



Creag Riabhach Wind Farm: Operational Period Extension

Landscape and Visual Technical Note



Report for

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1. Landscape and Visual

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) for Creag Riabhach Wind Farm (CRWF) was undertaken in 2013 by Pegasus Group. CRWF was granted Section 36 consent and deemed Planning Permission under Section 57 (2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 on 17 October 2016. The wind farm comprises 22 turbines up to 125m to blade tip height and is nearing end of construction.
- 1.1.2 WSP Environment and Infrastructure Solutions UK Limited (WSP) was appointed by Ron Shanks Development Projects Ltd in November 2022 to undertake a re-appraisal of the LVIA in relation to extending the operational period of CRWF from 25 years to 40 years.
- 1.1.3 Since the 2013 LVIA, there have been changes in planning policy in relation to wind energy development, as well as the names and boundaries of some landscape planning designations and Wild Land Areas. Several documents of relevance have also been published since the 2013 LVIA. The relevant documents include:
- Scottish Natural Heritage, *Guidance: Spatial Planning for Onshore Wind Turbines – natural heritage considerations*, Version 3a, June 2015.
 - Scottish Natural Heritage, *Siting and Design Windfarms in the Landscape*, Version 3a, 2017.
 - Scottish Natural Heritage, *Visual Representation of Wind Farms: Good Practice Guidance*, Version 2.2, February 2017.
 - Scottish Natural Heritage, *Scottish Landscape Character Types Map and Descriptions*, 2019.
 - NatureScot, *Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Areas – Technical Guidance*, 2020.
 - NatureScot, *Assessing the Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impact of Onshore Wind Energy Developments*, March 2021.
 - NatureScot, *Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Guidance*, April 2022.
 - The Highland Council (THC), *Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan)*, 2018.
 - The Highland Council, *Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance*, November 2016.
 - The Highland Council, *Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments*, July 2016.
 - The Highland Council, *OWESG Addendum Supplementary Guidance: Part 2B*, December 2017.
 - Scottish Government, *National Planning Framework 4*, February 2023.
- 1.1.4 It should be noted that the 2013 LVIA considers the 2012 *Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP)*. THC began updating the HwLDP in 2015, but the process was on hold while the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) was drafted and adopted. NPF4 was approved by the Scottish Parliament on January 11 2023 and adopted by Scottish Ministers on February 13 2023. While THC updates the LDP, the 2018 Caithness

and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan) serves as relevant supplementary guidance for development. The 2012 HwLDP and CaSPlan will be superseded once the new HwLDP is adopted.

- 1.1.5 A brief reappraisal of the landscape and visual effects of CRWF has been undertaken (see **Appendix A**). The reappraisal considers whether the increase in the duration of operation of CRWF, by approximately 15 years, is likely to result in new significant landscape and visual effects. This reappraisal follows the principles contained within the *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*, 3rd Edition (GLVIA 3). As CRWF has nearly been constructed, the reappraisal focuses on likely effects during operation and decommissioning only.

1.2 Landscape Receptors

Landscape Character Types

- 1.2.1 The 2013 LVIA uses the 1998 publication of SNH Landscape Character Types (LCT). SNH (now NatureScot - NS) updated the Landscape Character Assessment maps and descriptions in 2019. As a result, several LCTs were combined and land use based LCTs were added to the *Caithness and Sutherland LCA*. Additionally, most of the original LCTs incorporated “Landscape Sensitivities” and “Forces for Change” which are now outdated due to policy changes.
- 1.2.2 As a result of the 2019 update by NS, CRWF is within a 35km range of the following Caithness and Sutherland LCTs with potential visibility of the turbines:
- LCT 134 – *Sweeping Moorland and Flows* (previously a combination of all / some of *Sweeping Moorland, Flat Peatland, Forest Slopes and Moorland, Small Farms and Crofts, and Moorland Slopes and Hills* LCTs);
 - LCT 135 – *Rounded Hills* (previously a combination of all / some of *Moorland Slopes and Hills* and *Sweeping Moorland* LCTs);
 - LCT 136 – *Rocky Hills and Moorland* (previously some of *Moorland Slopes and Hills* LCT);
 - LCT 137 – *Cnocan – Caithness and Sutherland* (previously *Cnocan* LCT with minor boundary changes);
 - LCT 138 – *Lone Mountains* (previously *Lone Mountains* LCT with minor boundary changes);
 - LCT 139 – *Rugged Mountain Massif* (previously a combination of all / some of *Moorland Slopes and Hills* and *Irregular Massif* LCTs);
 - LCT 142 – *Strath* (previously a combination of all / some of *Strath, Small Farms and Crofts, and Sweeping Moorland*); and
 - LCT 144 – *Coastal Crofts & Small Farms* (previously *Small Farms and Crofts* LCT).
- 1.2.3 CRWF now sits partially within the *Sweeping Moorland and Flows* LCT (as in the 2013 LVIA), as well as the *Rounded Hills* LCT which was previously the *Moorland Slopes and Hills* LCT.
- 1.2.4 The 2013 LVIA states:
- “The wind turbines are likely to have significant effects on landscape character within 2km distance of the turbines on the Moorland Slopes and Hills (LCT 5), Sweeping Moorland (LCT 1) and Strath (LCT 11) landscape character types. This is due to the visual influence*

of the turbines forming a ‘wind farm’ landscape character sub type within 2km distance of the turbines. Beyond 2km distance, the visual influence of the turbines would be less dominant meaning the baseline landscape characteristics of the LCTs would not be significantly altered and the existing landscape character would prevail.” (LVIA, 2013, para 4.7.3)

- 1.2.5 The 2013 LVIA also notes that the Ben Klibreck ridgeline contains the landscape effects from the north and east, preventing visual effects to much of the *Lone Mountains LCT* (the name and boundaries of which have not changed since the LCT update in 2019).

National Scenic Areas

- 1.2.6 The 2013 LVIA concludes that the predicted effects on the special landscape qualities of the Kyle of Tongue and Assynt-Coigach NSAs would be not significant. The North-West Sutherland NSA was not assessed due to distance and very limited visibility.

Wild Land Areas

- 1.2.7 At the time of the 2013 LVIA, SNH was in the process of designating Wild Land Areas (WLA). The LVIA indicates four Search Areas for Wild Land Areas (SAWL) within the study area. SNH published the WLA descriptions in 2017. As a result, CRWF is within 35km of the following WLAs:
- WLA 32: Inverpolly – Glencanisp;
 - WLA 33: Quinag;
 - WLA 34: Reay – Cassley;
 - WLA 35: Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest;
 - WLA 37: Foinaven – Ben Hee; and
 - WLA 38: Ben Hope – Ben Loyal.
- 1.2.8 The 2013 LVIA concludes that only SAWL 4 - Ben Hee would experience a ‘Medium and Significant’ level of effect; the other three SAWLs (Ben Loyal, Ben Klibreck, and Ben More Assynt) were assessed as ‘Low and Not Significant.’
- 1.2.9 Given the long intervening distance and relative topography of the surrounding landscape, only WLA 35 and WLA 37 have notable visibility of CRWF and are included in this re-appraisal. There would be no change to the level of effect of the remaining WLAs / SAWLs as assessed in the 2013 LVIA.
- 1.2.10 It is noted that Policy 4 ‘Natural Places’ within NPF4 states that “*the effects of development outwith wild land areas will not be a significant consideration*”.

Special Landscape Areas

- 1.2.11 The Special Landscape Areas (SLA) assessed within the 2013 LVIA are still applicable, however the boundaries have since been altered on the *Eriboll East and Whiten Head* and *Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra* SLAs.
- 1.2.12 Given the long intervening distance and limited visibility of the majority of the SLAs, only the *Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire* SLA is included in this re-appraisal. There would be no change to the level of effect of the remaining SLAs as assessed in the 2013 LVIA.

1.3 Summary of Landscape Effects

- 1.3.1 This reappraisal assesses whether the increase in duration of operation of CRWF is likely to result in any significant effects on landscape character and designated landscapes, over and above those identified in the 2013 LVIA. It also considers the effects in the context of the current landscape baseline, which includes CRWF and other wind farms.

The table in **Appendix A** considers the implications of the 15-year extension in the operational life of CRWF for predicted landscape effects. New judgements have been made to inform the reappraisal, relating to sensitivity (informed by susceptibility and value) and magnitude (informed by scale of change, geographical extent, duration and reversibility), as recommended by GLVIA3. However, the reappraisal does not include *scale of change* or *geographical extent* as these have not changed since the 2013 LVIA.

1.3.2 The reappraisal focuses on the following landscape receptors:

- **LCTs:**
 - ▶ LCT 134 – Sweeping Moorland and Flows;
 - ▶ LCT 135 – Rounded Hills;
 - ▶ LCT 136 – Rocky Hills and Moorland;
 - ▶ LCT 137 – Cnocan – Caithness and Sutherland;
 - ▶ LCT 138 – Lone Mountains;
 - ▶ LCT 139 – Rugged Mountain Massif;
 - ▶ LCT 142 – Strath; and
 - ▶ LCT 144 – Coastal Crofts & Small Farms.
- **WLAs:**
 - ▶ WLA 35: Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest; and
 - ▶ WLA 37: Foinaven – Ben Hee.
- **NSAs:**
 - ▶ NSA 23: Kyle of Tongue; and
 - ▶ NSA 36: Assynt-Coigach.
- **SLAs:**
 - ▶ SLA 8: Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire.

1.3.3 In summary, based on the reappraisal in **Appendix A**, the 15-year increase in the operational life of CRWF will result in the landscape effects identified in the 2013 LVIA being experienced for a longer period of time. The area across which significant effects are experienced will not change from the previous assessment. There will be no new likely significant effects.

1.3.4 There will be no increase in the scale or geographical extent of the effects, as these terms are set out in GLVIA3. Duration of effect also informs the judgement on magnitude of change, and the additional duration of 15 years is likely to be defined as medium-term, in the context of the 25-year consent that applies to CRWF. Compared to the current baseline with the windfarms in place, the 15-year extension will mean the continuation of very localised significant effects within parts of the *Sweeping Moorland and Flows*, *Rounded Hills* and *Lone Mountains* LCTs and *Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest* and *Foinaven – Ben Hee* WLAs. However, the WLAs have only changed in status (from SAWLs to WLAs) and the LCTs have only been simplified in their boundaries or combined. As a result, the assessments have not changed in any consequential manner. The change in the duration of effects will not give rise to any new significant effects.

1.4 Visual Receptors

- 1.4.1 The 2013 LVIA includes an assessment of visual receptors at 19 different viewpoints. These selected visual receptors are representative of landscape designations, SAWLs (now WLAs), settlements / residential properties, and transport and recreational routes. The following visual receptors were assessed as “Major and Significant” level of effect:
- Residents at Vagastie Cottage (involved property) – *it is to be noted that this the use of the property has now been changed from residential to an agricultural store which was granted planning permission by THC on 9 April 2018;*
 - Walkers travelling up Ben Klibreck summit along the ridgeline at A'Chioch and summit at Meall nan Con;
 - Walkers on Ben Hee; and
 - Road users and cyclists on the A836 northbound / National Cycle Network 1, near the Crask Inn.
- 1.4.2 The selected viewpoints are still representative of visual receptors in the area except for Vagastie Cottage as noted above. Therefore, there are no residential properties within 2km of CRWF.

1.5 Summary of Visual Effects

- 1.5.1 The reappraisal assesses whether extending the operational life of CRWF by 15 years is likely to incur changes in the visual effects beyond those identified in the 2013 LVIA. The reappraisal uses the current baseline of CRWF, along with a cumulative assessment of new wind farms since 2013. The table in **Appendix A** considers the implications of the 15-year extension in the operational life of CRWF for predicted visual effects. New judgements have been made to inform the reappraisal, relating to sensitivity (informed by susceptibility and value) and magnitude (informed by scale of change, geographical extent, duration and reversibility), as recommended by GLVIA3. However, the reappraisal does not include *scale of change* or *geographical extent* as these have not changed since the 2013 LVIA.
- 1.5.2 In summary, based on the reappraisal in **Appendix A**, the 15-year increase in the operational life of CRWF will result in the visual effects identified in the 2013 LVIA being experienced for a longer period of time. There will be no change in the receptors affected (except for Vagastie Cottage as noted in paragraphs 1.4.1-2), and no increase in the scale or geographical extent of any effect. The increased duration will mean the continuation of significant effects on a small number of receptors, but will not give rise to new significant effects, given the current baseline.

1.6 Cumulative Effects

- 1.6.1 Since the 2013 LVIA was produced, several wind farms have been consented or have become operational. These include:
- Lairg 2;
 - Strath Tirry;
 - Strathy Wood.
 - Sallachy (2nd submission);
 - Gordonbush Extension; and
- 1.6.2 A number of other wind farm applications were refused, withdrawn, or have expired since the 2013 LVIA as follows:

- Melness;
- Sallachy (1st submission);
- Glencassley.
- Dalnessie;
- Tressady; and

1.6.3 Achany Extension and Chleansaid Wind Farms are the only other wind farm application under determination within 20km of CRWF.

1.6.4 When considered in their totality, cumulative effects on the landscape and visual receptors will not notably change given the intervening distances between CRWF and other cumulative wind farms. There would be two exceptions, including:

- Views from Ben More Assynt – there would be a significant cumulative effect as a result of the consented Sallachy wind farm, but not CRWF.
- Sequential views from the A836 – there would be significant cumulative effects as a result of CRWF and the consented Strath Tirry wind farm; however, both wind farms would affect different sections of the route and the combined cumulative effect would be not significant.

1.6.5 In summary, the cumulative effects of extending the operational life of CRWF by 15 years will not notably change but will increase slightly in duration.

1.7 Implications of Removing Creag Riabhach Wind Farm

1.7.1 Decommissioning CRWF after 40 years would result in potential landscape and visual effects beyond those determined in the 2013 LVIA. The future baseline is difficult to ascertain; however, upon decommissioning the landscape would be largely reinstated to its original condition. Additionally, the surrounding landscape might be altered by further planting or felling of forestry, new wind farms, or other types of development in the coming years.

1.7.2 The 2013 LVIA includes a 'Time Depth Analysis' which concludes that CRWF would not permanently alter the landscape and visual effects of the area due to centuries of landcover clearance and disturbance. The LVIA (2013, para. 4.4.198) states that:

“Landscape change arising from the Proposed Development would therefore not be an unusual occurrence and conditioning the decommissioning of the wind farm at the end of its operational life would mean that there would be no permanent effects on the landscape. It is noted that a large number of historic changes including the emergence of extensive commercial forestry at Dalchork Wood, follows the alignment of the A836 road due to ease of access. In this respect, the location of the Creag Riabhach Wind Farm continues this pattern of development and is therefore ‘fixed in the landscape’ by the position of the A836 road and commercial forestry.”

1.7.3 In summary, the operational period extension would not incur any new or additional landscape and visual effects other than those presented in the 2013 LVIA.

Appendix A

Reappraisal of Landscape and Visual Effects

This reappraisal accords with GLVIA 3. It considers any changes to the landscape and visual effects in the 2013 LVIA if the operational life of CRWF is extended by 15 years. For each assessed landscape and visual receptor, the duration is judged to be of medium term. Furthermore, the effects are judged to be reversible as the turbines will be removed upon decommissioning. These judgements are not reported separately but contribute to considerations of magnitude.

Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Level of Effect and Implications of 15-year Extension
Landscape Character			
LCT 134 – Sweeping Moorland and Flows (Previously a combination of all / some of Sweeping Moorland, Flat Peatland, Forest Slopes and Moorland, Small Farms and Crofts, and Moorland Slopes and Hills)	Medium	High	Major / Moderate and Significant within 2km of Site. Continued significant effect on the local landscape. No change to previous assessment.
LCT 135 – Rounded Hills (previously a combination of all / some of Moorland Slopes and Hills and Sweeping Moorland)	Medium	High	Major / Moderate and Significant within 2km of Site. Continued significant effect on the local landscape. No change to previous assessment.
LCT 136 – Rocky Hills and Moorland (Previously a combination of all / some of Moorland Slopes and Hills)	Medium	Low	Moderate / Minor and Not Significant. Predicted continuation of non-significant effect as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.

Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Level of Effect and Implications of 15-year Extension
LCT 137 – Cnocan – Caithness and Sutherland (Previously Cnocan with minor boundary changes)	Medium	Negligible	Minor and Not Significant. Predicted non-significant effect as a result of the 15-year extension. Not assessed in 2013 LVIA due to intervening distance and low theoretical visibility.
LCT 138 – Lone Mountains (Previously Lone Mountains with minor boundary changes)	High	High	Major and Significant within 5km on the Ben Klibreck ridgeline including A' Chioch (747m) and Creag an Lochain (808m). Continued significant effect on the local landscape. No change to previous assessment.
LCT 139 – Rugged Mountain Massif (Previously a combination of all / some of Moorland Slopes and Hills and Irregular Massif)	Low	Low	Minor / Negligible and Not Significant. Predicted continuation of non-significant effect as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.
LCT 142 – Strath (Previously a combination of all / some of Strath, Small Farms and Crofts, and Sweeping Moorland)	Medium	Low	Minor and Not Significant. Predicted continuation of non-significant effect as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.
LCT 144 – Coastal Crofts & Small Farms (Previously Small Farms and Crofts)	Medium	Negligible	Minor and Not Significant. Predicted non-significant effect as a result of the 15-year extension. Not assessed in 2013 LVIA due to intervening distance and low theoretical visibility.
Wild Land Areas			
WLA 35: Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest	High to Medium	Medium	Major / Moderate to Moderate and Significant. Slight reduction in sensitivity due to the Wild Land Policy in the NPF4, nevertheless, the effect would continue to be significant. Continued significant effect on the western edge of the WLA. No notable change to previous assessment.

Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Level of Effect and Implications of 15-year Extension
WLA 37: Foinaven – Ben Hee	High	Medium	Major / Moderate and Significant. Continued significant effect on the eastern edge of the WLA. No change to previous assessment.
National Scenic Areas			
NSA 23: Kyle of Tongue	High (No change)	Low (No change)	Moderate / Minor and Not Significant. No change to previous assessment. Predicted continuation of non-significant effect on the SLQs of the NSA as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.
NSA 36: Assynt-Coigach	High (No change)	Low (No change)	Moderate / Minor and Not Significant. Predicted continuation of non-significant effect on the SLQs of the NSA as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.
Special Landscape Areas			
SLA 8: Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire	High (No change)	Low (No change)	Moderate / Minor and Not Significant. Predicted continuation of non-significant effect on the SLQs of the SLA as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.
Views			
VP 1 – A836 southbound/ National Cycle Network 1, south of Altnaharra	High (No change)	Medium (No change)	Major / Moderate and Not Significant Predicted continuation of non-significant effect experienced by road users as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.
VP 2 – Minor road/car park, south of Loch Meadie	Medium (No change)	Low (No change)	Minor / Moderate and Not Significant. Predicted continuation of non-significant effect as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.

Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Level of Effect and Implications of 15-year Extension
VP 3 – B873, north of Altnaharra	Medium (No change)	Low (No change)	Minor / Moderate and Not Significant. Predicted continuation of non-significant effect as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.
VP 4 – A836 southbound / NCN 1, south of Loch Staing	High (No change)	Low (No change)	Minor / Moderate and Not Significant. Predicted continuation of non-significant effect as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.
VP5 – Minor road near Mudale	Medium (No change)	Negligible (No change)	Minor and Not Significant. Predicted continuation of non-significant effect as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.
VP 6 – Ben Klibreck, ridgeline at A' Chioch	High (No change)	High (No change)	Major and Significant Continued significant effect on views experienced by walkers. No change to previous assessment.
VP 7 – Ben Hee, summit	High (No change)	High (No change)	Major and Significant Continued significant effect on views experienced by walkers. No change to previous assessment.
VP 8 – A836 northbound / NCN 1, near the Crask Inn	High (No change)	High (No change)	Major and Significant Continued significant effect on views experienced by road users and cyclists. No change to previous assessment.
VP 9 – Ferrycroft Visitor Centre, Lairg	High (No change)	Negligible (No change)	Negligible / Zero and Not Significant. Predicted continuation of non-significant effect as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.
VP 10 – Ben Hope, southeast of Sail Romascaig	High (No change)	Low (No change)	Minor / Moderate and Not Significant. Predicted continuation of non-significant effect as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.
VP 11 – Altnaharra, bridge	High (No change)	Negligible (No change)	Negligible and Not Significant. Predicted continuation of non-significant effect as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.

Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Level of Effect and Implications of 15-year Extension
VP 12 – Ben More Assynt, summit	High (No change)	Low (No change)	Minor / Moderate and Not Significant. Predicted continuation of non-significant effect as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.
VP 13 – Beinn Sgeireach, summit	Low (No change)	Low (No change)	Minor and Not Significant. Predicted continuation of non-significant effect as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.
VP 14 – B873 westbound / Grummore Caravan site	High (No change)	Low (No change)	Minor / Moderate and Not Significant. Predicted continuation of non-significant effect as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.
VP 15 – Beinn Leoid, summit	High (No change)	Low (No change)	Minor / Moderate and Not Significant. Predicted continuation of non-significant effect as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.
VP 16 – Ben Loyal, south of summit at An Creagan	High (No change)	Low (No change)	Minor / Moderate and Not Significant. Predicted continuation of non-significant effect as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.
VP 17 – A836, south of Crask Inn	High (No change)	Medium (No change)	Major / Moderate and Not Significant Predicted continuation of non-significant effect experienced by road users as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.
VP 18 – The track to Loch Choire	High (No change)	Medium (No change)	Major / Moderate and Not Significant Predicted continuation of non-significant effect experienced by road users as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.
VP 19 – Achnairn Campsite	High (No change)	Negligible (No change)	Negligible and Not Significant. Predicted continuation of non-significant effect as a result of the 15-year extension. No change to previous assessment.

