

EARBA STORAGE

A GILKES ENERGY COMPANY

Earba Pumped Storage Hydro Scheme EIA Report

Appendix 7.4: Assessment of CNP February 2024



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Appendix 7.4: Assessment of Cairngorms National Park

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This appendix details the assessment of effects on the Special Landscape Qualities (SLQs) of the Cairngorms National Park (CNP). As shown on **Figure 7.1**, the CNP lies to the east of the Proposed Development with two small sections falling within the study area:
- o An area of Strath Mashie and Glen Shirra, and enclosing knolly hills, lying around 4 km to the north-east of the Shios Dam; and
 - o An area of Dalnaspidal Forest, lying east of the ridgelines of the mountains of Geal-charn and Beinn Udlamain on the eastern side of Loch Ericht, approximately 8.7 km to the east-south-east of the Leamhain Dam.
- 1.1.2 Part of the CNP within the study area is also covered by the Rannoch – Nevis – Mamores – Alder Wild Land Area (WLA 14).
- 1.1.3 The assessment has been conducted in accordance with criteria outlined in Section 7.5 of the EIA Report, and with cognisance to the principles outlined in working draft guidance provided by NatureScot:
- o Guidance for Assessing the Effects on Special Landscape Qualities (SNH, Working Draft 11, November 2018).
- 1.1.4 The assessment of Special Landscape Qualities gives consideration to effects on landscape character and identified. Conclusions made during the assessment of Landscape Character Types (LCTs) (see **Appendix 7.3**) and WLA 14 (see **Appendix 7.5**) are used to feed into this assessment and are cross referenced as necessary.
- 1.1.5 Evaluation of sensitivity to development of the type proposed and magnitude of change has been undertaken for all relevant SLQs. Given the status of these Qualities, the value is considered to be universally high. Therefore, the sensitivity rating is based on susceptibility to change only.

1.2 Baseline

- 1.2.1 The Proposed Development area is located approximately 3.5 km from the western boundary of the CNP. The CNP comprises an extensive area of mountains, straths and glens, stretching eastwards from the Proposed Development site for over 90km and is protected at the national level for the conservation of natural and cultural heritage and promotion of sustainable, economic and recreational opportunities.
- 1.2.2 The two areas falling within the study area comprise:
- Strath Mashie and Glen Shirra – a diverse area characterised by the mostly wooded Strath Mashie featuring small fields and scattered properties enclosed by surrounding deciduous woodland and forested slopes, and

contrasting upland foothill areas of open moorland and patchy forest plantation.

- Danaspidal Forest – An elevated and exposed broad mountain ridge, and steep, smooth slopes and screes dropping down to deep V-shaped corries and valleys on the eastern side.

1.2.3 The CNP Authority and NatureScot have identified 42 SLQ for the CNP, under nine categories. These are detailed in the publication 'The Special Landscape Qualities of the Cairngorms National Park' (CNPA / SNH, 2010). The full list of SLQs is contained in Table 1.

Table 1: SLQs of the CNP

General Qualities: • Magnificent mountains towering over moorland, forest and strath. • Vastness of space, scale and height. • Strong juxtaposition of contrasting landscapes. • A landscape of layers, from inhabited strath to remote, uninhabited upland. • 'The harmony of complicated curves'. • Landscapes both cultural and natural. The Mountains and Plateaux: • The unifying presence of the central mountains. • An imposing massif of strong dramatic character. • The unique plateaux of vast scale, distinctive landforms and exposed, boulder-strewn high ground. • The surrounding hills. • The drama of deep corries. • Exceptional glacial landforms. • Snowscapes. Moorlands: • Extensive moorland, linking the farmland, woodland and the high tops. • A patchwork of muirburn. Glens and Straths: • Steep glens and high passes. • Broad, farmed straths. • Renowned rivers. • Beautiful lochs.	Trees, Woods and Forests: • Darm and venerable pine forest. • Light and airy birch woods. • Parkland and policy woodlands. • Long association with forestry. Wildlife and Nature: • Dominance of natural landforms. • Extensive tracts of natural vegetation. • Association with iconic animals. • Wild land. • Wildness Visual and Sensory Qualities: • Layers of receding ridgelines. • Grand panoramas and framed views. • A landscape of many colours. • Dark skies. • Attractive and contrasting textures. • The dominance of natural sounds. Culture and History: • Distinctive planned towns. • Vernacular stone buildings. • Dramatic, historical routes. • The wistfulness of abandoned settlements. • Focal cultural landmarks of castles, distilleries and bridges. • The Royal connection. Recreation: • A landscape of opportunities. • Spirituality.
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1.3 Assessment of Effects

Landscape Character

- 1.3.1 Within the study area, the Strath Mashie part of the CNP falls within LCT 126: Upland Glen – Cairngorms. In the landscape character assessment LCT it was concluded that there would be Negligible effect on this LCT, due to the limited perceptibility of the Proposed Development due to landform and woodland, which would be unlikely to lead to any changes to landscape characteristics. It is therefore concluded that there would be no significant effects to the landscape character of this part of the CNP.
- 1.3.2 The Dalnaspidal part of the CNP falls within two LCTs: LCT 124: Summits and Plateaux – Cairngorms; and a separate part of LCT 126: Upland Glen – Cairngorms, also predicted to have a Negligible effects during construction and operation. LCT 124 was scoped out of detailed assessment in **Appendix 7.3** because there would be no intervisibility with the Proposed Development in this area due to the intervening high mountain ridgeline. However, this ridgeline which forms the boundary of the CNP, also comprises the edge of LCT 88: Loch and Glen which was included in the detailed landscape assessment.
- 1.3.3 Effects on LCT 88 were identified as being Minor Adverse (not significant), during construction and Negligible during operation, relating to the appearance of the Leamhain Dam within the northerly context. As this effect is predicted to be not significant, and relates only to the border of the CNP, concerning features which would be outwith the CNP and thereby not affecting the relationship with the landscapes within the National Park, it is considered that there would be no significant landscape character effect on this part of the CNP.

Special Landscape Qualities

- 1.3.4 Taking account of the indirect nature of any effects and the very limited and peripheral part of the CNP potentially affected, six SLQs have been identified for consideration in the SLQ assessment. For assessment purposes, these have been grouped based on their similar focus as follows:
- 1.3.5 SLQ Group 1: SLQs relating to upland areas, hills, moorland, and mountain:
- Magnificent mountains towering over moorland, forest and strath;
 - The surrounding hills; and
 - Wildness.
- 1.3.6 SLQ Group 2: SLQs relating to the relationships of straths and glens within the wider setting of hills and mountains;
- Magnificent mountains towering over moorland, forest and strath;
 - A landscape of layers, from inhabited strath to remote, uninhabited upland
 - Layers of receding ridgelines; and
 - Grand panoramas and framed views.
- 1.3.7 When considered in relation to the study area for the Proposed Development, the first of these groupings relates more specifically to the Dalnaspidal area, whilst the

second is more relevant to the Strath Mashie and Glen Shirra area in the context of the wider landscape.

SLQ Group 1: SLQs relating to upland areas, hills, moorland and mountain

- 1.3.8 SLQs within this group are associated with generally undeveloped qualities of upland landscapes which tend to have a high susceptibility to change. However, this is slightly tempered in relation to the study area as potential effects are indirect in relation to the CNP. Sensitivity for these SLQs is therefore considered to be Medium – High.
- 1.3.9 There would be some limited visibility of the Leamhain Dam from around the summits of Geal-charn and Beinn Udlamain, at the boundary of the CNP in the Dalnaspidal area (see VL11, **Figure V3a-11a-f and V3b-11a-k**). This is predicted to lead to some non-significant effects to qualities of wildness across these summits during construction and operation (see **Appendix 7.5**). These effects would be limited, indirect and highly localised to the boundary of the CNP, associated with areas outwith the CNP. The Proposed Development would not affect the appreciation of mountain areas or wildness characteristics within the interior of the CNP and the effect on the SLQs within this group is therefore predicted to be not significant.

SLQ Group 2: SLQs relating to the relationships of strath and glens within the wider setting hills and mountains

- 1.3.10 SLQs within this group relate to visual qualities and relationships between features and landscape types. These elements are susceptible to some types of change, such as features which maybe prominent or would breach upland skylines and this is to some extent applicable to the development proposed. Within the context of indirect effects, the sensitivity is considered to be Medium.
- 1.3.11 The ZTV suggests that the Shios Dam would be theoretically visible from parts of Strath Mashie around Kinloch Laggan within the CNP, and that the Shios and Shuas Dams would be theoretically visible from some elevated slopes to the north of Strath Mashie and around Glen Shirra. In reality, it is likely that this potential intervisibility would be limited to only a few higher areas, where construction works and the dam may be perceived due to the enclosing woodland and forest cover on the lower slopes and valley floor. The construction works or dam would form a relatively focussed feature within the south or south-westerly context, contained by the topography, and on the forest edge, and therefore, although at higher elevation, would be more associated with the landscape of the glens and straths. Whilst construction works would be perceptible within longer views towards Binnein Shios, they would be unlikely to form a very distracting feature and would be unlikely to disrupt the existing relationships of upland and lowland landscapes. In the longer term, the downstream face of the Shios Dam would be vegetated and therefore would form a barely perceptible feature within the wider landscape context of the CNP. The effect on the SLQs within this group is therefore predicted to be not significant.

Table 2: Summary of Sensitivity and Magnitude of Change to SLQs

SLQ	Sensitivity	Magnitude (Construction)	Magnitude (Operation)
Magnificent mountains towering over moorland, forest and strath	Medium – High	Negligible	Negligible
A landscape of layers, from inhabited strath to remote, uninhabited upland	Medium – High	Negligible	Negligible
The surrounding hills	Medium – High	Negligible	Negligible
Wildness	Medium – High	Negligible	Negligible
Layers of receding ridgelines	Medium – High	Negligible	Negligible
Grand panoramas and framed views	Medium – High	Negligible	Negligible

Conclusions on Significance of Effects

- 1.3.12 The Proposed Development would appear within the context of small areas close to the edge of the CNP, mostly affecting some of the summits and lower hills along its boundary. These effects would be indirect and peripheral, affecting areas outwith the CNP which would be very contained. The changes proposed are not predicted to lead to any significant effects on the landscape character of the areas affected, or to lead to significant effects on any of the SLQs of the CNP.

The effect on the Cairngorms National Park is therefore considered to be **Negligible** during construction and during year 1 and year 15 of operation.