

Appendix 6.2b - Assessment of Effects on Wild Land Area 35 (Ben Klibreck–Armine Forest)

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Appendix 6.2b - Assessment of Effects on Wild Land Area 35 (Ben Klibreck–Armine Forest)

Introduction

WLA 35 (Ben Klibreck–Armine Forest) lies a minimum of around 5.2 km to the east of the Proposed Development, as shown on Figure 1. The Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) ‘Description of Wild Land Areas’ (2017) for WLA 35 (Ben Klibreck–Armine Forest) provides a useful initial brief overview of this WLA:

“This large Wild Land Area (WLA) extends 530 km² across central Sutherland between the settlements of Lairg, Altnaharra and Kinbrace. In its north west corner Ben Klibreck and the adjacent deep and linear glen of Loch Choire are prominent, although most of the area mainly comprises a series of round-topped hills and plateaux and an extensive area of undulating peatland and lochans whose strikingly simple form reflect the hardness of the underlying Moinian rocks and the effects of glaciation. It is one of a group of three areas distinguished by extensive low lying peatland, in contrast to many of the more mountainous WLAs.”

The following assessment follows guidance set out in NatureScot’s ‘Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Technical Guidance’ (September 2020) with reference to the SNH ‘Description of Wild Land Areas’ (2017) for WLA 35 (Ben Klibreck–Armine Forest).

The SNH WLA description lists five key attributes/qualities (which have been numbered 1 to 5 for the purpose of this assessment) for WLA 35 (Ben Klibreck–Armine Forest):

- 1. *“An awe-inspiring simplicity of landform and landcover and a perception of ‘emptiness’, so that the extent of the peatland often seems greater than it is.*
- 2. *Arresting, isolated mountains rise up in stark contrast to surrounding peatland and glens, amplifying the awe-inspiring qualities of each.*
- 3. *A remote interior where access involves long distances and lengthy time via penetrating glens or crossing over and around rugged landforms and waterbodies.*
- 4. *An extensive area of peatland with a prevailing strong sense of naturalness.*
- 5. *A secluded, elevated and remote interior plateau shielded by an outer rim of hills, in which there is a strong sense of solitude, sanctuary and risk.”*

These key attributes/qualities (hereafter referred to as Wild Land Qualities, or WLQs) form the basis of the wild land assessment as they express the distinctive and specific wildness qualities that are found in this WLA. The WLA description provides further information on each of these WLQs as an explanation of how the various aspects of the landscape contribute to the WLQ.

‘Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Technical Guidance’ (2020)

The NatureScot technical guidance (2020) sets out the suggested approach to the assessment of effects on wild land. As noted in paragraph 4 of the guidance, the assessment methodology broadly follows that of GLVIA3, and is based around the following five stages (as described in Table 1 of NatureScot guidance):

- *“Step 1 - Define the study area and scope of the assessment;*
- *Step 2 – Verify the WLA baseline;*
- *Step 3 – Assess the sensitivity of the qualities;*

- Step 4 – Assess the magnitude of the effects; and
- Step 5 – Judge the significance of effects”

Paragraph 13 of the guidance notes that “the assessment approach...should be:

- concise and proportionate, focused on likely significant effects on the qualities;”

While the wild land assessment methodology broadly follows that set out in GLVIA3, there are several points that are beneficially explained prior to the assessment itself, as discussed below.

The Status of WLAs

The status of WLAs is clearly set out in paragraph 8; “WLAs have not been identified on scenic grounds and are not a statutory designation.”

There is also an acceptance (paragraph 9) that WLAs are not ‘wilderness’ and that human influences can and do form part of the baseline character of WLAs:

“...Whilst the WLA map identifies areas where wildness is most strongly expressed, these are not ‘wilderness’, empty of any human activities or influence. They reflect Scotland’s long history of past occupation and current use and management, albeit that evidence of such is often light and limited in extent.

An important phrase in this paragraph is “light and of limited extent” as this presents a measure with which to assess the existing external influence of development, and operational wind farms in particular, on the WLA, and indicates to what degree this influence can be accommodated within an area that is considered to be ‘wild land’.

The Need for a Wild Land Assessment

The need for a WLA assessment is discussed in Paragraphs 5 and 6 of the NatureScot guidance, which note that:

“This guidance should only be applied to proposals whose nature, siting, scale or design are likely to result in a significant effect on the qualities of a WLA. Given this, assessments are more likely for proposals within a WLA, and are less-likely for proposals outwith the WLA.

An assessment will only be required where it has been deemed necessary by the competent authority. You are encouraged to discuss the need for an assessment with the competent authority at an early stage.”

While the Proposed Development lies outwith this WLA, both NatureScot (formerly SNH) and The Highland Council (THC) have requested that a wild land assessment be carried out.

It is also important to note that, according to NatureScot guidance, effects on WLAs can only be experienced within WLAs and not on the area surrounding them. Paragraph 3 of the guidance notes that “This guidance sets out a methodology and general principles for assessing the impact of development and other proposals on WLAs, as they are experienced from within the WLA, not from outwith it.”

Cumulative Effects

NatureScot guidance notes the following in relation to cumulative effects on WLAs.

“The potential for cumulative effects. Other proposals (either of the same or different type) which are likely to contribute to significant cumulative effects should be identified in discussion with the decision maker. The principles within our guidance document Assessing the cumulative impact of onshore wind energy developments specific to onshore wind energy development can be applied to other development and should aid this assessment.” (paragraph 16)

And “In judging significance, the following factors should be considered.

- *The nature and extent of any likely cumulative effects.”* (paragraph 33)

The operational/under construction wind farm at Gordonbush and Extension lies adjacent to the eastern end of the WLA, while Kilbraur and Extension is slightly further away (a minimum of 5.5 km) to the south-east. These wind farms (shown on Figure 5a) are relevant to the assessment as they exert baseline influence on the WLA and are specifically referred to in the WLA description.

To the south-west is the more distant operational wind farm at Lairg Estate, a minimum of 11.4 km away (see Figure 5a). This wind farm is also relevant to the assessment as it exerts some baseline influence on the WLA. More distant operational wind farms at Achany and Rosehall, a minimum of 17.2 km and 18.1 km away respectively, have considerably less influence on the WLA due to limited, very intermittent visibility and distance.

The consented wind farm at Creag Riabhach lies a minimum of around 500 m to the west of the WLA and has close-proximity theoretical visibility from the north-western end of the WLA but negligible visibility from elsewhere within the WLA. The consented site at Lairg II, 12 km to the south-west of the WLA, is also relevant as while it lies some distance away, the turbines at this development are of larger dimensions (tip heights of 150 m and 180 m) than seen elsewhere in the area. The consented Strathy South is 14 km away to the north of the WLA and while this site is also relatively distant, it is relevant for inclusion as it would affect an aspect of the WLA that is otherwise unaffected by wind energy development. These consented wind farms can be seen on Figure 5b. Braemore, 18 km away to the south-west of the WLA will have considerably less influence on the WLA due to limited, very intermittent visibility and distance.

It is relevant to note that Gordonbush, Kilbraur and Lairg Estate wind farms were operational at the time of the SNH site assessment of this WLA, which was carried out September 2013.

Cumulative effects are below.

Methodology for Assessing Effects on Wild Land Areas

Introduction

As noted in NatureScot guidance, the wild land assessment methodology broadly follows that of GLVIA3, and is based around the five stages described in Table 1 of the guidance.

Steps 1 and 2 do not require detailed explanation of methodology, and are carried out subsequently in this Appendix. The methodology for Steps 3, 4 and 5 is described below. These steps are assessed in accordance with GLVIA3 and largely follow OPEN’s methodology, which is described in full in Appendix 6.1.

In this methodology, WLAs are considered as landscape character receptors rather than visual receptors. This is because the landscape of the WLA is a resource in itself and effects are assessed in terms of the effects on the WLQs of the WLA, as per NatureScot guidance, and not in terms of the effects on views gained by people who may be within the WLA.

Step 3: Assess the Sensitivity of WLA Qualities

NatureScot guidance summarises this step as follows:

“Through detailed field assessment within the study area, assess the sensitivity of the wild land qualities scoped in (including their physical attributes and perceptual responses), to the type and scale of change proposed”.

Value of Wild Land Areas

In applying GLVIA3 to the assessment, and as noted by NatureScot, it is necessary to attribute a value to the receptor (classified as high, medium or low, or interim levels, as described in Appendix 6.1). The value attributed

to nationally important designations, including National Parks (NP) and National Scenic Areas (NSA) is normally found to be at the upper end of the scale, or high.

Wild land is not an environmental designation and is not statutorily protected in the way that NPs and NSAs are for their scenic qualities. It is, however, recognised in SPP and planning policy as a nationally important mapped resource, which should be afforded protection for its wildness qualities.

In order to apply objectivity to the attribution of value in wild land areas, it is helpful to have regard to the weighting that SPP gives to it. Whereas in SPP Table 1: Spatial Frameworks Scottish Ministers place NSAs and NPs in the Group 1 category, Wild Land Areas are identified as a Group 2 consideration, recognising the difference in their respective values. As a matter of national policy Wild Land is therefore less highly valued than NSAs and NPs.

SNH also helpfully provides some further guidance on this in its publication Spatial Planning for Onshore Wind Turbines – Natural Heritage Considerations, Guidance (June 2015). Annex 1 to this document provides advice on the potential landscape objectives that may be applicable in different landscapes within Scotland in terms of their ability to accommodate wind farms, suggesting that some landscapes should be subject to a higher level of protection than others.

Annex 1 places WLAs in the middle category, where some landscape ‘accommodation’ of windfarms may be considered appropriate, noting that:

“Within local landscape designations and Wild land Areas, the degree of landscape protection will be less than for National Scenic Areas. In these areas, an appropriate objective may be to accommodate windfarms, rather than seek landscape protection.”

WLAs are therefore considered to have a lower inherent baseline value, in landscape terms, than nationally designated landscapes. In the terms of GLVIA3 and OPEN’s methodology, it is reasonable to attribute a theoretical medium-high value to WLA 35 (Ben Klibreck-Armine Forest). The north-western part of the WLA falls within the Ben Klibreck-Loch Choire SLA, which itself is accorded a medium-high sensitivity in the LVIA.

These levels of value are combined with individual assessments of susceptibility (described below) to inform the overall assessment of sensitivity within the WLA.

Susceptibility within Wild Land Areas

Susceptibility relates to the nature of the landscape receptor and how susceptible it is to the potential effects of the Proposed Development, as described in GLVIA3. Susceptibility varies across the WLA depending on the nature and strength of the WLQs, the particular perceptions that are experienced in different areas, and in the context of different external and internal influences.

OPEN’s methodology assesses the susceptibility of landscape character receptors through a series of three criteria, as set out in Appendix 6.1. Two of these are relevant to the assessment of susceptibility of WLQs:

- The specific nature of the Proposed Development: the susceptibility of landscape receptors is specific to the change arising from the particular development that is proposed, including its individual components and features, and its size, scale, location, context and characteristics.
- Landscape character: the key characteristics of the existing landscape character of the receptor are considered in the evaluation of susceptibility as they determine the degree to which the receptor may accommodate the influence of the Proposed Development (in the wild land assessment this criterion relates to the documented WLQs, physical attributes and perceptual responses of the WLA).

The third criterion, 'landscape association', is not identified as a separate factor in the judgement of susceptibility within WLAs; this is because the WLQs anyway make specific mention of landscape association where it is a relevant factor, and it is therefore not necessary to include it again when considering susceptibility.

A useful tool in the assessment of the levels of susceptibility across the WLA is SNH's 2014 analysis of the data that was gathered in order to inform the identification of WLAs. SNH gathered data for each of the 'physical attributes' of wild land and used these to create a 'relative wildness map'. The 'Jenks Natural Breaks Optimisation method' was then used to identify the natural breaks in the distribution of the relative wildness data in order that levels of wildness could be identified and mapped. As a result, eight classes of wildness were identified, with 8 being the highest and 1 being the lowest.

Step 4: Assess the Effects

NatureScot guidance notes this step as follows in Table 1:

"Assess the effects on individual and / or combinations of qualities, drawing out which physical attributes and perceptual responses will be affected, how and to what degree. This should reflect the size or scale of change, its extent and duration."

OPEN's methodology for assessing magnitude of change on landscape character receptors is carried out through the application of a set of criteria as set out in Appendix 6.1.

Broadly, the magnitude of change that the Proposed Development will have on landscape receptors is assessed in terms of the size or scale of the change, the geographical extent of the area influenced and its duration and reversibility. The key elements of the Proposed Development that will influence the level of change on landscape character are the movement, form, material, colour and scale of the turbines, although infrastructure is also considered.

Step 5: Judgement of the Significance of Effects

NatureScot guidance summaries this step as follows in Table 1:

"Conclude on the overall significance (taking into account any mitigation), in terms of the study area and where relevant the wider WLA."

On the basis that the NatureScot guidance is based on the principles of GLVIA3, OPEN's methodology for the assessment of the significance of effects (as described in Appendix 6.1) has also been used for the assessment of the significance of effects on wild land. OPEN's methodology describes the significance of effects as quoted below.

"A significant effect will occur where the combination of the variables results in the Proposed Development having a defining effect on the view or receptor. A not significant effect will occur where the effect of the Proposed Development is not definitive, and the view or receptor continues to be characterised principally by its baseline characteristics. In this instance, a not significant effect would indicate that the Proposed Development may have an influence, but this influence will not be a defining one."

The following sections of this report assess the effects of the Proposed Development on WLA 35 (Ben Klibreck-Armine Forest) following the five steps as described by SNH.

Step 1: Define the Study Area and Scope of the Assessment

NatureScot guidance summarises this step as follows:

"Identify a study area appropriate to the scale of the proposal and extent of likely significant effects on the WLA."

Paragraph 16 of the guidance notes that:

“The rationale for the selection of the study area and scope of the assessment should be clearly stated and consider the following.

- *The extent of visibility and recognised routes / movement through the WLA. The scale of the proposal may not equate to the extent of effects (for example, a large proposal where visibility is limited to part of the WLA, a more focused study area may be appropriate).*
- *The wild land qualities likely to be significantly affected. The focus of the assessment should be on the qualities likely to be affected rather than where the proposal is located.*
- *The potential for cumulative effects.”*

The study area for the wild land assessment is discussed below in relation to these three considerations.

The ZTVs (Figures 1 and 2) show localised and intermittent theoretical visibility (partly blade only) from the WLA, gained almost completely from the western periphery of the WLA with just a few high points and elevated west-facing slopes in the internal WLA gaining theoretical visibility. The eastern half of the WLA, east of Creag Mhor, gains no theoretical visibility at all of the Proposed Development.

LVIA Viewpoints 14 and 15 are located at two of these high points – Creag Mhor and Ben Klibreck – in the central and north-western parts of the WLA respectively.

Theoretical visibility is gained from a minimum of 5.2 km (from the western edge of the WLA, several kilometres east of Dalnessie Estate lodge.) up to a maximum of around 17 km away, at the high point of Creag na h-lolaire (which lies between Ben Klibreck and Creag Mhor).

In relation to the first NatureScot consideration, the WLA description for WLA 35 mentions several *“recognised routes/movement through the WLA”*. These are listed below along with a description of the theoretical visibility that may be gained from them:

- **Ben Klibreck:** distant (over 15 km away) visibility from the summit of Ben Klibreck, as seen in Viewpoint 15; one stretch of theoretical visibility, partly blade only, from the principal routes to the summit (which come in from the west, around Strath Vagastie/ Crask Inn) around Cnoc Sgriodain;
- **Loch Choire:** no visibility;
- **Ben Armine:** theoretical visibility of blades only from the summit around 17 km away, no visibility from main routes from north and south (unless Creag Mhor is incorporated in the route) until the higher ground around the summit is reached;
- **Creag Mhor:** distant (around 15 km away) visibility from the summit of Creag Mhor, as seen in Viewpoint 14; no visibility from main routes from north and south until the higher ground around Creag Mhor is reached;
- the **interior** (*“visited by those partaking in deer stalking and fishing”*): no visibility from the interior other than several high points such as the mountains described above;
- the route over the **Bealach Easach and along Loch a’ Bhealaich and Loch Choire:** no visibility;
- the route between **Badanloch and Loch Choire House:** no visibility; and
- the route between **Sciberscross and Ben Armine Lodge:** no visibility.

This indicates that of the notable routes and locations that people may visit within the WLA, the great majority will gain no visibility of the Proposed Development, as shown on the ZTVs. Where there is visibility, this is gained

from a minimum of around 13 km on the route to Ben Klibreck, and 15 km away, at Creag Mhor, where the Proposed Development is assessed to have a not significant effect on the view. It can therefore be concluded that the Proposed Development will not have a significant effect on views from any of the listed “*recognised routes/movement through the WLA*”.

The second point noted in NatureScot guidance as being relevant in the “*rationale for the selection of the study area and scope of the assessment*” is consideration of the “*wild land qualities likely to be significantly affected*”.

This WLA has five WLQs. These are described below along with a judgement as to whether or not they may be significantly affected.

1. “*An awe-inspiring simplicity of landform and landcover and a perception of ‘emptiness’, so that the extent of the peatland often seems greater than it is.*”

The title and description of this WLQ indicate that it applies to the landform and landcover *within* the WLA. As the Proposed Development lies outwith the WLA, it will not affect the attributes/responses that comprise this WLQ.

2. “*Arresting, isolated mountains rise up in stark contrast to surrounding peatland and glens, amplifying the awe-inspiring qualities of each.*”

The Proposed Development will have no effect on the majority of the attributes/responses that comprise this WLQ as they relate largely to landform and peatlands within the WLA.

There is, however, reference to the views of surrounding areas that can be gained from the mountains within the WLA.

“The high elevation and openness of the hills means that their peaks are extremely exposed, as well as these offering panoramic views of the surrounding landscape. This exposure increases the sense of risk upon the hill tops.

Elevated views from the tops reveal human artefacts and contemporary land use within surrounding glens and around the edge of the WLA. These are particularly prominent where these contrast in colour, form or line to the peatland or hill backcloth.”

The Proposed Development may affect these attributes/responses of the WLQ as it is visible in views from several of the peaks within the WLA.

Reference is also made to views of mountains that lie in other WLAs, and the importance of these views to the “*arresting wild land qualities of the area*”. The Proposed Development will not affect views from within the WLA towards any of the mountains that are mentioned, and will therefore not affect this aspect of the WLQ.

3. “*A remote interior where access involves long distances and lengthy time via penetrating glens or crossing over and around rugged landforms and waterbodies.*”

The title and description of this WLQ indicate that it applies to routes, access and the interior *within* the WLA. As the Proposed Development lies outwith the WLA, it will not affect the attributes/responses that comprise this WLQ.

4. “*An extensive area of peatland with a prevailing strong sense of naturalness.*”

The description of this WLQ indicates that it applies to artefacts and landcover *within* the WLA. As the Proposed Development lies outwith the WLA, it will not affect the attributes/responses that comprise this WLQ.

5. “*A secluded, elevated and remote interior plateau shielded by an outer rim of hills, in which there is a strong sense of solitude, sanctuary and risk.*”

The Proposed Development will have no effect on the majority of the attributes/responses that comprise this WLQ as they relate to the “*secluded, elevated and remote interior plateau*”, from where there is no visibility of the Proposed Development.

There is, however, reference to the views of surrounding areas that can be gained from the hills that surround and enclose the interior plateau.

“In contrast, from the tops of the hills and ridges that make up the outer lip of the plateau, outward views include numerous human artefacts and evidence of contemporary land use extending across the lower-lying ground outside the WLA; for example, forest plantations, wind farms, tracks, roads and houses.

Whilst these elements can be clearly seen from the margins of the WLA, they do not greatly impose upon the wild land qualities if sufficiently distant, low-lying and discrete in siting and character. Conversely, human elements appear more encroaching upon the WLA where they are close, large in size or extent, are located upon elevated ground, or where there are cumulative effects; whilst their prominence is also increased where they contrast in colour, line or form to the backdrop..”

The Proposed Development may affect these attributes/responses of the WLQ as it is visible in views from several of the “*hills and ridges that make up the outer lip of the plateau within the WLA*”.

The third point noted in NatureScot guidance as being relevant in the “*rationale for the selection of the study area and scope of the assessment*” is consideration of the “*The potential for cumulative effects*”. The operational, under-construction and consented cumulative wind farm development that is most relevant is found around the WLA; Strathy South to the north; Creag Riabhach to the west; Kilbraur, Gordonbush, and their Extensions to the south-east; and Lairg Estate and Lairg II to the south-west.

Identification of the Study Area

The considerations described above indicate that the study area for the assessment of effects on this WLA should cover the full extent of the WLA. The two WLQs that have potential to be affected by the Proposed Development (WLQs 2 and 5) relate to views gained from hilltops, which are found widely within the WLA and are not restricted to any specific geographical area that could form the basis of a study area. Moreover, views of the surroundings of the full WLA are relevant to both of these WLQs, and the nature of WLQs is such that the addition of the Proposed Development could affect them.

The nature of potential cumulative effects also indicates the suitability of using the full WLA as a study area, as cumulative operational, under-construction and consented wind energy development is distributed around the WLA.

The first NatureScot consideration - “*recognised routes/movement through the WLA*” – is not a notable consideration in the identification of the study area due to the very limited number of the locations that gain visibility of the Proposed Development. However, those that do gain theoretical visibility – Ben Klibreck (and a small part of its access route), Creag Mhor, and Ben Armine- are in the north-western and central parts of the WLA rather than in one discrete geographical area, and the use of the whole WLA as a study area is therefore also appropriate to this criterion.

Step 2: Establish the Baseline

NatureScot guidance summarises this step as follows in Table 1:

“Confirm the wild land qualities (set out in the WLA description) relevant to the study area, describing any major changes that have occurred since the description was prepared and the nature of their contribution to the WLA.”

The baseline study is informed by SNH's description of the WLA, the mapping of the eight classes of wildness (SNH, 2014), OPEN's site visits, and LVIA Viewpoints 14 and 15, which illustrate the outlook across the WLA from the north-western and central parts of the study area.

It is important to note that while LVIA Viewpoints 14 and 15 provide a useful illustration of the views that can be gained from within the study area, the assessment of effects on viewpoints and on wild land areas is carried out separately and according to specific methodologies that vary in some respects. The assessment of effects at Viewpoints 14 and 15 should therefore not be considered in relation to the assessment of effects on wild land, and the viewpoints have been referenced simply to provide an illustration of views within the study area.

This step involves a review of the strength of attributes and responses and their contribution to the identified WLQS of the study area. These are verified against the WLA description, noting that the strength to which the WLQS are expressed will vary in different parts of the WLA. In this case, it has been ascertained in Step 1 that the Proposed Development has potential to significantly affect two of the WLQS (WLQs 2 and 5). This baseline section therefore focusses on the WLQs 2 and 5 of WLA 35 (Ben Klibreck-Armine Forest). These are "**Arresting, isolated mountains rise up in stark contrast to surrounding peatland and glens, amplifying the awe-inspiring qualities of each**" and "**A secluded, elevated and remote interior plateau shielded by an outer rim of hills, in which there is a strong sense of solitude, sanctuary and risk**".

The physical attributes of WLQs 2 and 5 are generally present to a notable degree in the study area. The two attributes - "*a high degree of perceived naturalness*" and "*landform which is rugged, or otherwise physically challenging*" – are both apparent to a high degree. These attributes are not specifically mentioned in the WLA description of these two WLQs, but OPEN's site visits have ascertained that although coniferous plantations within the interior glens (e.g. at Loch Choire and Ben Armine Lodges) do detract locally, the overall strength is high.

The two attributes "*the lack of modern human artefacts or structures*" and "*little evidence of contemporary land uses*" are apparent to varying degrees in relation to both WLQ 2 and 5, ranging from high to low. These attributes are referred to as follows in the WLA description for the WLQs.

- WLQ 2: "*Elevated views from the tops reveal human artefacts and contemporary land use within surrounding glens and around the edge of the WLA. These are particularly prominent where these contrast in colour, form or line to the peatland or hill backcloth.*"
- WLQ 5: "*There are few human artefacts and little evidence of contemporary land use within the interior plateau, contributing to its sense of remoteness and sanctuary. Furthermore, because of the screening effect of the outer lip of the plateau, views of distant human elements are limited.*"

In contrast, from the tops of the hills and ridges that make up the outer lip of the plateau, outward views include numerous human artefacts and evidence of contemporary land use extending across the lower-lying ground outside the WLA; for example, forest plantations, wind farms, tracks, roads and houses.

Whilst these elements can be clearly seen from the margins of the WLA, they do not greatly impose upon the wild land qualities if sufficiently distant, low-lying and discrete in siting and character. Conversely, human elements appear more encroaching upon the WLA where they are close, large in size or extent, are located upon elevated ground, or where there are cumulative effects; whilst their prominence is also increased where they contrast in colour, line or form to the backdrop."

These attributes vary widely across the study area, as in some parts (e.g. parts of the enclosed interior) there are very few modern human artefacts or structures and very little evidence of contemporary land uses whereas

elsewhere in the interior glens there are notable features, particularly deer fences, access tracks and buildings at Loch Choire and Ben Armine Lodges and in Strath Skinsdale. As noted in the description, external human influences, including wind farms, are also apparent in views from the mountains (and in some cases, from lower glens).

It is relevant that subsequent to the production of the WLA description, consent has been granted for wind farms at Gordonbush Extension, Creag Riabhach, Strathy South and Lairg II, all of which are likely to have some external influence on WLQ 2.

The final physical attribute – *“remoteness and/or inaccessibility”* – is apparent to a moderate/high degree in both WLQ 2 and 5. This is not specifically mentioned in relation to WLQ 2 in the WLA description, while the description for WLQ 5 notes that *“there are few human artefacts and little evidence of contemporary land use within the interior plateau, contributing to its sense of remoteness and sanctuary”*.

OPEN’s site visits indicate that the high-grade access tracks into the glens at Loch Choire, Ben Armine Lodge and Strath Skinsdale increase accessibility and reduce remoteness, as does the Right of Way/ Heritage Path/Scottish Hill Track that runs north from Dalnессie. The track into the peatlands at Strath Skinsdale provides increases accessibility into this area, although the majority of the interior is remote and relatively inaccessible, as are the mountains.

The four perceptual responses of WLQ 2 and 5 are also generally expressed to a notable degree in the study area. One of the responses – *“perceptions that the landscape has arresting or inspiring qualities”* is expressed to a high degree in relation to both of the WLQs. The WLA description does not specifically mention this in relation to WLQ 5, but for WLQ 2 it notes *“while these hills seem fairly regular in shape at a broad scale, some have steep crags on one side that are arresting and create ‘hidden’ edges and glens that harbour a strong sense of sanctuary”*.

The other three perceptual responses of WLQ 2 and 5 are apparent to a moderate/high degree in the study area.

In relation to a *“sense of sanctuary or solitude”* in WLQ 2, the WLA description notes that *“while these hills seem fairly regular in shape at a broad scale, some have steep crags on one side that are arresting and create ‘hidden’ edges and glens that harbour a strong sense of sanctuary”*. OPEN’s site visits indicate that this response is apparent in some parts of the study area, but elsewhere the views of external influences that are gained from some upper hill slopes reduce the *“sense of sanctuary or solitude”*. This leads to moderate/high expression of this response in WLQ 2.

In relation to this response in WLQ 5, the WLA description notes that:

“...The plateau is simple at a broad level with few landmarks, whilst it includes undulations at a local level whose screening and lack of regular pattern means you can ‘lose yourself’ within the area. This results in a strong perception of solitude, sanctuary and risk...There are few human artefacts and little evidence of contemporary land use within the interior plateau, contributing to its sense of remoteness and sanctuary”.

OPEN’s site visits indicate that while there is a strong sense of *“solitude, sanctuary and risk”* in the interior plateau, this diminishes in the surrounding mountains where more developed elements and influences are apparent, thus reducing isolation and the perception of hazard at these tops. The consented wind farms at Gordonbush Extension, Creag Riabhach, Strathy South and Lairg II will have some further external influence on this response of WLQ 5. This leads to moderate/high expression of this response in WLQ 5.

WLQs 2 and 5 also display the response *“risk or, for some visitors, a sense of awe or anxiety”* to a moderate/ high degree. The WLA description for WLQ 2 notes that:

“The steepness, elevation and prominence of these hills appears amplified in contrast to the lower-lying and horizontal reference provided by surrounding peatland, lochs and the glen of Loch Choire, resulting in a strong sense of awe.

The high elevation and openness of the hills means that their peaks are extremely exposed, as well as these offering panoramic views of the surrounding landscape. This exposure increases the sense of risk upon the hill tops...Elevated views from the tops reveal human artefacts and contemporary land use within surrounding glens and around the edge of the WLA. These are particularly prominent where these contrast in colour, form or line to the peatland or hill backcloth.”

This response is apparent in some parts of the study area, but elsewhere the views of external influences that are gained from the tops, as noted in the description, can reduce isolation and the perception of hazard at these tops. The presence of tracks, buildings, fences and forestry can also reduce this response within the glens, including that of Loch Choire.

The final response – *“fulfilment from the physical challenge required to penetrate into these places”* – is not specifically referred to in the WLA description for either WLQ 2 or 5. OPEN’s site visits indicate that this is expressed to a moderate/high degree in relation to both WLQ 2 and 5. In relation to WLQ 2, the high-grade access tracks at Loch Choire, Ben Armine Lodge and Strath Skinsdale as well as other tracks such as that at Dalnessie provide easy access into the glens, thus reducing the satisfaction and sense of accomplishment that arises from the physical effort required to traverse these settings. In relation to WLQ 5, the tracks that access the glens do assist in penetrating the interior, but a sense of achievement in arrival is still experienced. There is, however, *“a high degree of fulfilment from the physical challenge”* involved in accessing the mountains that are relevant to both WLQ 2 and 5.

In relation to the baseline strength of attributes and responses within the study area, it is relevant to note the Jenks classification of wild land within the study area, as shown on Figure 3. As the study area for this assessment extends across the full WLA, a full range of classes is apparent within the study area. It is, however, useful to note the distribution of these classes across the WLA, with the highest levels of wildness generally found in the central and north-western areas while the routes of the tracks to Loch Choire and Ben Armine Lodges and in Strath Skinsdale are notably lower in classification.

It is interesting to note that the part of the WLA that lies adjacent to Gordonbush wind farm (which became operational in 2012, prior to the SNH site visits and production of the WLA description) is largely classes 5 and 6, which is above average wildness. Notwithstanding this, the construction of the consented wind farms at Creag Riabhach and Strathy South is likely to lead to some reduction in the wildness classes found in the north and west of the WLA.

Step 3 – Assess the Sensitivity of the WLA Qualities

Sensitivity is assessed by combining the value of the WLA and its susceptibility to the Proposed Development. NatureScot guidance summarises this step as follows in Table 1:

“Through detailed field assessment within the study area, assess the sensitivity of the wild land qualities scoped in (including their physical attributes and perceptual responses), to the type and scale of change proposed”.

The value of the WLA has been established previously as medium-high. The study area also has a medium-high value as it fully covers the WLA.

It has been ascertained in Step 1 that the Proposed Development has potential to significantly affect two of the qualities of the WLA (WLQs 2 and 5) and the assessment of the susceptibility and sensitivity therefore focusses on WLQs 2 and 5.

OPEN’s methodology for assessing susceptibility is described previously in the Appendix.

The susceptibility of WLQS is specific to the change arising from the particular development that is proposed, including its individual components and features, and its size, scale, location, context and characteristics, as described in OPEN’s methodology. In the case of the Proposed Development, three of the physical attributes of the WLA have no susceptibility as they cannot be affected by the Proposed Development due to its location outwith the WLA. These attributes are “*high degree of perceived naturalness*”, “*landform which is rugged, or otherwise physically challenging*” and “*remoteness and / or inaccessibility*”. The remaining two physical attributes - “*the lack of modern human artefacts or structures*” and “*little evidence of contemporary land uses*” – can be affected by development within or outwith the WLA and therefore have a heightened susceptibility to the Proposed Development.

The baseline presence and strength of the physical attributes and perceptual responses that contribute to WLQs 2 and 5 are of relevance to susceptibility, and are discussed in Step 2, above. This concluded the following:

Table 1 – Strength of Physical Attributes and Perceptual Responses (WLQs 2 and 5)

| Physical Attribute/ Perceptual Response | Strength of Physical Attribute/Perceptual Response WLQ 2 | Strength of Physical Attribute/Perceptual Response WLQ 5 |
|--|--|--|
| Physical Attribute | | |
| A high degree of perceived naturalness | High | High |
| A lack of modern human artefacts or structures | Low-high | Low-high |
| Little evidence of contemporary land uses | Low-high | Low-high |
| Landform which is rugged, or otherwise physically challenging | High | High |
| Remoteness and/or inaccessibility | Moderate/high | Moderate/high |
| Perceptual Responses | | |
| A sense of sanctuary or solitude | Moderate/high | Moderate/high |
| Risk or, for some visitors, a sense of awe or anxiety | Moderate/high | Moderate/high |
| Perceptions that the landscape has arresting or inspiring qualities | High | High |
| Fulfilment from the physical challenge required to penetrate into these places | Moderate/high | Moderate/high |

In many cases, the lower strength of attributes/responses is due to the influences of human artefacts within and outwith the study area, including the elements that are mentioned in the WLA description as well as other elements described in Step 2 above, and more recently consented wind farms.

There is one notable aspect of WLQ 2 that will heighten its susceptibility to the Proposed Development - the “*elevated views from the tops [that] reveal human artefacts and contemporary land use within surrounding glens*”

and around the edge of the WLA. These are particularly prominent where these contrast in colour, form or line to the peatland or hill backcloth.”

It is likely that when it is visible, the Proposed Development will contrast *“in colour, form or line to the peatland or hill backcloth”* to some degree, and this increases the susceptibility of WLQ 2 to the Proposed Development.

A similar comment is made in the WLA description for WLQ 5.

“...from the tops of the hills and ridges that make up the outer lip of the plateau, outward views include numerous human artefacts and evidence of contemporary land use extending across the lower-lying ground outside the WLA; for example, forest plantations, wind farms, tracks, roads and houses.

Whilst these elements can be clearly seen from the margins of the WLA, they do not greatly impose upon the wild land qualities if sufficiently distant, low-lying and discrete in siting and character. Conversely, human elements appear more encroaching upon the WLA where they are close, large in size or extent, are located upon elevated ground, or where there are cumulative effects; whilst their prominence is also increased where they contrast in colour, line or form to the backdrop.”

Where it is visible *“from the margins of the WLA”*, the Proposed Development could either *“not greatly impose upon the wild land qualities”* or *“appear more encroaching upon the WLA”*, dependent on its proximity, elevation, apparent scale, contrast with the backdrop, and potential to add to cumulative effects. This is a matter for the assessment of the magnitude of change, as carried out in Step 4, but is noted here as this specific reference does increase the susceptibility of WLQ 5 to the Proposed Development.

The combination of factors that apply to both WLQ 2 and 5 – the location of the Proposed Development outwith the WLA; the strength of the attributes/responses, including some high but also some that range to a low level; the lack of susceptibility of three of the physical attributes to the Proposed Development; the potential for the Proposed Development to add to the external human influences that are already found around the WLA; and the potential for cumulative effects - results in both WLQs 2 and 5 having a medium-high susceptibility to the Proposed Development. When combined with the medium-high value of the study area, this leads to a **medium-high** sensitivity for WLQs 2 and 5, and the study area.

Assess the Magnitude of the Effects

NatureScot guidance summarises this step as follows in Table 1:

“Assess the effects on individual and / or combinations of qualities, drawing out which physical attributes and perceptual responses will be affected, how and to what degree. This should reflect the size or scale of change, its extent and duration.”

It has been ascertained in previous steps that the Proposed Development has potential to significantly affect two of the four WLQS of this WLA – WLQ 2 ***“Arresting, isolated mountains rise up in stark contrast to surrounding peatland and glens, amplifying the awe-inspiring qualities of each”*** and WLQ 5 ***“A secluded, elevated and remote interior plateau shielded by an outer rim of hills, in which there is a strong sense of solitude, sanctuary and risk.***

The previous steps of this Appendix have reviewed the baseline situation of physical attributes/ perceptual responses for both of the WLQs and assessed their sensitivity to the Proposed Development. This process has indicated that in there is one key respect in which they may both be affected by the Proposed Development; the views, and therefore influence, that may be gained of the Proposed Development from the elevated mountains that are a characteristic of both of these WLQs. This can affect the same physical attribute of the WLQs – *“a lack of modern human artefacts or structures”* – and, in turn, this can lead to an effect on three of the perceptual

responses of the WLQs: *“a sense of sanctuary or solitude”, “risk or, for some visitors, a sense of awe or anxiety”, and “perceptions that the landscape has arresting or inspiring qualities”.*

The remaining four physical attributes of WLQs 2 and 5 will not be affected by the Proposed Development. In the case of *“high degree of perceived naturalness”, “landform which is rugged, or otherwise physically challenging” and “remoteness and/or inaccessibility”* this is because these relate to physical conditions within the WLA, and they cannot be affected by the Proposed Development as it lies outwith the WLA. In the case of the fourth attribute – *“little evidence of contemporary land uses”* – the Proposed Development will not have any effect because it will neither affect land use within the WLA, nor affect the external influence of *“more intensive land use...extensive grazing and management for field sports...(for example, muirburn, grazing pressure and use of ATVs)”*, as noted in NatureScot guidance (2020).

The fourth perceptual response – *“fulfilment from the physical challenge required to penetrate into these places”* – will not be affected as the Proposed Development cannot affect the *“satisfaction and sense of accomplishment that arises from the physical effort required to traverse these settings, tackling their scale, topography, ground and weather conditions”* due to its location outwith the WLA.

The assessment of magnitude of change on WLQs 2 and 5 will therefore be very similar, as it is the same aspects of both WLQs that have potential to be affected by the Proposed Development. For this reason, the effects on the two WLQs have been assessed together.

LVIA Viewpoints 14 and 15 provide a useful illustration of the views that can be gained from within the study area. However the assessment of effects on viewpoints and on wild land areas is carried out separately and the assessment of effects at Viewpoints 14 and 15 should therefore not be considered in relation to the assessment of effects on wild land, and the viewpoints have been referenced simply to provide an illustration of views within the study area.

The magnitude of change on WLQs 2 and 5 will vary across the study area due to the extensive nature of the LCT and the resultant variable influence of the Proposed Development.

The maximum magnitude of change on WLQs 2 and 5 will be **medium-low**. This arises from the following considerations.

- There will be no *direct* physical effects on the WLQs, and effects are perceived only.
- It is of fundamental importance that due to lack of visibility, the Proposed Development will not have any effect on the physical attributes and perceptual responses of the *“secluded, elevated and remote interior plateau”* that forms the key element of WLQ 5. The *“strong perception of solitude, sanctuary and risk”* and *“sense of remoteness and sanctuary”* found in this interior will therefore remain unaffected.
- It is also important that the Proposed Development will not affect the relationship between the mountains and the peatland and glens that form the key elements of WLQ 2 due to its location to the south-west of the WLA, where it will not appear in views between these two elements. This ensures that it will not affect the *“sense of awe”* that arises from the contrast between the *“steepness, elevation and prominence of these hills”* and the *“lower-lying and horizontal reference provided by surrounding peatland, lochs and the glen of Loch Choire”*.
- The Proposed Development will affect one of the five physical attributes of the WLQs - *“the lack of modern human artefacts or structures”* as it will add to the wind farm and other development influence that is already noted in the WLQs, further diminishing the attribute of *“a lack of modern human artefacts or structures”*, which is apparent to a varying (low to high) degree in the baseline situation.

- In relation to this attribute of the WLQs, the Proposed Development will introduce theoretical external influence of wind energy development to an aspect of the setting to the WLA (the west) that is not affected by large-scale baseline development. It will, however, be seen in an aspect of the setting to the WLA that is already notably affected by external human influence (the A836, forestry, houses, energy infrastructure).
- There is one notable aspect of WLQ 2 that will heighten its susceptibility to the Proposed Development: the *“elevated views from the tops [that] reveal human artefacts and contemporary land use within surrounding glens and around the edge of the WLA. These are particularly prominent where these contrast in colour, form or line to the peatland or hill backcloth.”*
- It is likely that when it is visible, the Proposed Development will contrast *“in colour, form or line to the peatland or hill backcloth”* to some degree, and this increases the susceptibility of WLQ 2 to the Proposed Development.
- In relation to human artefacts, the WLA description for WLQ 5 notes that *“Whilst these elements [numerous human artefacts and evidence of contemporary land use extending across the lower-lying ground outside the WLA; for example, forest plantations, wind farms, tracks, roads and houses] can be clearly seen from the margins of the WLA, they do not greatly impose upon the wild land qualities if sufficiently distant, low-lying and discrete in siting and character. Conversely, human elements appear more encroaching upon the WLA where they are close, large in size or extent, are located upon elevated ground, or where there are cumulative effects; whilst their prominence is also increased where they contrast in colour, line or form to the backdrop.”*
- The Proposed Development has a varied relationship to the criteria listed in this description: it is relatively distant from the WLA and is notably low-lying in its siting (as seen in Viewpoints 14 and 15). and character. It is, however, of innately large scale and will add to the cumulative wind farm scenario, particularly when consented wind farms are considered in addition to operational wind farms. It may also *“contrast in colour, line or form to the backdrop”*, dependent on light conditions.
- The Proposed Development may therefore appear to encroach upon some parts of the WLA, but will *“not greatly impose upon the wild land qualities”* due to its low elevation, distance, the very small part of the setting to the WLA that it will affect, and its location in an area that is already affected by human influences.
- It is also notable that the Proposed Development will not notably introduce theoretical external influence of wind energy development to parts of the study area that are not affected by baseline wind energy development. Figure 5a shows the combined baseline ZTVs of operational wind farms, and this shows that theoretically the Proposed Development will almost always be seen from parts of the WLA that already gain visibility of operational wind farms.
- When consented wind farms are also taken into consideration, the theoretical influence of the Proposed Development on otherwise unaffected parts of the study area will decrease slightly due to the additional influence of other wind farms (see Figure 5b).
- The Proposed Development will have no effect on the remaining four physical attributes of WLQs 2 and 5, including the two that are expressed to a high level in the study area (*“high degree of perceived naturalness”* and *“landform which is rugged, or otherwise physically challenging”*).

- The limited effect of the Proposed Development on the physical attributes of WLQs 2 and 5 ensure that in turn it will also have a limited effect on the perceptual responses of these WLQs, such as *“the sense of risk upon the hill tops”* (which is expressed to a moderate/high degree in the study area).
- Views towards other hills outwith this WLA but within other WLAs, as mentioned in WLQ 2, will also not be affected as the Proposed Development will not be seen in the line of view towards these hills from the WLA. The only potential exception to this is from the very southern extremity of visibility of the Proposed Development within the WLA, where it may be theoretically visible from over 11 km in very limited views towards Ben More Assynt. This aspect of *“the arresting wild land qualities of the area”* will therefore remain almost completely unaffected.
- The Proposed Development lies a minimum of around 5.2 km from the study area, ensuring that it will constitute a relatively minor feature in the setting to the WLA. It also has very intermittent theoretical visibility from the study area, parts of it blade only, as seen in the ZTVs on Figures 1 and 2.
- The parts of the study area that gain theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development are covered primarily by Jenks classes 5, 6 and 7 with negligible visibility from class 8 (see Figure 4). The higher levels of influence will arise on the peripheral parts of the WLA that have lower wildness classes, whereas influence on class 7 does not arise until several kilometres into the WLA.
- When the WLA is considered as a whole, the Proposed Development will affect a very limited part of it, and will have a minor effect on the parts of the WLA that have the higher Jenks classifications

This **medium-low** magnitude of change on WLQs 2 and 5 will diminish as distance from the Proposed Development increases, dropping to a **low** and then **negligible** level. This reduction in the level of change results from various factors including the reduction in the extent of the setting to the WLA that will be affected by the Proposed Development so that the turbines become a less notable external influence on the attributes of the WLA; the continued low elevation of the turbines, which ensures that they will not appear as prominent vertical features; and the increasing importance of the other WLQS, attributes and responses of the WLA as the Proposed Development decreases in influence.

Judge the Significance of the Effects

NatureScot guidance summarises this step as follows in Table 1:

“Conclude on the overall significance (taking into account any mitigation), in terms of the study area and where relevant the wider WLA.”

The significance of the effect is assessed through a combination of the sensitivity of the WLQs and the magnitude of change that will arise on these as a result of the Proposed Development, with reference also made to their physical attributes and perceptual responses.

The steps above indicate that the Proposed Development has potential to have a significant effect on two of the four WLQS of WLA 35 (Ben Klibreck-Armine Forest). These are WLQ 2 ***“Arresting, isolated mountains rise up in stark contrast to surrounding peatland and glens, amplifying the awe-inspiring qualities of each”*** and WLQ 5 ***“A secluded, elevated and remote interior plateau shielded by an outer rim of hills, in which there is a strong sense of solitude, sanctuary and risk.”***

Steps 3 and 4 have ascertained that WLQs 2 and 5 has a **medium-high** sensitivity and that a maximum **medium-low** magnitude of change will arise as a result of the Proposed Development.

A combination of the factors considered in the maximum medium-low magnitude of change and the medium-high sensitivity of WLQs 2 and 5 will lead to a **not significant** effect on WLQs 2 and 5. The effect on the study area and the wider WLA will also be **not significant**. These effects will be long-term and reversible.

In OPEN's methodology, a combination of a medium-low magnitude of change and a medium-high sensitivity can lead to an effect that is significant or not significant. In this case, the effect is judged to be not significant primarily because the Proposed Development has potential to significantly affect only two of the four WLQs of the WLA, and the effect on these two WLQs is very similar; that is, the increased visibility of human structures from the elevated mountains within the WLA. Other key aspects of the two WLQs – the peatland interior and glens - will not be affected by the Proposed Development. It is also important that the Proposed Development lies outwith the WLA and will therefore have no direct physical effects upon it.

Whilst removing all visibility from the WLA is not possible, the design of the Proposed Development ensures that it will have negligible influence on the physical attributes and perceptual responses of the part of the WLA where WLQs are best expressed (e.g. the extensive central areas of class 7 and 8 wildness). This has been achieved through the restriction on turbine height and the small horizontal field of view that is occupied by the Proposed Development. The relatively low elevation of the turbine bases is also important as it ensures that they do not appear prominent in the setting to the WLA. In almost all cases, the Proposed Development will only be seen from areas where the WLQs are not expressed to their optimum and where other external influences have resulted in a diminution of their strength.

Cumulative Effects on WLA 35 (Ben Klibreck-Armine Forest)

NatureScot guidance notes the following in relation to assessing cumulative effects on WLAs.

“The potential for cumulative effects. Other proposals (either of the same or different type) which are likely to contribute to significant cumulative effects should be identified in discussion with the decision maker. The principles within our guidance document Assessing the cumulative impact of onshore wind energy developments specific to onshore wind energy development can be applied to other development and should aid this assessment.” (paragraph 16)

OPEN's methodology for the assessment of cumulative effects on landscape character receptors and views is described in Appendix 6.1. This accords with guidance in 'Assessing the cumulative impact of onshore wind energy developments' (SNH, 2012).

The following operational and consented wind farms are relevant in the assessment of cumulative effects (shown on Figure 5a):

- the operational wind farms at Achany and Rosehall, a minimum of around 17.2 km to the south-west of the WLA;
- the operational/under construction wind farm at Gordonbush and Gordonbush Extension, adjacent to the eastern end of the WLA;
- the operational wind farm at Kilbraur and Extension, a minimum of around 5.5 km to the south-east of the WLA;
- the operational wind farm at Lairg Estate, a minimum of around 11.4 km to the south-west of the WLA;
- the consented wind farm site at Braemore, approximately 18 km to the south-west of the WLA;

- the consented wind farm site at Creag Riabhach, approximately 500 m to the west of the WLA;
- the consented wind farm site at Lairg II, 12 km away to the south-west; and
- the consented wind farm at Strathy South, 14 km to the north of the WLA.

The application stage wind farm at South Kilbraur, around 8 km to the south-east of the WLA has also been considered in the assessment, as has the Strathy South resubmission.

The cumulative assessment encompasses the whole of the WLA as this is the study area that is identified in Step 1 of this Appendix. One of the key reasons for the selection of the full WLA as the study area is the nature of the distribution of cumulative development around the WLA. It is also important that the full WLA is considered in the cumulative assessment as the two WLQs – WLQs 2 and 5 – that have potential to be affected by the Proposed Development – are primarily apparent in the central, western and north-western part of the WLA, and a focus on a smaller part of the WLA would thus not represent effects on these WLQs.

The cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development in any scenario will vary across the study area.

In relation to the WLA as a whole, and WLQs 2 and 5 as they are perceived throughout the WLA, the addition of the Proposed Development to operational wind farms will have a maximum **low/medium-low** cumulative magnitude of change. This arises because, as described in Step 4 above, the Proposed Development will add to the wind farm influence that is already noted in WLQs 2 and 5, affecting an aspect of the WLA – the south-west – that is otherwise unaffected by wind energy development within 10 km (although the more distant sites at Achany and Rosehall also lie to the south-west), in relation to the attribute of “*a lack of modern human artefacts or structures*”. It may also affect the sense of risk that is apparent at the mountain tops through the addition of further development.

The cumulative magnitude of change is restricted to a **low/medium-low** level by the location of the operational wind farms and the Proposed Development around the south, south-west and south-east of the WLA, so that the very extensive and often dramatically scenic views to the north, west, north-east and north-west remain unaffected by wind farm development. The Proposed Development will also be seen in the context of other human influences rather than other wildness areas, and its low-lying nature will avoid prominent influence on the setting. It is also relevant that the influence of the Proposed Development (and often the cumulative wind farms) on the WLA as a whole is limited, very intermittent and distant, thus restricting its contribution to the cumulative situation.

When consented wind farms are also considered, the level of change arising from the addition of the influence of the Proposed Development to the whole WLA and WLQs 2 and 5 will intermittently increase to a **medium-low** level. This increase is due to the distribution of these operational and consented sites around the WLA, so that the addition of the Proposed Development would lead to potential wind energy influence to the south-west of the WLA in addition to the north, south, west and south-east. However, as described for the operational scenario, the appearance of the Proposed Development in a part of the setting to the WLA that has other human influences, and its limited, very intermittent and low-lying influence ensures that the cumulative magnitude of change remains limited.

The cumulative magnitude of change arising from the addition of the Proposed Development to the WLA as a whole would increase slightly but remain **medium-low** when the application-stage sites at South Kilbraur and Strathy South are also considered. South Kilbraur wind farm has a close relationship with Kilbraur wind farm, while Strathy South is effectively the consented Strathy South but with increased turbine height (which will increase its own level of influence but will not affect a further aspect of the setting to the WLA). The addition of the Proposed Development to a scenario including either or both of these wind farms would not lead to a material increase in the cumulative magnitude of change.

The cumulative effect in the scenarios of operational, operational and consented and operational, consented and application-stage wind farms will be **not significant** due to a combination of the factors that lead to the medium-high sensitivity of WLQs 2 and 5 and the maximum low/medium-low (with operational wind farms) and medium-low (with operational and consented wind farms and operational, consented and application-stage wind farms) cumulative magnitude of change upon them.

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