

EARBA STORAGE

A GILKES ENERGY COMPANY

Earba Pumped Storage Hydro Scheme EIA Report

Appendix 7.6: Assessment of Special Landscape Areas

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Appendix 7.6: Assessment of Ben Alder, Laggan and Glen Banchor Special Landscape Area

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This appendix details the assessment of effects on the Ben Alder, Laggan and Glen Banchor Special Landscape Area (SLA). The Proposed Development would fall entirely within the SLA, as illustrated in **Figure 7.4**.
- 1.1.2 Part of this SLA lies within the Cairngorms National Park (CNP). However, THC has advised that they continue to identify the whole area as an SLA to enable continued acknowledgement of the particular landscape area and its components as a whole. The LVIA has therefore considered these two areas as distinct designations for the purposes of assessment. However, the assessment of the SLA should be read and considered in conjunction with that for the CNP (see **Appendix 7.4**).
- 1.1.3 Within the study area, the SLA also falls partly within the Rannoch – Nevis – Mamores – Alder Wild Land Area (WLA 14) which is assessed in **Appendix 7.5**.
- 1.1.4 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with criteria outlined in Section 7.5 of the EIA Report, and with cognisance to the principles outlined in working draft guidance provided by NatureScot:
- Guidance for Assessing the Effects on Special Landscape Qualities (SNH, Working Draft 11, November 2018)
- 1.1.5 The assessment gives consideration to effects on identified Special Qualities (SQs) of the SLA and its landscape character. Conclusions made during the assessment of Landscape Character Types (LCTs) (see **Appendix 7.3**) are used to feed into this assessment and are cross referenced as necessary.
- 1.1.6 Evaluation of sensitivity to development of the type proposed and magnitude of change has been undertaken for all relevant SQs. 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 This SLA is located within the Central Highlands, with the northern portion being located within the Cairngorms National Park (CNP) and covers an area of 402 sq.km (40200 ha.). It extends from Glen Banchor and surrounding hills in the north to Ben Alder and part of Loch Ericht in the south and includes Creag Meagaidh, Loch Laggan, Lochan na h-Earba and the Ardverikie Munros of Geal Charn, Creag Pitridh and Beinn a' Chlachair. This is a diverse landscape comprising a series of predominantly wooded glens, small-scale farmlands, and rising moorland that leads to distinctive craggy summits and mountain plateaux. There is a strong contrast between the more settled glens, which often feature traditional estate farmsteads, cottages, castles and gatehouses, and the remote upland areas,

which often have a wild character. The upland areas are traversed by an extensive network of estate tracks and paths and are popular with hill walkers.

- 1.2.2 SQs of the SLA are detailed in the document 'Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas' (Horner + Maclellan and Wood, 2011¹) and are grouped under two sub-headings as follows:

"Ever Changing Compositions:

- This SLA comprises a contrasting combination of landform and landuse, forming a fairly confusing composition and a varied character of views.
- A dynamic sense of place is experienced through ever changing combinations of high mountain, craggy knolls and ridges, smooth moorland, dark coniferous forest and native broadleaf woodland, flat farmed strath and open loch.
- This area includes some striking landscape features: Coire Ardair, on Creag Meagaidh is one of Scotland's most dramatic mountain corries: Creag Dhubh, near Newtonmore is one of Scotland's most impressive roadside crags: And the Dirc Mhór, off the beaten track in the hills west of Dalwhinnie, is one the country's best examples of a glacial meltwater channel.
- Loch Laggan, an extensive body of open water flanked by wooded shores and slopes, separates the Aberarder and Ardverikie Forests. This provides the focus for long ranging panoramas and intimate vistas, particularly for users of the A86.
- Glen Bancher in the north is enclosed by a complex pattern of craggy hills and deep glens and displays a lonely character despite its relative proximity to Newtonmore and the busy A9 corridor.
- The Monadhliath Mountains form a simple landform horizon to the north in contrast to Ben Alder and Creag Meagaidh which are more variable in form.
- Creag Meagaidh which is National Nature Reserve is popular with visitors all year round and particularly in the winter as it provides challenging walking and ice climbing.
- Ben Alder is remote from public access routes and a visit requires a long walk in, with consequent qualities of wildness.

Historic Landscape:

- This area comprises a range of features that lend a sense of history to the landscape, including medieval castles such as the ruinous castle on Eilean an Rìgh in Loch Laggan, depopulated medieval townships with many associated shielings in the hills, and post-medieval crofting townships and farmsteads.
- There is a picturesque sequence of contrasts between upland mountains and settled straths which are enhanced by castles and lodges.
- Cluny Castle and Glen Trium House, with their small-scale policy landscapes, give the area an added visual richness.

¹ Horner + Maclellan and Wood, M. (2011) *Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas*.

- Current day settlement is heavily concentrated around the banks of the River Spey and, to a lesser extent, the River Truim. Prehistoric settlement is especially pronounced and present in significant concentrations along the River Spey to the south-west of Newtonmore. This area was clearly of importance in the Bronze and Iron Ages. Also present are more contemporary defensive structures, such as the Fort at Dun da Lamh (Black Craig)².

1.3 Assessment of Effects

Landscape Character

1.3.1 Within the study area, the SLA covers parts of the following Landscape Character Types (LCTs) which have been given detailed assessment within the LVIA:

- LCT 85 – Isolated Mountain Plateau
- LCT 86 – Smooth Rounded Hills – Badenoch and Strathspey;
- LCT 87 – Small Craggy Knolls and Hills
- LCT 88 – Loch and Glen;
- LCT 89 – Broad Loch and Glen;
- LCT 126 – Upland Glen - Cairngorms; and
- LCT 236 – Smooth Moorland Ridges.

Sensitivity to change

1.3.2 Landscape character varies across the study area as indicated by these different LCTs. The sensitivity to change is therefore reflective of that identified for the relevant LCTs which has taken the additional value attached to the SLA designation into account and varies between Medium and High.

Assessment of Effects

1.3.3 There would be a direct change within this SLA, as the Proposed Development in its entirety would be located within it. The ZTV (see **Figures 7.1 a and b**) indicates theoretical visibility of the upper reservoir and / or dam from surrounding slopes and hill summits of Loch a' Bhealaich Leamhain including the north facing flanks and summit of Carn Dearg.

1.3.4 The ZTV suggests that the Shios and Shuas Dams would be intervisible throughout the Lochan na h-Earba valley, surrounding slopes and the valley floor to the south of the loch, where theoretical visibility of the powerhouse is also indicated. Theoretical visibility is also indicated within the northern part of the SLA, to the north of Loch Laggan, up to the summit of Carn Liath, particularly of the Shios Dam. However, from the lower slopes intervisibility is likely to be restricted by forestry as well as woodland on the loch shore, and the Proposed Development is unlikely to be seen in views along the Loch Laggan from the A86.

² Horner + MacIennan et al. (2011)

- 1.3.5 The Proposed Development would result in a change in some of the landscape characteristics of this SLA within the immediate context of the Proposed Development as detailed within the Landscape Assessment (see **Appendix 7.3**). This has determined that significant effects are likely during the construction of the Proposed Development, focussed within areas around the upper and lower reservoirs where the majority of construction works would occur. Significant effects to landscape character are predicted to continue into the operational phase of the Proposed Development, associated with the ongoing presence of the dams, reservoir drawdown and, to some extent, the powerhouse, which would introduce new large, man-made foci and a broader sense of human influence into the landscape and lead to some localised changes in the spatial composition. However, around Lochan na h-Earba, mitigation measures including vegetating the downstream slopes of the dams and strategic planting of woodland are predicted to reduce this to a non-significant level by 15 years post construction by reducing the prominence of some of these features and helping permanent features assimilate into the landscape context.
- 1.3.6 These landscape effects would be likely to lead to similar significant landscape effects to the character of the SLA, largely focussed within an area surrounding the two proposed reservoirs, with key parts of the SLA around Ben Alder, Creag Meagaidh and Glen Banchor being generally unaffected. Nevertheless, during construction the area affected would comprise a notable proportion within a central part of the SLA and this is considered to be significant in the context of the SLA as a whole. During operation, with reinstatement and mitigation planting, and the absence of activities associated with construction, the area of significant effect would reduce, particularly with the growth of proposed tree planting around the powerhouse, and after 15 years and the overall effect on the SLA would be localised.

Special Qualities

- 1.3.7 Table 1 lists those SQs identified as having potential to be affected by the Proposed Development with identified evaluations for sensitivity and magnitude of change. SQs have been scoped out of the assessment where they relate to geographic areas or features not affected by the Proposed Development.

Table 1: Assessment of Special Qualities

SQ	Sensitivity	Nature of Change	Magnitude of Change
Ever Changing Compositions:			
A contrasting combination of landform and landuse, forming a fairly confusing composition and a varied character of views.	Medium	During construction, the works would lead to a noticeable change in land use around the development site forming a focus of views. This may form a distraction from other small scale diversity of landform and features in the local area. During operation, the permanent structures would continue to form features within views, but particularly with the growth of proposed planting, the variation in composition and character would be retained, particularly around the lower reservoir.	<u>Construction:</u> Medium <u>Operation yr1:</u> Low – Medium <u>Operation yr15:</u> Low
A dynamic sense of place experienced through ever changing combinations of high mountain, craggy knolls and ridges, smooth moorland, dark coniferous forest and native broadleaf woodland, flat farmed strath and open loch.	Medium	The activities associated with construction would be likely to alter sense of place in the local area for a period of time, particularly perceptions of wild land. During operation, the permanent structures and managed inundation and drawdown would lead to continued landscape change in some areas, although the wider rugged and remote qualities of the landscape associated with topography and land cover would remain present. Woodland planting around Lochan na h-Earba would also lead to some change but this is not predicted to be negative in nature as it would to some extent offset some of the effects of the other proposed features and would retain a particular sense of place which would complement other surrounding landscapes.	<u>Construction:</u> Medium - High <u>Operation yr1:</u> Low <u>Operation yr15:</u> Low
Loch Laggan, an extensive body of open water flanked by wooded shores and slopes which provides the focus for long ranging panoramas and intimate vistas, particularly for users of the A86.	Medium	Whilst theoretical visibility of the Shios Dam is indicated from the northern part of Loch Laggan, actual visibility is likely to be limited both by woodland and forestry. It is not anticipated that the Proposed Development would affect the setting of Loch Laggan or feature in views along Loch Laggan.	<u>All stages:</u> Negligible

SQ	Sensitivity	Nature of Change	Magnitude of Change
The Creag Meagaidh National Nature Reserve (NNR).	Low	The ZTV indicates limited potential intervisibility of the Proposed Development with a few summit areas within Creag Meagaidh NNR. However, this would be experienced within a wide landscape context, and is not considered likely to affect appreciation of the wider landscape or the experience of visitors to the NNR.	<u>Construction:</u> Low <u>Operation yr1:</u> Negligible <u>Operation yr15:</u> Negligible
Ben Alder which is remote from public access routes and a visit requires a long walk in, with consequent qualities of wildness.	Medium	Walkers enroute to Ben Alder would obtain visibility of the Leamhain Dam around 2.5 km away for a short stretch during construction and operation. This may affect the sense of wildness and distance from peopled areas experienced, although the distance to walk would not be changed and the area affected is already influenced by some existing contemporary land use such as forest plantations and tracks around Loch Pattack. There would be no visibility of the Proposed Development from Ben Alder itself.	<u>Construction:</u> Low <u>Operation yr1:</u> Low <u>Operation yr15:</u> Low
Historic Landscape			
A picturesque sequence of contrasts between upland mountains and settled straths, enhanced by castles and lodges.	Medium	Views of the Proposed Development would be limited from the more settled straths within the study area, due to the relatively contained nature of the upper and lower reservoirs by surrounding topography. Whilst there would be some potential for sequential effects, when moving from settled to upland areas, this would be limited by the distances between these areas. The Proposed Development would mainly be experienced from elevated areas, and although it could lead to reduced contrast between upland mountains and settled straths by introducing man-made features and activities into upland areas this would be localised this would be unlikely to noticeably change the presence of this SQ.	<u>Construction:</u> Low <u>Operation yr1:</u> Low <u>Operation yr15:</u> Negligible

Conclusions on Significance of Effects

- 1.3.8 As discussed in paragraph 1.3.6, the Proposed Development is predicted to lead to temporary significant effects on the landscape character of the SLA during construction within an area surrounding the proposed upper and lower reservoirs where the majority of construction activities would take place. These effects are predicted to lead to locally significant effects on two sub-qualities of the 'Ever changing compositions' SQ:

- A contrasting combination of landform and landuse, forming a fairly confusing composition and a varied character of views; and
- A dynamic sense of place experienced through ever changing combinations of high mountain, craggy knolls and ridges, smooth moorland, dark coniferous forest and native broadleaf woodland, flat farmed strath and open loch.

- 1.3.9 During operation, with the completion of activities associated with construction the level of effects would reduce, becoming more localised to the areas immediately around the Leamhain Dam and reservoir and Lochan na h-Earba. During this phase, without the additional movement, noise and activity of construction works, the effect on the SQs is not predicted to be significant. With the establishment of vegetation on the downstream faces of the Shios and Shuas Dams, and growth of mitigation tree planting around Lochan na h-Earba, the sense of place around the lower reservoir would become more established and after 15 years, longer term significant effects, are predicted to be limited to the area around the upper reservoir and Leamhain Dam only which would form a more noticeable intervention in the upland landscape. This would comprise a very localised area within the context of the SLA and it is not considered that this would lead to a significant effect on the designation overall as the area would continue to provide a positive contribution to its diversity.
- 1.3.10 Additional tree planting is proposed around Lochan na h-Earba and across Binnein Shuas and Binnein Shios for biodiversity net gain purposes. This would be likely to lead to a noticeable change in character within LCT 87 with the potential for this to become more enclosed and less associated with wider views and experiences of the surrounding crags. However, this would not necessarily be a considered a negative change and may further reduce the appearance of elements of the Proposed Development within the landscape. It is unlikely that this would change the predicted levels of effect.
- 1.3.11 The effect of the Proposed Development on the Ben Alder, Laggan and Glen Banchor SLA is therefore predicted to be **Moderate Adverse** (significant) during construction, reducing to **Minor – Moderate Adverse** (not significant) after completion and **Minor Adverse** (not significant) after 15 years. There would be no long-term significant effects on the SQs of the SLA.