

Appendix 5 Landscape Sensitivity

The sensitivity of the landscape character types which may receive significant landscape effects are assessed below. Landscape sensitivity is not absolute and can only be defined in relation to each development and its location. To assess the sensitivity of a particular landscape it is good practice to consider the value attached to the landscape and its susceptibility to the particular form of change likely to result from the proposed Development. Assessment text relates to sensitivity of the landscape receptor as a whole, to the proposed Development, with additional comments regarding the Site where relevant. In the main this has been taken from the Highland Council Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG): Part 2b (quotes shown in italics) as well as from the NatureScot LCT descriptions and site assessment. The criteria below are based on relevant guidance (see Appendix 1 to the LVIA).

Criteria

The following factors are considered in the assessments provided below. These are combined to form an overall judgement of sensitivity as set out within Appendix 1.

Factors affecting sensitivity	Lower Sensitivity to Wind Energy	Higher Sensitivity to Wind Energy
Landscape Value		
Designated scenic quality	No specific designation	National or regional designation
Natural Heritage	Low presence of ecological or geological / geomorphological interest.	High presence of ecological or geological / geomorphological interest.
Cultural Heritage	Low presence of archaeology or historical interests	High presence of archaeology or historical interests
Landscape condition/ quality	Landscape in a poor state of repair with incongruous elements	Landscape fully intact in good condition with limited incongruous elements
Cultural associations	No strong associations with notable people, events or the arts.	Strong cultural associations with notable people, events or the arts, which contribute to perceptions of natural beauty.
Distinctiveness	Commonplace elements and features, or the landscape itself. Lacking distinctive and strongly expressed character and with no important relationship to a settlement.	Presence of rare elements or features or rarity of the landscape itself. Landscape with a distinctive and clearly expressed character and/or with an important relationship to a settlement.
Amenity and recreation	Limited amenity/recreational function where experience of the landscape is important	Well used for recreation where experience of the landscape is important; or forms part of a view that is important to a recreational experience. May contain National Trails or other long distance routes.

Factors affecting sensitivity	Lower Sensitivity to Wind Energy	Higher Sensitivity to Wind Energy
Perceptual (Scenic)	Landscape with no particular scenic / visual appeal.	Landscape with strong appeal to the senses, particular visual.
Perceptual (Wildness and tranquility)	Busy with evidence of human activity, well-lit.	Remote, peaceful or with a sense of wildness. Dark skies.
Function	No important blue/green infrastructure function or important relationship with national landscape designation.	Landscape with important blue/green infrastructure function or strong relationship that is important to a national landscape designation.
Landscape Susceptibility		
Scale	Large scale landscapes where the turbines may be in proportion	Small scale intimate landscapes
Landform	Smooth regular flowing, flat or uniform landscapes	Dramatic, rugged and complex landscapes
Openness/enclosure	Open and exposed landscapes	Enclosed and sheltered landscapes
Land cover	Simple or regular landcover (including intensive farming and forestry). Simple and sweeping lines, linear features and patterns.	Complex, intimate or mosaic cover. Complex or irregular patterns.
Built Environment	Contemporary masts, pylons, industrial elements, buildings infrastructure, settlements	Established, traditional or historic built character
Views and intervisibility	Visually contained and have limited inward or outward views	Extensive views within or of the area with distant horizons.
Landscapes that form settings, skylines, backdrops, focal points	Generally low lying landscapes without distinctive landform or horizon	Areas with strong features, focal points that define the setting or skyline

Host Landscape: LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows (CT3 Northeast Caithness)

Factors affecting sensitivity	Explanation	Judgement
Designated scenic quality	A very small part of the northeast corner is included in Duncansby Head SLA, otherwise not designated.	Community
Natural Heritage	The area includes a number of national designations in this respect which cover a notable extent of the LCT.	National
Cultural Heritage	Evidence of prehistoric settlement and 18 th and 19 th century farming are noted in the NatureScot description, and a small number of Scheduled Monuments are within the LCT.	Community
Landscape condition/ quality	Mixed condition with some areas very good and others notably affected by incongruous elements. Transitional fringes have a character similar to the adjacent farmed landscapes.	Regional/ Community
Cultural associations	No noted cultural associations.	Community
Distinctiveness	The landscape has a distinctive character in the more remote areas, with the more modified fringes having a less strongly expressed character.	Regional/ Community
Amenity and recreation	More remote moorland areas are relatively inaccessible and this character type primarily forms the inland backdrop to the coastal areas which are the focus of recreational use.	Community
Perceptual (Scenic)	No particular scenic appeal in its own right, though outward views can be scenic (see below).	Community
Perceptual (Wildness and tranquillity)	The area is sparsely settled and the more remote core areas have a sense of wildness and tranquillity which contrasts with the surrounding coastal and farmed landscapes.	Regional
Function	No particular valued landscape function.	Community
Overall Judgement of Value		Community

Factors affecting sensitivity	Explanation	Judgement
Scale	<i>"larger scale, open and simple moorland landscape"</i>	Medium/low
Landform	<i>"flat to gently undulating and smooth landform"</i>	Low
Openness/enclosure	An open landscape apart from occasional areas of forestry	Medium/low
Land cover	Simple landcover with large areas of forestry and moorland. Pastoral uses in places, particularly around the fringes.	Low
Built Environment	Some larger scale infrastructure including wind farms and the A99. Small settlements and farms are set among the fields in peripheral pastoral areas.	Medium
Views and intervisibility	<i>"The open horizontal form ... could allow wide 360 degree panoramas..., however the hinterland is relatively inaccessible. The key view is from the A99 at Warth Hill which provides uninterrupted panoramic views north."</i>	High
Landscapes that form settings, skylines, backdrops, focal points	<i>"provides an important backdrop and visual horizon in many views along the coast".</i>	High
Overall Judgement of Susceptibility		High/ medium
Overall Judgement of Sensitivity		Medium

LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows (CT5 Dunnet Interior)

Similar to above given it is of the same character type, but with the following modifications reflecting localised characteristics:

Factors affecting sensitivity	Explanation	Judgement
Designated scenic quality	Most of the LCT is included within the Dunnet Head SLA	Regional
Natural Heritage	No recognised value in this respect	Community
Distinctiveness	The small area limits the clear expression of the character type, but recognition as the most northerly part of mainland UK provides a distinctive location.	National/ regional
Amenity and recreation	Experienced by many recreational visitors, albeit mostly passing through to the coast.	Regional/ community
Perceptual (Wildness and tranquility)	Not a wild or particularly tranquil landscape, though has some sense of remoteness.	Regional/ community
Function	<i>"the area is a pronounced landmark"</i> due to views towards Dunnet Hill and Easter Head and forms the inland context to the coastal SLA.	Regional
Overall Judgement of Value		Regional
Scale	The expression of landscape scale is limited by the extent of the LCT	High/ medium
Openness/enclosure	An open landscape	Low
Built Environment	Very limited built form apart from the local road.	High
Views and intervisibility	<i>"The open elevated landform allows wide 360 degree panoramas ... Iconic views of dramatic sea stacks and cliff faces, with extensive panoramas"</i> in all directions.	High
Landscapes that form settings, skylines, backdrops, focal points	<i>"the area is a pronounced landmark"</i> due to views towards Dunnet Hill and Easter Head from inland areas.	High
Overall Judgement of Susceptibility		High/ medium
Overall Judgement of Sensitivity		High/ medium

LCT 143 Farmed Lowland Plain (CT9 North Caithness)

Factors affecting sensitivity	Explanation	Judgement
Designated scenic quality	No designated landscapes lie within this area.	Community
Natural Heritage	There are some SSSI and SPA designations within this area, but the majority of this LCT has no particular recognised value in this respect.	Regional/ community
Cultural Heritage	Heritage assets are relatively widespread throughout the LCT and include castles, the garden and designed landscape at Castle of Mey, baronial mansions and Laird's houses and features such as brochs and cairns. Wick and Thurso have Conservation Areas.	Regional
Landscape condition/ quality	The landscape is generally in fair condition, with some localised variation.	Regional/ community
Cultural associations	No specific cultural associations are noted.	Community
Distinctiveness	The open, farmed landscape largely includes commonplace features and is not particularly distinctive.	Community
Amenity and recreation	The NC500 passes through this area and coastal areas are visited by tourists, whereas inland areas are accessible but without marked recreational uses or associations.	Regional/ community
Perceptual (Scenic)	<i>"few scenic views", although "sea views are open and expansive from the north coast between Mey and Melvich."</i>	Community
Perceptual (Wildness and Tranquility)	The landscape is perceived as relatively empty, with some tranquility away from main roads, its farmed nature precludes a sense of wildness.	Community
Function	No specific valued landscape function apart from forming the setting to Thurso and Wick.	Community
Overall Judgement of Value		Community

Factors affecting sensitivity	Explanation	Judgement
Scale	Expansive, but smaller scale in terms of landcover, field sizes and settlement patterns.	Medium
Landform	<i>"broad and relatively low-lying plain and basin bounded by the sea and inland by the expansive Sweeping Moorland and Flows"</i>	Low
Openness/enclosure	Typically open with woodland around older houses and farms. Some areas with notable hedgerow cover.	Medium/ low
Land cover	A mix of pasture and arable with limited woodland, largely simple and rectilinear in pattern.	Low
Built Environment	<i>"widely settled character of farm buildings", "sensitivity is reinforced where the historic landscape is more prevalent in stone slab and dyke field boundaries"</i> . Major substations, large scale buildings near Thurso and Dounreay, and wind farms are also present.	Medium
Views and intervisibility	<i>"typically wide views within and across this landscape"</i> and views from coastal areas both out to sea and along the coast.	High
Landscapes that form settings, skylines, backdrops, focal points	This landscape does not form the skyline or backdrop to any key views except for forming the immediate setting to Thurso and Wick.	Medium
Overall Judgement of Susceptibility		Medium
Overall Judgement of Sensitivity		Medium/ low

LCT 144 Coastal Crofts and Small Farms (CT1 Dunnet to Brough, Canisbay to John O’Groats)

Factors affecting sensitivity	Explanation	Judgement
Designated scenic quality	No designated landscapes are associated with the two nearby parts of this LCT.	Community
Natural Heritage	No recognised value in relation to this.	Community
Cultural Heritage	Some listed buildings and scheduled monuments in this area. " <i>Churches, castles, mills and cemeteries</i> " are noted within the NatureScot description.	Regional/ community
Landscape condition/ quality	Mixed, with highly visible contemporary development of varied design set in places within the farmed landscape.	Community
Cultural associations	No noted cultural associations except for the association of John O’Groats as a starting point and destination for journeys that span the entire UK ('Lands End to John O Groat’s).	Regional
Distinctiveness	Distinctive settlements and landscape pattern associated with crofting.	Regional
Amenity and recreation	The NC500 and national cycle route pass through this area and holiday makers visiting the coast or islands are typically hosted in the hotels and other holiday accommodation within this settled coastal area.	National / regional
Perceptual (Scenic)	The landscape itself has limited scenic quality, but outward coastal views are scenic.	Regional / community
Perceptual (Wildness and Tranquility)	This settled landscape includes the key route of the A9 and is neither wild nor tranquil.	Community
Function	No specific valued landscape function.	Community
Overall Judgement of Value		Regional/ community

Factors affecting sensitivity	Explanation	Judgement
Scale	<i>"a relatively smaller scale character"</i>	High/ medium
Landform	Gently undulating landform contained by the Sweeping Moorland areas (CT3, CT5 and CT6)	Low
Openness/enclosure	Open landscape with the main containment being areas of rising ground inland.	Low
Land cover	Pastoral uses with limited vegetation cover, simple and strongly rectilinear patterns.	Low
Built Environment	Smaller scale farms and settlements with a mix of older and contemporary buildings. Some small wind turbines and the A836 and A99 are also notable features.	High/ medium
Views and intervisibility	Visually connected to both the moorlands inland and the coastal areas and <i>"highly visible from major roads"</i> including the NC500 as it passes through the area.	High
Landscapes that form settings, skylines, backdrops, focal points	This landscape forms the immediate context to the coast, and is seen as part of the backdrop in views along the coast and towards the mainland from ferry routes.	Medium
Overall Judgement of Susceptibility		High/ medium
Overall Judgement of Sensitivity		Medium

LCT 141 High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays (CT8 Dunnet Head, Duncansby Head)

Factors affecting sensitivity	Explanation	Judgement
Designated scenic quality	Both Dunnet Head and Duncansby Head are included in SLAs.	Regional
Natural Heritage	The cliffs which form a narrow strip around the coastal edge of the LCT, and adjacent seascape are included within national designations.	Regional
Cultural Heritage	Buildings including the Dunnet Head lighthouse are listed, but otherwise there are no designated heritage assets in the area.	Community
Landscape condition/ quality	The condition of the inland landscape is very different to that of the cliffs and bays. The dilapidated buildings near the lighthouses provide a sense of neglect and the open car parks are placed directly within sensitive views.	Community
Cultural associations	No noted cultural associations.	Community
Distinctiveness	The cliffs, bays and views out to sea are highly distinctive, though the character of the landscape largely borrows from the immediately adjacent inland landscapes rather than having a clear character of its own.	Regional
Amenity and recreation	A well visited landscape – very popular with recreational users.	National/ regional
Perceptual (Scenic)	<i>"Key focus for scenic views and informal recreation, and imparts a strong sense of place to Caithness with views along the coast, of overlapping headlands."</i>	Regional
Perceptual (Wildness and Tranquility)	The landscape is neither wild nor tranquil with the presence of the lighthouses, car parks and tourists creating a built and well-populated landscape.	Community
Function	<i>"High Cliffs at Dunnet Head and Duncansby Head demarcate the most northerly points of mainland Scotland, with clear open views to Orkney Islands."</i>	National/ regional
Overall Judgement of Value		Regional

Factors affecting sensitivity	Explanation	Judgement
Scale	The scale is very mixed with the landscape inheriting the scale of the adjacent inland landscape types, but with the addition of the vertical scale of the cliffs, the small scale of the bays and the wide open views from the cliff tops out to sea.	Medium
Landform	Gently undulating inland, with " <i>an intricate coastline of fissured cliffs, ravines, caves and stacks with small covers and narrow inlets</i> ".	High/ medium
Openness/enclosure	Open on the cliff tops and more enclosed, but with seaward views from the bays and inlets.	High/ medium
Land cover	There is limited vegetation and no discernible pattern to the landcover.	Medium
Built Environment	The lighthouses and abandoned military buildings are the main built features, along with the car parks and access roads.	Medium/ low
Views and intervisibility	Key views are out to sea rather than inland, though open inland views are available.	High/ medium
Landscapes that form settings, skylines, backdrops, focal points	The cliffs form the skyline in views to the south from the islands and ferry routes.	High
Overall Judgement of Susceptibility		High/ medium
Overall Judgement of Sensitivity		High/ medium

LCT 140 Sandy Beaches and Dunes (CT7 Dunnet Bay)

Factors affecting sensitivity	Explanation	Judgement
Designated scenic quality	The LCT is not included in any designations.	Community
Natural Heritage	Dunnet Bay is covered by national designations.	National
Cultural Heritage	Contains small number of scheduled brochs and cairns.	Regional
Landscape condition/ quality	The area is in fair condition with limited detracting elements apart from the road and car parks.	Community
Cultural associations	No noted cultural associations.	Community
Distinctiveness	Distinctive character of sandy beaches and dunes. <i>"Small areas of this type within Caithness and as such are rare in this context."</i>	Regional
Amenity and recreation	<i>"Important focus"</i> for recreational use.	Regional
Perceptual (Scenic)	Scenic views along and towards the beach from nearby areas of coastline around the bay.	Regional
Perceptual (Wildness and Tranquility)	<i>"Whilst set within a well settled wider landscape, the natural qualities of sea, beach and dunes contribute to high qualities of wildness and seclusion."</i>	Regional
Function	No valued landscape function.	Community
Overall Judgement of Value		Regional

Factors affecting sensitivity	Explanation	Judgement
Scale	Smaller scale of the dunes contrasts with the larger scale of the sandy beaches and sea.	High/ medium
Landform	Low lying with the dunes forming the main relief.	High/ medium
Openness/enclosure	Very open landscapes with dunes providing localised containment.	Medium/ low
Land cover	Simple linear pattern of grassed dunes and sandy beach.	Low
Built Environment	Very limited built environment except for small car parks, coastal roads and occasional buildings associated with recreational use.	High/ medium
Views and intervisibility	Key views are around the bay and out to sea, inland views are also available where not screened by dunes.	Medium
Landscapes that form settings, skylines, backdrops, focal points	This landscape can be appreciated in views into and across the bay from the nearby coast, but does not form the skyline or back drop.	Medium
Overall Judgement of Susceptibility		High/ medium
Overall Judgement of Sensitivity		High/ medium