

Chapter 2: Environmental Impact Assessment Process

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2 Environmental Impact Assessment Process

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a process that considers how a proposed development will change existing environmental conditions and what the consequences of such changes will be. It therefore informs both the project design and planning decision making processes.

2.1.2 This Chapter sets out the regulatory context for undertaking EIA and the assessment methodology applied in the evaluation of effects, approach to mitigation and assessment of significance. The Chapter also outlines the structure of the EIA Report.

2.2 Baseline

2.2.1 The EIA Report provides an assessment of the likely significant effects of the Proposed Development against the baseline information collected and presented as part of the 2016 ES. In agreement with statutory consultees (see Appendix 6.1: Pre Application Briefing Note, and Appendix 6.2: Minutes of Pre-Application Telecom Meeting), previous survey data collected for the 2016 ES remains valid, subject to updates where this was deemed necessary (e.g. updated otter survey).

2.2.2 In accordance with Regulation 18(4)(c) of the EIA Regulations, the EIA Report will aim to avoid duplication of assessment by taking into account the results identified in the 2016 ES.

2.3 EIA Regulations

2.3.1 This EIA Report is prepared in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017, hereinafter referred to as the 'EIA Regulations'.

2.3.2 This EIA Report contains the information specified in Schedule 4 of the EIA Regulations. The approach to the assessment has been informed by current best practice guidance, including the following:

- Scottish Government Good Practice Guidance¹;
- Scottish Government Planning Advice Note (PAN) 1/2013 (revision 1.0²); and
- Scottish Government Planning Circular 1/2017³.

2.3.3 An overview of the guidance and methodology adopted for each technical study is provided within the respective technical chapters of this EIA Report.

¹ Scottish Government Energy Consents and Deployment Unit (2013) Good Practice Guidance.

² Scottish Government (2013, revised 2017) Planning Advice Note 1/2013 (revision 1.0): Environmental Impact Assessment.

³ Scottish Government (2017) Planning Circular 1/2017: The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017.

2.4 Assessment of Likely Significant Environmental Effects

2.4.1 The approach to the assessment of environmental effects is detailed below.

Sensitivity/Importance of Receptors

2.4.2 The sensitivity of the baseline conditions was defined according to the relative importance of existing environmental features within or in the vicinity of the site, or by the sensitivity of receptors which would potentially be affected by the Proposed Development.

2.4.3 Criteria for the determination of sensitivity (e.g. high, medium, or low) or of importance (e.g. international, national, regional or authority area) were established based on prescribed guidance, legislation, statutory designation and/or professional judgement. The criteria for each environmental parameter are provided in the relevant chapter of the EIA Report.

Magnitude of Change

2.4.4 The magnitude of change to environmental baseline conditions was identified through detailed consideration of the Proposed Development, taking due cognisance of any legislative or policy standards or guidelines, and/or the following factors:

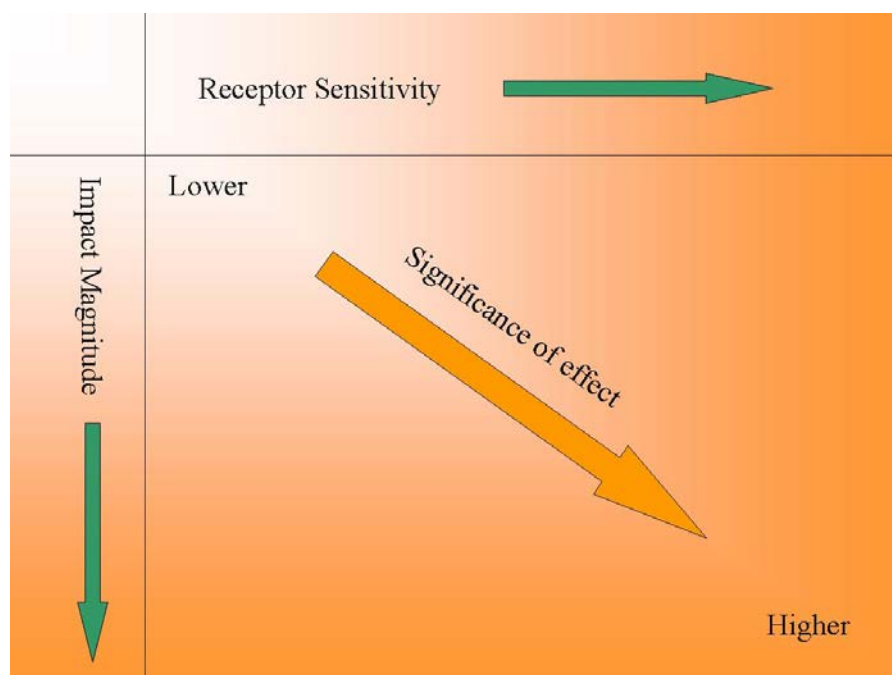
- the degree to which the environment is affected, e.g. whether the quality is enhanced or impaired;
- the scale or degree of change from the existing situation;
- whether the effect is temporary or permanent, indirect or direct, short term, medium term or long term;
- any in-combination effects; and
- potential cumulative effects.

2.4.5 In some cases the likelihood of effect occurrence may also be relevant, and where this is a determining feature of the assessment this is clearly stated.

Evaluation of Effects

2.4.6 The potential effects have been evaluated taking into account the sensitivity of the affected receptor and the magnitude of the impact. The principle is illustrated in Plate 2.1 and where practical this approach has been adapted for application to all environmental effects to provide a consistent approach to evaluation.

Plate 2.1: Relationship between receptor sensitivity, impact magnitude, and effect significance



2.4.7 Thus, it does not follow that all high magnitude impacts will cause, or that high sensitivity receptors will always be subject to, significant effects. The converse is also true.

Significance of Effects

2.4.8 In identifying the likely significant effects, an attempt is made to reduce the scope of the assessment process to the most important potential effects. There is no general definition of what constitutes significance. Any consideration of the significance of environmental effects must recognise that environmental assessment is inherently a human concept which is centred on the effects of human activities and the importance that man places upon them. Accordingly, the assessment of significance or the importance of effects ultimately involves a judgement based on values which reflect environmental, social and economic criteria.

2.4.9 For obvious reasons, the question of significance of effect varies according to the environmental factor under consideration and the context in which the assessment is made. It depends on the availability of data relating to existing environmental conditions (which is unlikely ever to be complete) and the value placed on those conditions. Any limitations identified when compiling each technical discipline are identified in the appropriate chapter.

2.4.10 In the assessment of all environmental effects which are likely to be significant, the following factors require consideration:

- the relative importance of the environment i.e. whether of international, national, regional, county, district or local importance;
- the degree to which the environment is affected e.g. is its quality enhanced or impaired;
- the scale of the change e.g. the land area, number of people affected and degree of change from the existing situation;

- the scale of change resulting from cumulative effects;
- whether the effect is temporary or permanent and, if temporary, its duration; and
- The degree of mitigation that can be achieved.

2.4.11 Against this background, the environmental assessment for the Proposed Development has been progressed through the identification of four levels of impact as appropriate:

- Major;
- Moderate;
- Minor; and
- Negligible

2.4.12 Any impact or effect assessed as "Major" or "Moderate" is considered as "significant" within the terms of the EIA Regulations. Any impact described as "Minor" or "Negligible" is not considered as "significant" within the terms of the EIA Regulations. Occasionally, where it assists in describing the level of impact, a "Not Significant" category is also used. These terms are generally used to define the level of impact arising for the environmental factors. Where different terms to the above are used, they are defined within the methodology section for the topic area as appropriate.

Mitigation

2.4.13 Adverse effects which were identified as significant have been considered to determine whether they could be mitigated by measures to avoid, reduce or remedy the impact, beyond that already taken into account as normal good practice (e.g. the Draft Outline Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP) included in Appendix 4.2 of this EIA Report). The EIA has evaluated effects post-mitigation to determine the residual effects that are reported upon in the EIA Report. Mitigation measures are summarised in a Schedule of Mitigation (see Appendix 4.1).

Assessment of Residual Effects

2.4.14 Any remaining effects following implementation of available mitigation measures are known as 'residual effects'. This assessment takes into account the mitigation as specified in the EIA Report to identify the remaining (residual) effects with this mitigation implemented. The residual effects are discussed for each potential effect and a significance level identified.

Cumulative Effects

2.4.15 In accordance with the EIA Regulations, the assessment has considered 'cumulative effects'. Cumulative impact assessment is a key part of the EIA process and is concerned with identifying situations where a number of potential effects from separate projects could combine to cause a significant impact on a particular resource. Cumulative effects have been assessed within each chapter, at a scale appropriate to that subject.

2.5 EIA Quality

2.5.1 In accordance with Regulation 18(5)(a) of the EIA Regulations, by appointing ASH design+assessment Ltd. (ASH) to coordinate the EIA Report for the Proposed Development the Applicant has ensured that the EIA Report has been prepared by 'competent experts'. The EIA Report has been compiled and approved by professional EIA practitioners at ASH, holding relevant undergraduate and post-graduate degrees, and membership of IEMA. The EIA Report meets the requirements of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) EIA Quality Mark scheme. This is a voluntary scheme operated by IEMA that allows organisations to make a commitment to excellence in EIA and to have this commitment independently reviewed on an annual basis. In addition, the Applicant confirms that each of the impact assessment chapters has been prepared by a competent expert, with the chapter providing details of the relevant authors and any applicable code of practice followed. Section 1.6 of Chapter 1: Introduction and Background provides a summary of specialist consultants appointed by the Applicant for this EIA Report.

2.6 Structure of the EIA Report

2.6.1 This EIA Report contains the environmental information required by the EIA Regulations and comprises a number of volumes as detailed below.

Volume 1: Non-Technical Summary

2.6.2 The Non-Technical Summary (NTS) summarises in non-technical language the findings of the EIA as reported in the EIA Report.

Volume 2: Written Statement

2.6.3 The Written Statement (this document) describes the project and the legal and policy framework within which the application will be determined. Details of alternatives considered are also included. The Written Statement includes the individual assessments undertaken under each of the specialist environmental topics identified, providing an assessment of the likely significant effects of the Proposed Development.

2.6.4 Volume 2 of the EIA Report contains the following chapters:

- 1: Introduction and Background;
- 2: EIA Process;
- 3: Consideration of Alternatives;
- 4: Description of Proposed Development;
- 5: Planning Policy Context;
- 6: EIA Scope and Pre-Application Consultation;
- 7: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment;
- 8: Ornithology;
- 9: Ecology;
- 10: Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology;

- 11: Cultural Heritage; and
- 12: Other Issues.

Volume 3: Figures

2.6.5 This volume includes all accompanying figures referred to in the assessments in Volume 2, with figure numbering corresponding to the chapter numbers e.g. Figure 1.1, 2.1 etc.

Volume 4: Technical Appendices

2.6.6 This volume includes all accompanying technical appendices referred to in the assessments in Volume 2, with appendix numbering corresponding to the chapter numbers e.g. Appendix 1.1, 2.1 etc.