat classification system. These do have some biological diversity including scarce species such as creeping lady's-tresses Goodyera repens, and Ptilium crista-castrensis. Despite this, within the survey area, these species are not restricted to the identified areas and are found in non-native plantation stands also. As such, the presence of these species alone does not assign a higher conservation value to these stands, instead the conservation value is considered to be the assemblage of the plantations as a whole.

W1 Salix cinerea – Galium palustre woodland

The woodland canopy was dominated by Salix cinerea, Betula pubescens and Alnus glutinosa in varying quantities. Alnus glutinosa was relatively frequent with a ground layer containing varying amounts of Filipendula ulmaria, Dryopteris dilatata, Ajuga reptans, Poa trivialis. Common pleurocarpous mosses such as Kindbergia praelonga and Pseudoscleropodium purum were abundant on the ground layer.

W4 Betula pubescens – Molinia caerulea woodland

This woodland community is infrequent within the survey area where it formed small to medium sized stands. Betula pubescens was dominant within the community and is set within a rather wet ground layer. Less frequently recorded tree species included Sorbus aucuparia, Ilex aquifolium and Salix caprea. Flora recorded at ground level included Deschampsia cespitosa, Sphagnum palustre, Juncus effusus and Molinia caerulea. Where water flushed the ground, species such as Juncus acutiflorus, Achillea ptarmica and Viola palustris were locally frequent.

The W4a *Dryopteris dilatata-Rubus fruticosus* sub-community was the only one of the three described within the NVC system to be recorded within the survey area.

W23 Ulex europaeus - Rubus fruticosus agg. scrub

Ulex europaeus is dominant within this community to the exclusion of most other species, though *Rubus* fruticosus agg. is often present in varying amounts. None of the W23 communities on site were assigned to a sub-community as they did not correspond to one.

Grasslands (B1)

U4 Festuca ovina - Agrostis capillaris - Galium saxatile grassland

This habitat is rare within the survey area and often occupied very small areas. U4 grassland communities occur where frequent grazing maintains a short sward length. It typically occupies areas on free draining, slightly acidic soils. Species within this community are varied which is illustrated by having five sub-communities to accommodate the differences in composition. The most frequently recorded species are Festuca ovina, Agrostis capillaris, Holcus lanatus, Galium saxatile and Anthoxanthum odoratum.

One of the five sub-communities were recorded during the NVC survey. The U4a Typical sub-community. It has no real distinguishing vegetative features other than lacking the more distinctive flora recorded within the other four described sub-communities.

U6 Juncus squarrosus – Festuca ovina grassland

This community is located on mineral deficient, peaty substrates and is often found adjacent to degraded peatland areas. The dark green basal rosettes of *Juncus squarrosus* is the most prominent feature of this habitat type. These are mixed with *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, *Agrostis canina*, *Avenella flexuosa*, *Galium saxatile* and *Potentilla erecta*. Bryophytes recorded within this community included *Hylocomium splendens*, *Pleurozium schreberi*, *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus* and *Calliergonella cuspidata*.

U6 communities were not assigned to sub-community level within the survey area as they did not conform to one.

MG6 Lolium perenne – Cynosurus cristatus grassland

This habitat was recorded as large areas throughout the site. It is a habitat that is indicative of agricultural improvement. The community is dominated by nutrient demanding species like *Lolium perenne* and *Cynosurus cristatus*, *Bellis perennis* and *Trifolium repens*. The MG6a typical sub-community was recorded where soils are more improved. The MG6b *Anthoxanthum odoratum* sub-community occurred where the soil is typically less improved, where a greater abundance of grass species such as *Festuca rubra* and *Agrostis capillaris*. This is a habitat which is of high value for grazing but low in biodiversity and of limited conservation value.

Habitat results summary

A number of the recorded NVC communities are considered to have conservation value at a European level (Annex 1) or at a national level (Scottish BAP). A summary of habitats which have conservation designations assigned to them can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of conservation value

Phase 1	NVC code	Annex 1 code	Scottish BAP	Area (Ha)
A111	W1	N/A	N/A	2.89
A1.1.1	W4	N/A	N/A	6.29
A1.1.2	N/A	N/A	N/A	1.03
A1.2.2	N/A	N/A	N/A	1268.15
A1.3.2	N/A	N/A	N/A	17.48
A2	W23	N/A	N/A	7.01
A4	N/A	N/A	N/A	26.70
B1.2	U4	N/A	N/A	3.56
B4	MG6	N/A	N/A	33.93
B5	M23	N/A	Purple moor grass & rush pasture	30.33
B5	M25	N/A	Purple moor grass & rush pasture	9.71
B6	U6	N/A	N/A	0.94
C1	U20	N/A	N/A	8.38
D1	H12	H4030	Upland heathland	11.46
D2	M15	H4010	Upland heathland	36.93
E1.6.1	M15	H7130	Blanket bog	13.54
E2.1	M6	N/A	Upland flushes, fens & swamps	1.10
E3.2	M4	H7140	Upland flushes, fens & swamps	0.77
J1.1	N/A	N/A	N/A	35.57
J3.6	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.76
J4	N/A	N/A	N/A	20.86
			Total (Ha)	1537.37

A significant proportion of the survey area is occupied by commercial plantation forestry (Phase 1 code A1.2.2). Some of this is mapped on the Ancient Woodland Inventory as Long-Established woodland of Plantation Origin (LEPO) (Class 2b). However, much of this area is non-native tree species that has been planted at high density and does not allow light to penetrate to ground level and is of low conservation value. Some areas with Scot's pine dominant and at moderate density does have moderate value for biodiversity, but do not vegetatively correspond to W18 Pinus sylvestris – Hylocomium splendens NVC community with which it is superficially similar.

Figure 3 illustrates the mapped habitats within the extended survey boundary.

Groundwater Dependent Terrestrial Ecosystems (GWDTE) Results

GWDTEs are classified according to SEPA (2017), defining each NVC community on their potential dependency on groundwater. Groundwater dependency is often linked to wetlands that contain flora that is dependent upon the chemical composition of the water fed from a groundwater source. SEPA defines the habitats with regard to their potential for groundwater dependency, therefore not all communities listed may be truly groundwater dependent.

Table 2 lists the NVC communities that have a potential for groundwater dependency. The table categorises each habitat type according to whether they are likely to be moderately or highly groundwater dependent as defined by SEPA (2017). In total, there are four communities listed as moderate and three communities listed as having high potential for groundwater dependency.

Table 2: Potential GWDTE recorded on site

NVC code	NVC community name	GWDTE potential
M15	Trichophorum germanicum - Erica tetralix wet heath	Moderate
M25	Molinia caerulea - Potentilla erecta mire	Moderate
W1	Salix cinerea – Galium palustre woodland	Moderate
U6	U6 Juncus squarrosus – Festuca ovina grassland	Moderate
M6	M6 Carex echinata - Sphagnum fallax/denticulatum mire	High
M23	Juncus effusus/acutiflorus - Galium palustre rush pasture	High
W4	W4 Betula pubescens – Molinia caerulea woodland	High

While these communities have potential for groundwater dependency, following the assessment process, none of these were considered to be dependent on groundwater. This was primarily due to the location of surface water runoff feeding into the communities, a lack of plant species indicative of base rich conditions and no noticeable groundwater features (e.g. springheads). Figure 4 illustrates the recorded GWDTEs and their associated potential.

Recommendations

The main habitat constraint for the proposed development is considered to be areas of long-standing woodland of plantation origin (Class 2b) that have a moderate biodiversity interest at a local level. Following an assessment, none of these stands were considered to conform closely to the W18 *Pinus sylvestris – Hylocomium splendens* woodland community.

Within the areas, the biodiversity interest is considered to be of moderate value due to having a vegetative ground layer component containing species such as *Calluna vulgaris* and robust pleurocarpous mosses. This ground cover can become quite sparse where regeneration of non-native species is prevalent or tree density becomes high.

No GWDTES were identified within the survey area, no mitigation is therefore required at this stage. As a commercial forestry plantation, groundwater sources can be obscured by dense planting or artificial drainage. A watching brief is therefore recommended for groundwater sources during construction.

Summary

Habitat surveys were carried out at the proposed Teindland wind farm in spring and summer of 2024 by Rory Whytock ACIEEM. The survey area is dominated by commercial forestry plantations but does contain some semi-natural broadleaved woodland, mires and improved grasslands. A number of communities were identified as having conservation value at either a European, national or regional level.

Much of the forestry plantation is mapped within the Ancient Woodland Inventory as long-established woodland of plantation origin (Class 2b). A large percentage of the mapped area is commercial forestry plantation of little biodiversity value. Areas that are of moderate conservation value at a local level have been identified as part of this assessment.

Peatland communities were recorded within the buffer area including dry heath, wet heath and blanket bog. The blanket bog is small in size, fragmented and has a wet heath vegetation composition. It is categorised as blanket bog due to occurring on a depth of peat greater than 50cm.

While a number of NVC communities have potential for groundwater dependency, following the evaluation process, none were considered to be groundwater dependent within survey area.

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Appendix A – Target Notes

TN ID	Comment	BNG	Х	Υ
1	Gnaphalium sylvaticum	NJ3037453264	330374	853264
2	Large area of windfall	NJ2978152805	329781	852805
3	Hairy wood ant nest on north side of track just beyond banking	NJ2950653693	329506	853693
4	Hairy wood ant nest on north side of track just beyond banking	NJ2752653781	327526	853781
5	Hairy wood ant nest on north side of track just beyond banking	NJ2753753778	327537	853778
6	Single Rhododendron sapling	NJ2763653755	327636	853755
7	A moss - Tetraplodon mnioides	NJ2721054315	327210	854315
8	Hairy wood ant nest on north facing slope at edge of plantation	NJ2720754288	327207	854288
9	Hairy wood ant nest on north facing slope at edge of plantation	NJ2719754192	327197	854192
10	Common spotted orchid - Dactylorhiza fuchsii	NJ2720054139	327200	854139
11	Goodyera repens	NJ2814552882	328145	852882
12	Ptilium crista-castrensis	NJ2823052865	328230	852865
13	Goodyera repens	NJ2780852242	327808	852242
14	Stag's-horn clubmoss - <i>Lycopodium</i> clavatum	NJ2854555292	328545	855292
15	Ptilium crista-castrensis	NJ2966257434	329662	857434
16	Ptilium crista-castrensis	NJ2961057530	329610	857530
17	Rhododendron saplings	NJ2945557585	329455	857585
18	Ptilium crista-castrensis	NJ2941757577	329417	857577
19	Small number of Rhododendron	NJ2937557545	329375	857545

TN ID	Comment	BNG	Х	Υ
20	Lesser knotweed - <i>Persicaria</i> campanulata	NJ2958157163	329581	857163
21	Hole in base of root plate but no sign of recent activity of any sort	NJ3008857024	330088	857024
22	Line of beech trees	NJ3024456947	330244	856947
23	Gorse and Rowan scrub in old quarry - too small to map	NJ3026556917	330265	856917
24	Rhododendron in small amounts	NJ3077754546	330777	854546
25	Ptilium crista-castrensis	NJ2977054522	329770	854522
26	Nationally scarce liverwort - Calypogeia suecica	NJ2973254641	329732	854641
27	Hairy wood ant nest on north side of track just beyond banking	NJ2822653625	328226	853625
28	Hairy wood ant nest on north side of track just beyond banking	NJ2740153816	327401	853816
29	Hairy wood ant nest on north side of track just beyond banking	NJ2736253838	327362	853838
30	Hairy wood ant nest on north side of track just beyond banking	NJ2738053832	327380	853832
31	Single rhododendron stem	NJ2723853045	327238	853045
32	Line of sycamore trees along trackside	NJ2755452003	327554	852003
33	Oak Quercus sp. and sycamore plantation - too small to map	NJ2769252197	327692	852197
34	Salix cinerea dominated area - too small to map	NJ3087453728	330874	853728
35	Rhododendron frequent on western side of track	NJ3090553964	330905	853964
36	Yellow rattle - <i>Rhinanthus minor</i> along track side	NJ2883555051	328835	855051

TNID	Comment	BNG	Х	Υ
37	Carex rostrata dominated pond with abundant Sphagnum cuspidatum and Sphagnum fallax	NJ2948055668	329480	855668
38	Montbretia - <i>Crocosmia sp.</i> at side of track	NJ2949756975	329497	856975









