

EARBA STORAGE

A GILKES ENERGY COMPANY

Earba Pumped Storage Hydro Scheme EIA Report

Appendix 15.1: Draft Access Management Plan

February 2024



Quality Information

Prepared by

Chris Pasteur

Checked by

David Tomb

Approved by

Gavin McGill

Revision History

Revision

01

Revision Date

February 2024

Details

Issue to ECU

Authorised

Gavin McGill

© 2024 Gilkes Energy Ltd. All Rights Reserved

Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Baseline	4
3. Impacts on Access During Construction and Operation with Mitigation	8
4. Implementation of the Access Management Plan	18

List of Figures

Figure 15-1 - Existing Access Routes and Footpaths List of Appendices

Figure 15-2 - Access Routes and Footpaths During Construction

Figure 15-3 - Access Routes and Footpaths During Operation

Figure 15-4 - Strava Heatmap for Walking

Figure 15-5 - Strava Heatmap for Cycling

Figure 15-6 - Site Photographs Locations and References

Figure 15-7 - Strava Heatmap with Site Photographs Locations and References

List of Appendices

Appendix 15.1.1 - Photographic Record of Views from the Munro Circular Walk

Appendix 15.1.2 - Photographic Record of Views from the Approach, Climb and Descent of the Rock Climb “Ardverikie Wall”

1 Introduction

This Draft Access Management Plan (AMP) demonstrates the Applicant's proposals and commitment to maintain and where possible improve access through the Development Site during the construction and operation of the Proposed Development. A final AMP will be prepared post consent and agreed with the Highland Council and all other relevant stakeholders ahead of the commencement of any pre-construction works.

The Draft Access Management Plan (AMP) provides a plan to:

- provide site tracks and paths to maintain public access routes during construction and operation of the Proposed Development;
- provide safe public access at all stages of the development; and
- enhance public outdoor access in the long-term.

The draft AMP should be read in conjunction with the EIA Report **Chapter 15 – Recreation and Access**.

The draft AMP covers the area within the Development red line planning boundary, which encompasses all of the construction activity and the whole footprint of the infrastructure for the Proposed Development. This area is shown in the EIA Report **Figure 2.2 - Scheme Arrangement**.

The Draft AMP has been prepared in line with the guidance set out in the NatureScot Guidance “A Brief Guide to Preparing and Outdoor Access Plan”, 2010¹ and Appendix 6 of the NatureScot EIA Handbook, V5, 2018².

The following sources of data have been used in the preparation of this assessment:

- Ordnance Survey mapping;
- The East Highland Way website³;
- The Scottish Mountaineering Club guidebook The Munros⁴;
- Walkhighlands website⁵;
- The Scottish Mountaineering Club rock climbing guidebook Highland Outcrops South⁶;

¹ NatureScot Guidance “A Brief Guide to Preparing and Outdoor Access Plan”, 2010: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2017-06/B639282%20-%20A%20Brief%20Guide%20to%20Preparing%20Outdoor%20Access%20Plans%20-%20Feb%202010.pdf>, accessed December 2023

² NatureScot EIA Handbook, V5, 2018, Appendix 6: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2018-05/Publication%202018%20-%20Environmental%20Impact%20Assessment%20Handbook%20V5.pdf>

³ The East Highland Way: <http://www.easthighlandway.com/>, accessed September 2023

⁴ “The Munros” – Scottish Mountaineering Press, 2021

⁵ Walkhighlands: <https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/>, accessed September 2023

⁶ Scottish Mountaineering Club Climbers' Guide Highland Outcrops South – Scottish Mountaineering Trust, 2016

- The UKClimbing website⁷;
- Strava Global Heatmap⁸;
- The Cycling UK website⁹;
- The SCA Guidebook Scottish White Water – 3rd Edition, 2018¹⁰;
- The UK Rivers Guidebook¹¹; and
- The Scottish Mine and Cave Database¹²;

The Draft AMP is focussed on direct impacts on access. Indirect impacts, such as the effects on the quality of the settings where recreation takes place, noise and vibration are covered separately in the relevant chapters of the EIAR.

This document is a draft plan which has been prepared to be submitted with the Section 36 planning application. It demonstrates the commitment of the Applicant to maintain access through the Development Site during the construction and operation of the Proposed Development. A final AMP will be prepared post consent with the appointed construction contractor and agreed with the Highland Council and all other relevant stakeholders ahead of the commencement of any pre-construction works.

Any commitments in the EIA Report and the draft Access Management Plan that the Main Contractor would need to deliver during the construction period would be made binding on them in their contract with the Applicant, who would seek to work with THC both before, during and after the construction phase to make sure that there is no dilution of the measures proposed.

⁷ The UKClimbing website: <https://www.ukclimbing.com/>, accessed September 2023

⁸ Strava Global Heatmap: <https://www.strava.com/heatmap#7.00/-120.90000/38.36000/hot/all> , accessed September 2023

⁹ The Cycling UK website: <https://www.cyclinguk.org/route/weekender-badger-divide> , accessed November 2023

¹⁰ The SCA Guidebook Scottish White Water – 3rd Edition, 2018: <https://www.pesdapress.com/index.php/product/scottish-white-water/>

¹¹ The UK Rivers Guidebook: <https://www.ukriversguidebook.co.uk/rivers/scotland/west-highlands/river-spean-roybridge-to-spean-bridge> , accessed September 2023.

¹² The Scottish Cave and Mine Database: <https://registry.gsq.org.uk/sr/sitedetails.php?id=1312> , accessed September 2023

2 Baseline

Existing tracks, paths rights of way are shown in **Figure 15.1 - Site Plan Showing Existing Access Routes and Footpaths**. Those more distant from the Development Site are shown in the EIA Report **Figure 7.6 – Potential Visual Receptors**. There are no Core Paths within the Development Boundary.

The forms of public recreation known to take place within and around the site of the Proposed Development, and which are considered in this Chapter are as follows:

- Walking and running,
- Mountaineering;
- Rock climbing;
- Cycling;
- Backpacking;
- Swimming;
- Canoeing;
- Angling;
- Horse riding; and
- Caving.

More detail of these activities and the access routes associated with them is given below:

2.1 Walking and Running

The principal walking / running routes within the Site of the Proposed Development are indicated in **Figure 15.1 - Existing Access Routes and Footpaths**. These, together with those in the wider area, are shown in **Figure 7.6 – Potential Visual Receptors** which accompanies the EIAR **Chapter 7- Landscape and Visual**. This figure also shows the zones of theoretical visibility of the various key infrastructure components of the Proposed Development.

A number of Scottish Hill Tracks, 153, 154 and 155 pass to the east of the proposed development, but none of them is within the Development Site itself.

The unofficial long-distance walk between Fort William and Aviemore, The East Highland Way generally passes to the north of the Proposed Development, but overlaps with the site where the Proposed Development takes access from the A86 and again at the northeast end of the site by the Shios Dam.

Under direction of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, The Highland Council has produced Core Path Plans with the aim of creating a framework of paths linking with other access provision. There are currently no Core Paths identified within the site of the Proposed Development, nor any with any view of the Proposed Development.

An indication of the relative popularity of the walking various routes can be understood from the Strava Heatmap for walking, which is included at **Figure 15.4**.

2.2 Mountaineering

Surrounding the Proposed Development are the Munros Beinn a Chlachair, Geal Charn and Creag Pitridh, and the Grahams Binnein Shuas and Binnein Shios.

The most popular outing in these hills is the circuit of the Munros Beinn a Chlachair, Geal Charn and Creag Pitridh. To assist with appreciating the views from this walk, a photographic record from locations along this route has been prepared and attached at **Appendix 15.1.1 - Photographic Record of Views from the Munro Circular Walk, Beinn a Chlachair, Gael Charn and Creag Pitridh.**

Whilst the majority of walkers on these hills tend to follow the route published in the Scottish Mountaineering guidebook “The Munros” or the very similar route published on the Walkhighlands website, there are many variations to these routes, with differing popularity. The Strava Heatmap gives a n indication of the key routes and the variations thereon, together with their relative popularity amongst users of Strava.

The most popular approach to these Munros is from the A86 at Moy Bridge. Whilst some walkers approach from here on foot, many use bikes to cycle as far as the south west end of Loch Earba, before continuing on foot.

2.3 Rock Climbing

On the southeast face of Binnein Shuas there are cliffs which host a significant rock climbing venue including (amongst approximately sixty climbs) the route “Ardverikie Wall”, one of the most popular easier grade rock climbs in Scotland.

The cliff is generally approached from the A86 at Moy Bridge. As far as the SW end of Loch Earba, this may be on foot or by bike, from where there is a small and generally boggy informal footpath to the foot of the cliffs, approximately half an hour’s additional walk. Descent may be by the same route or alternatively down the SW flank of Binnein Shuas. The relative popularity of the various access routes can be seen in the Strava Heatmap at **Figure 15.4.**

To assist with appreciating the views from the rock climbing on Binnein Shuas, a photographic record has been prepared of from the approach, the climb and the descent of the most popular rock climb at Binnein Shuas, “Ardverikie Wall”. This is attached at **Appendix 15.1.2 - Photographic Record of Views from the Approach, Climb and Descent of the Rock Climb “Ardverikie Wall” on the Southeast Face of Binnein Shuas.**

Thirteen rock climbs are recorded on the Creag a' Chuir Craggs to the East of the Northern Earba Loch, but these are little visited, with only one recorded visit on the UKClimbing website, a popular facility for climbers to publicly record the routes they have climbed.

There are a further six climbs on two small crags on the western side of Creag Pitridh, above the proposed site for the powerhouse, but again these are understood to be very rarely visited, with no ascents recorded on the UKClimbing website.

2.4 Cycling

Cycling is popular on the various estate tracks within the site of the Proposed Development, both for cycle only trips and by people using bikes to approach the footpaths up the surrounding hills and the path to the climbing cliffs on Binnein Shuas.

The stalkers' path over the Bealach Leamhain between the SW end of Loch Earba and Loch Pattack is indicated in the Strava Heatmap as a route with a reasonable amount of use by mountain bikers.

The "Badger Divide", a 210-mile bikepacking route through rugged Scottish landscapes between Glasgow and Inverness passes through the area, following the track up from Moy Bridge and then along the south side of the Earba Lochs. This is reported to be an increasingly popular cycling route.

The popularity of cycling routes within the area can be gauged from the cycling Strava Heatmap at **Figure 15.5**.

2.5 Backpacking

The area is used by campers, including organised groups such as Duke of Edinburgh Award expeditions and teams from Outward Bound Loch Eil. The grassy area to the SW of Loch Earba is a popular camping area, and campers also use the area between the two Earba lochs and the small peninsula on the east side of the northern Earba loch.

2.6 Swimming

Open water swimming in the Earba lochs, one of a number of swimming locations in the area, is reportedly relatively popular, notably from the sandy beach created by low water levels in the existing Earba reservoir. It does not however feature in any published list of popular open water swimming locations.

2.7 Canoeing

Except for Loch Laggan, no canoeing is recorded on Strava or reported by the Estate on the lochs within the site, these being inaccessible by the public by vehicle from the public roads. Canoeing on Loch Laggan would be unaffected by the Proposed Development.

White water canoeing is practiced on the following rivers downstream of the Proposed Development:

- The River Pattack, a 2km stretch described as a good intermediate trip;
- The Allt Labhrach, a 1.5km grade 4+ stretch of river between Loch Earba and Loch Laggan requiring the existing Ardverikie hydro dam to be spilling to be paddleable;
- The River Spean:
 - o Upper Spean, 4km just downstream of the Laggan dam, grade 3+(5);
 - o Spean (Monessie), 3km of grade 3+(5) starting below the Monessie Gorge
 - o Middle Spean, below the confluence with the River Roy, 5km of grade 2/3; and
 - o The Spean Gorge, 6km of grade 3/4 (5) starting from Spean Bridge.

2.8 Angling

None of the burns are used by the Estate for fishing.

Fishing on Loch an Earba is available for the Ardverikie Estate owners and their guests, as well as guests staying in the holiday cottages. The loch is very rarely fished, however.

Badenoch Angling Association have a recurring annual licence from the Estate to fish on Loch Laggan. By arrangement, generally once a year, the Estate occasionally permit a group from the Badenoch Angling Association to hold a charity fishing match on Loch an Earba.

Due to its inaccessibility, Loch Leamhain is very rarely, if ever, fished.

2.9 Horseriding

Horse riding through the area is reported by the Estate, although this appears to be more of an occasional activity than one taking place on a regular basis.

There are no formal equestrian trails at the site.

2.10 Caving

There is a small cave to the north of Loch Leamhain, "The Long Walk Cave". This appears to be an esoteric and little visited attraction. The description of the 24m long cave includes reference to a section of roof comprising "hanging death boulders".

2.11 Additional Considerations

A locked gate near to Moy Bridge prevents unauthorised vehicular access to the site, but adjacent there is a pedestrian / equestrian gate which is not secured.

There is no other access infrastructure including seating, picnic tables, signage, viewpoints etc. within the area.

There is no formal data on participation levels for recreation and access at the site, but records from the Highland Council Ranger Service, which monitors the two car parking lay-bys on the A86 from which access is most commonly taken, indicate up to 21 vehicles have been recorded in these parking places. This suggests that on busy days perhaps 50 or 60 people might visit the site from this access point.

There are no key community facilities adjacent to the development site e.g. schools, churches, health centres, libraries, post offices, and shops which are connected by an existing access network, or which would benefit from such provision.

The nearest public transport to the site entrance at Moy Bridge is Tulloch Station, which is approximately 8.5km away, accessible by the A86 or the East Highland Way. It does not appear that the site is currently served by a public bus service.

3 Impacts on Access During Construction and Operation, with Mitigation

3.1 Construction and Operational Programme

The main construction period for the scheme is anticipated to be approximately 5 years and the operational phase effectively indefinite. This should give a good idea of the likely duration of the temporary and permanent outdoor access impacts.

The most disruptive period for access will be during the following phases of work:

- Whilst the new junction and bridge are being constructed, during which time the existing Moy Bridge access would need to be used for construction traffic;
- During widening of the shared section of track between the Moy Bridge entrance compound and the point where this track diverges from the existing estate track, a length of approximately 1.2km.

It is proposed that these activities would occur during the first phase of the construction period, with the junction and bridge construction likely to last for approximately 3 to 4 months.

3.2 General Principles

The general principles to be adopted in managing access during the construction and operation of the development are as follows:

- To maintain access for the public for recreational use of the area affected by the construction and operation of the scheme as far as practicable, as described later in this document;
- To minimise disturbance to recreational users of the area during construction and operation of the scheme;
- To ensure the safety of the public and the builders and operators of the scheme. During construction, there is the potential for risks to public safety if public access to the proposed site is maintained. Construction of the proposed scheme would comply with the requirements of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2017. These regulations require the Contractor to establish and operate a safety management system encompassing risk assessment, design measures and management instructions to ensure the safety of construction workers and the public. Speed limits will be put in place to regulate traffic flows and appropriate signage will be provided on the proposed site to indicate any hazards, those areas which should be avoided or where unauthorised entry is prohibited. Where feasible, alternative routes separate from the construction site will be arranged. These will be required in any case for Estate traffic whilst the construction work is in progress;
- To design, construct and maintain relevant, realistic, acceptable and deliverable access arrangements as outlined in this document in line with current best practice, including the following:

- o Upland Pathwork Construction Standards for Scotland, UPAG, 3rd Edition, 2015¹³; and
- o Upland Path Management Standards for Delivering Path Projects in Scotland's Mountains, UPAG, 2nd Edition, 2016¹⁴;
- To deliver enhancements to access provision where these are available and practicable; and
- To establish and maintain effective communication with relevant stakeholders with interests in access in the area.

3.3 Access via Public Roads and Parking

Additional traffic using the public road network to access the site during construction could impact on recreational users visiting the site, although with the mitigations proposed to manage construction traffic volume this has not been assessed as significant through the EIAR process. During operation of the scheme, additional traffic using the public road network to access the site during its operation would be minimal and would have a negligible impact in this context on recreational users visiting the site. Traffic on the public road system is covered in the EIAR, Chapter 17, Transport and Access.

Data on parking at the two lay-bys on the A86 used by recreational users has been provided by The Highland Council Lochaber Ranger Service for the period June to September 2023. This data was collected at various different times of day, often in the evenings, when the rangers are monitoring and encouraging responsible overnight parking. Based on the data points collected during the mornings, the highest number of vehicles recorded is 21. This indicates that the lay-bys are well used, but apparently not to over-capacity.

Parking in the laybys either side of the current access off the A86 at Moy Bridge would be unaffected by the proposed new site access for the Proposed Development, both during construction and operation, with Transport Scotland confirming that no changes to the use of these would be required. Access would continue to be taken over the existing Moy Bridge and access track, as far as where the new access road joins this at the proposed Entrance Site Compound.

The new junction on the A86 for traffic for the construction and operation of the Earba PSH will be to the north of the existing site entrance and parking lay-bys. This junction will have roadside trees cut back sufficient to give the necessary sightlines. If sightlines from the existing access and parking lay-bys could be similarly improved, permission will be sought from Transport Scotland to arrange this.

As well as improving sightlines, the following mitigation is proposed for parking to access the area from Moy Bridge, subject to agreement with Transport Scotland:

- crown lifting of the trees and shrubs to reduce screening, increase surveillance and reduce wild toileting and irresponsible behaviour; and

¹³ Upland Pathwork Construction Standards for Scotland, UPAG, 3rd Edition, 2015: <http://www.satinonline.org/Documents/74-Upland-pathwork-construction-standards-scotland.pdf>

¹⁴ Upland Path Management Standards for Delivering Path Projects in Scotland's Mountains, UPAG, 2nd Edition, 2016: <https://www.nature.scot/doc/upland-path-management-standards-delivering-path-projects-scotlands-mountains>

- reinforcement of verges with aggregate and repairing potholes.

3.4 Entrance to the Site for Recreational Users

It is proposed that recreational access to the site will continue to use the existing Moy Bridge access, which also provides access to Corrour Estate. This is the main access point for recreational users to the development site, although access is also taken along the estate tracks to the Northeast, along the East Highland Way from the West, over the Bealaich Leamhain from the Loch Pattack direction, and from the hills surrounding the site. This entrance will be used for traffic accessing any preliminary works, for example site investigation works, as well as during construction of the new access junction and bridge over the River Spean. The traffic for these activities will be relatively light and not in excess of that which has regularly used this access in the past for construction works and forestry extraction on Corrour Estate.

At the Moy Bridge “gateway” to the site, the locked vehicle and unsecured pedestrian access gates at NN 43650 82800, prominent information signage will be provided which will include the following:

- basic details of the proposed development;
- durations of construction activity, including specific information on areas affected as the work progresses;
- warning of construction activity and associated safety instructions;
- warning of fluctuating reservoir water levels (operational phase only);
- a map showing access routes, any shared construction and access areas, and any diversions; and
- contact information for the contractor.

Similar signage will be erected at the Shios Dam “gateway”, and more limited signage will be erected at other paths entering the site towards the Loch Leamhain area and the path from Lubvan. The signs will be erected prior to any works commencing, including preliminary works before the main construction activity, for example ground investigation and pre-construction fencing and tree planting.

During the period that the existing Moy Bridge access is being used for preliminary works and the construction of the new junction and bridge, this signage will be provided at the pedestrian exits from the parking spaces that give access to the Moy Bridge, instead of at the access gates referred to in above.

The detail of the signage will be agreed with the Highland Council in advance of any construction or preliminary pre-construction works in conjunction with the Main Contractor and based on the detailed construction methodology and programme.

3.5 Shared Use of Access Tracks

The proposed arrangement of access tracks is shown in the following Figures:

- Figure 15.1 - Existing Access Routes and Footpaths
- Figure 15.2 - Access Routes and Footpaths During Construction
- Figure 15.3 - Access Routes and Footpaths During Operation

As a general principle, access tracks for the construction and operation of the scheme will as far as practicable be kept separate from the tracks and paths used for public recreational

access. This will be achieved by retaining some tracks for public use whilst traffic for the Proposed Development uses separate new tracks, or by creating new tracks or paths for public use which are not used by traffic for the Proposed Development.

Where provision of separate tracks or paths is not practicable, shared use of these is proposed, subject to site rules for both construction / operational users (generally in vehicles) and recreational users (generally on foot or cycle). These site rules will cover segregation of vehicle and pedestrian / cycle traffic to separate parts of the track and speed limits for vehicles. The rules will be communicated through the contractors' and operator's induction processes and safety management systems and training. For recreational users they will be detailed in the gateway signage at the entrance points to the site. The rules will be reinforced by frequent signage along the lengths of shared tracks for vehicles and recreational users going in both directions.

A typical warning sign, in addition to speed limit signs, might be as shown below.



3.6 Shared Use of Access Tracks during Track Widening Works

Where widening of tracks that are in shared use is taking place, most significantly on the stretch of track between the Moy Bridge compound and the point where this splits into new construction track and existing recreational users track, as highlighted in the drawing extract below, additional safety measures will be implemented.

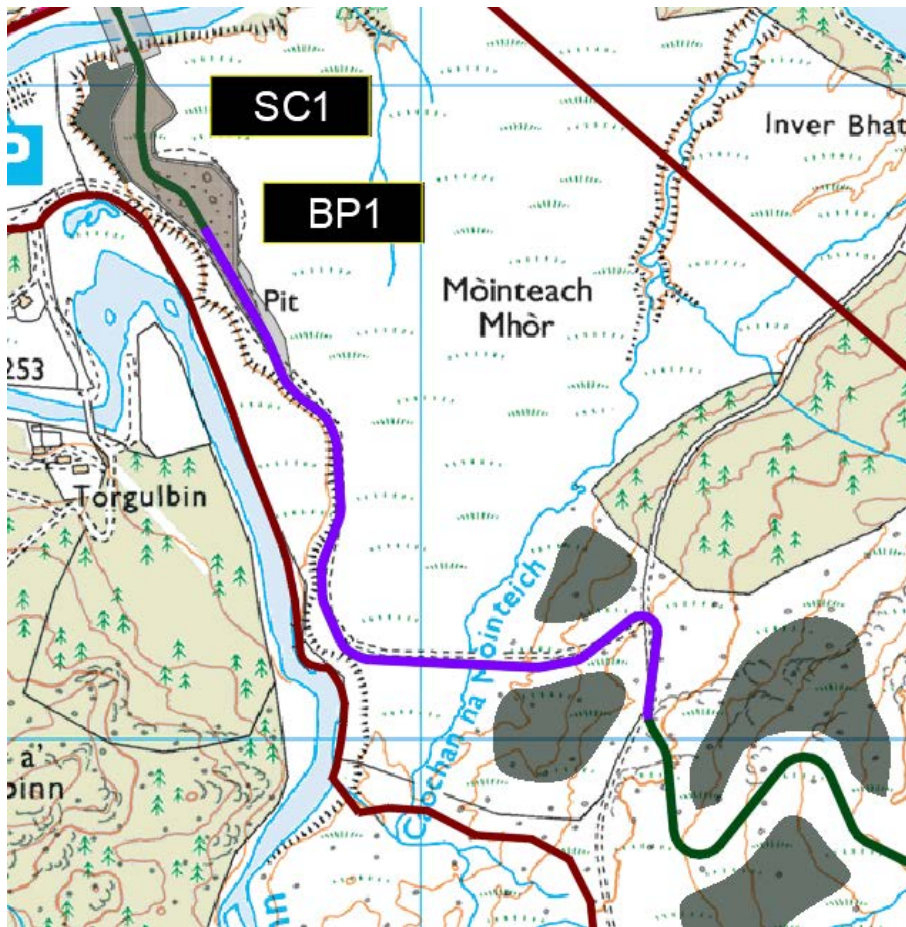


Plate 1 – Section of shared access track marked blue

A banksman would be placed in a visible location at the end of the track upgrading working zone, easily identifiable by members of the public.

The banksman would maintaining safe public access as follows:

- by acknowledging and engaging with approaching members of the public;
- by checking that it is safe to pass, if necessary by stopping the track widening work, and then signalling to the members of the public that they can continue;
- Allowing the safe passage of the members of the public will be the priority along the route. They will be allowed past as quickly as practicable.

Additional signs will be displayed on either side of the working area identifying the active works. As the construction area moves so too would the signs and the banksman.

3.7 Walking and Running

A number of the principal walking / running routes would be affected by the Proposed Development. Some of the access tracks currently comprising parts of walking and running routes would be used for construction and operational traffic. In other cases, new construction access tracks would be built separate from the existing recreational access routes. These arrangements would maintain access within the site, except during construction for areas which are the locations for construction of the infrastructure for the Proposed Development.

Access along the South shore of the Earba Lochs would be discouraged, but still possible, as this area would be affected by a high level of construction activity and traffic. A new track along the entire length of the North shore of the Earba Lochs, built in advance of the main construction work, would afford an alternative route for access between the two ends of the Earba Lochs that would not be used by construction traffic.

There would be no direct impact on the Scottish Hill Tracks, 153, 154 and 155 which pass to the east of the proposed development.

The East Highland Way would overlap with the site for limited stretches where the Proposed Development takes access from the A86 and again at the northeast end of the site by the Shios Dam. Access here would be maintained as shown in **Figure 15.2 - Access Routes and Footpaths During Construction** and **Figure 15.3 - Access Routes and Footpaths During Operation**.

Once the scheme enters operation, access for walking and running would be possible on both sides of the Earba Reservoir, creating a circular route which does not currently exist. This will be an enhancement to the current access provision.

3.8 Mountaineering

Access to the Munros Beinn a Chlachair, Geal Charn and Creag Pitridh, and the Grahams Binnein Shuas and Binnein Shios, would be affected as detailed in **Figure 15.2 - Access Routes and Footpaths During Construction** and **Figure 15.3 - Access Routes and Footpaths During Operation**. The existing estate track would be diverted close to Loch Ardruidh across the moorland to connect to the existing stalkers' path up Coire Pitridh. This path would be kept separate from the construction access track up this coire as far as practicable. There would be shared sections of track from the site entrance to the southwest end of Binnein Shuas, and a further section shared track to the south of Loch Leamhain (not on Munro circuit route). Otherwise the tracks and paths would be separate from the construction and operational tracks, except for number of crossing points, as shown in the figures. The crossing points would be made suitable for pedestrian crossing if the track is in cutting or on an embankment, although these types of crossing will be avoided wherever possible. Warning signage would be provided at the any crossing points.

These facilities will be provided to an appropriate standard, in consultation with THC. It is expected that this standard would be defined by a Red Specification Survey.

During operation, access for mountaineering would be as for during construction, except that the access track to the South of Loch Leamhain would be accessible for use rather than by the construction diversion routes. A suggested design for the crossing point signage is shown below.



These arrangements would maintain access within the site, except for areas which are the locations the infrastructure for the Proposed Development.

3.9 Rock Climbing

Access to the rock climbing on the southeast face of Binnein Shuas would follow the existing estate track as far as the SW end of Loch Earba. From here it would follow the new track alongside the North shore of Loch Earba until it meets the existing small path up to the base of the cliffs. This approximately 600m length of path would be upgraded to a proper constructed mountain footpath. This will be an approximately 1m wide mountain path with gravel or stone pitching as necessary depending on topography, built to Red Specification Survey standards. It is the intention to have this built before the start of the main construction works.

The new track along the North side of Loch Earba and upgraded connecting footpath to the base of the cliffs will allow for quicker and less boggy access to this rock climbing venue, particularly if using a bike, which would be usable until the start of section of new footpath up to the cliffs. This will be a significant access enhancement for climbing on this crag.

Access for rock climbing on the Creag a' Chuir and Creag Pitridh crags would remain possible during construction, although it is understood that these venues are very seldom visited. This would be by shared use of the track to the east of the Earba lochs.

3.10 Cycling

As for walking and running, a number of the principal cycling routes would be affected by the Proposed Development. Some of the access tracks currently comprising parts of cycling routes would be used for construction and operational traffic. In other cases, new construction access tracks would be built separate from the existing cycling routes. These arrangements would maintain access within the site, except during construction for areas which are the locations for construction of the infrastructure for the Proposed Development.

Access along the south shore of the Earba Lochs would be discouraged, but still-possible, as this area would be affected by a high level of construction activity and traffic. A new track

along the entire length of the north shore of the Earba Lochs, built in advance of the main construction work, would afford an alternative route for access between the two ends of the Earba Lochs that would not be used by construction traffic.

During operation, the new tracks on the north side of the Earba Lochs and up Coire Pitridh and over to Loch Leamhain would increase accessibility by bike to a wider area as well as creating a circular route around Loch Earba.

3.11 Backpacking

During construction, the grassy area to the SW of Loch Earba, which is a popular camping area, would be displaced by the main site compound for the Proposed Development. There are other suitable and popular camping areas close by, for example adjacent to the ruined shepherds' cottage at Lubvan (NN 4455 7900).

After construction the area to the SW of Loch Earba would be reinstated and available again for camping.

3.12 Swimming

Open water swimming in the Earba lochs would remain accessible during construction, but access to the water from the beach at the southwest end of Loch Earba would be precluded by construction of the Shuas Dam. There are other access points for swimming in Loch Earba that would remain accessible during construction, as well as many other local open water swimming locations, for example at Loch Laggan and Strathmashie.

During operation of the scheme, open water swimming in the Earba lochs would continue to be accessible in various locations, but the beach at the southwest end of Loch Earba would be partially displaced by the Shuas Dam and the remainder intermittently inundated by the reservoir. Despite this, access to the reservoir for swimming would remain possible.

The rate of change of water level in the Earba Reservoir during operation of the PSH would be up to 0.8m per hour, and 2.0m per hour for the Leamhain reservoir. Signage advising of this would be provided on the "gateway" signs, at all of the dams and at any locations that are regularly used for access for swimming. These signs would read: "Caution: this waterbody is reservoir within which water levels may change at up to [0.8m / 2.0m] per hour. Please be aware of this if you are accessing the reservoir shoreline or entering the water".

The inlet / outlet works for the pump/turbines will be screened, with the approach velocities less than 0.3m/s. This is sufficiently low at the screens and reducing rapidly as the approach channel widens out, that there is no danger of becoming trapped or pinned onto the screens by the flow of water.

3.13 Canoeing

Canoeing on Lochs

Canoeing on Loch Laggan would be unaffected by the Earba PSH, and although not recorded on Loch Earba would continue to be possible there also.

River Pattack

It is proposed to provide a discharge from the Leamhain dam equivalent to the natural flow from the loch. This means that there will be no change to the current hydrology of the River Pattack catchment arising from the Earba PSH.

Allt Labhrach

Once filled, the Earba PSH will operate broadly as a closed system, with 55Mm³ of water pumped up or released through the pump/turbines and any natural catchment to Loch Earba continuing downstream to Loch Laggan. This water will either pass through the existing Ardverikie hydro scheme or be released as hands off or compensation flow down the Allt Labhrach. There is currently no hands off or compensation flow from the existing Ardverikie Estate hydro dam, the reservoir has a moderate capacity but does on occasion spill to the Allt Labhrach, particularly during the winter months. Whilst the larger reservoir capacity of the proposed Earba reservoir may reduce the incidence of spills, the dam will still spill during the winter months. So spate flows suitable for canoeing, which are also necessary to maintain the passage of sediments down the Allt Labhrach, will continue to be available during the operation of the scheme.

During the initial filling of the Earba reservoir, there would be no spill proposed, with this being the case for between 2 and 5 years depending on rainfall patterns. Mitigation for any reduction in canoeing opportunity could be provided by providing information to the SCA on the times the All Labhrach is paddleable.

River Spean

The filling of the Earba reservoir from its natural catchment is predicted to take between 2 and 5 years, depending on rainfall patterns. During this time it is proposed that no water would be released from Earba to Loch Laggan. The water withheld from reaching Loch Laggan would be that arising from approximately 4% of the catchment area of the Spean at Laggan dam. (The Earba catchment area of about 24km² represents about 6% of the overall direct catchment to Laggan Dam (375km²). Furthermore, if transfers into the Laggan catchment (particularly from the Spey) are considered, its share of the Laggan Dam catchment drops to about 4%). This will reduce the amount of spill from Laggan dam on which the Upper and Monessie sections of the River Spean rely for paddling. It is difficult to predict the precise amount of reduction in spill because of various complexities including the diversion from the Spey catchment and the operation of the Lochaber hydro scheme in relation to water management of the Laggan reservoir. It is however reasonable to predict that the filling of the Earba reservoir would reduce the volume and duration of spills at the Laggan dam by less than 10%.

After the Earba Reservoir is full, there would be no change to the prevailing water management at Laggan dam arising from the operation of the Earba PSH.

There is no mitigation that can be provided for this temporary and relatively small effect on canoeing the two upper sections of the River Spean. For the sections below the confluence with the River Roy, the effect of the reduced spill from Laggan dam will be less significant, and the two sections of the river below here are reportedly paddleable at a wide range of water levels.

Access to paddle the River Spean is taken at Roy Bridge, and would be unaffected by the construction or operation of the scheme.

3.14 Angling

Although rarely carried out on the lochs within the site, angling would remain available during both the construction and operation of the Proposed Development. It is likely that fluctuation of water levels associated with operation of the reservoir could affect the quality of the fishing.

The safety signage proposed for swimmers would be equally applicable to anglers.

3.15 Horse Riding

Horse riding through the area is reported by the Estate, although this appears to be more of an occasional activity than one taking place on a regular basis. Although the routes used by horse riders within the area do not appear to be recorded, a number of potential horse riding routes could be affected by the construction and to a lesser extent operational activity. Some of the access tracks currently comprising parts of potential horse riding routes would be used for construction traffic, in particular a section of the main access track between Moy Bridge and Loch Earba. In other cases, new construction access tracks would be built separate from the existing recreational access routes. The proposed routes for maintaining access for horse riding are shown in **Figure 15.2 - Access Routes and Footpaths During Construction** and **Figure 15.3 - Access Routes and Footpaths During Operation**. These arrangements would maintain access within the site, except for areas which are the locations for construction of the infrastructure for the Proposed Development.

The signage provided for walkers and cyclists described above will be equally applicable to horse riders.

During operation of the scheme, traffic on shared tracks will be limited, although the same signage and precautions as for construction would remain applicable.

3.16 Caving

Access to the “The Long Walk Cave” will remain possible during the construction period. Once the scheme is operational, it will still be accessible although it would be underwater during periods when the reservoir is full, thus reducing the availability of the resource (unless for cave diving).

There will be safety signage warning of fluctuating water at the “gateway” signs and at the Leamhain Dam, which would be passed to access the cave location.

4 Managing and Monitoring the Implementation of the Access Management Plan

4.1 Management Responsibilities

Until the appointment of a main construction contractor, responsibility for management of the Access Management Plan will lie with the Developer. This will cover all works on site before the main construction works including site investigation works, preliminary access works and potentially some environmental mitigation works. Thereafter responsibility for management of the Access Management Plan will lie with the main construction contractor.

The Access Management Plan will be developed in consultation with The Highland Council's Access Officer and any other relevant third parties.

Consideration will be given to having an on-site access management mechanism such as an established site user group, if this is found to be necessary.

4.2 Maintenance of Access Arrangements

Routine maintenance programmes will be established for paths, tracks and any other access infrastructure in accordance with NatureScot guidance.

4.3 Review of Access Management Plan

The Access Management Plan will be reviewed on a three yearly basis to:

- Consider if the development has successfully integrated into the baseline environment in respect of outdoor access provision – or whether provision has led to other access issues
- Confirm that all the proposed mitigation objectives have been achieved, and if not, determine what remedial actions should be implemented.
- Assess whether new or enhanced provisions have established fully, and for instance of any further promotion or information may be required.

Appendix 15.1.1 - Photographic Record of Views from the Munro Circular Walk, Beinn a Chlachair, Gael Charn and Creag Pitridh

Attached as separate document.

Appendix 15.1.2 - Photographic Record of Views from the Approach, Climb and Descent of the Rock Climb “Ardverikie Wall” on the Southeast Face of Binnein Shuas

Attached as separate document.