



Environmental Impact Assessment Report

# Swarclett Wind Farm

Appendix 5-2: Landscape Character Type  
Descriptions

Swarclett Wind Energy Limited

**wind2**

June 2024



NatureScot has used a system of landscape character assessment to identify, describe, classify and map Scotland. Using accepted, systematic methods of landscape character assessment, the countryside has been subdivided into different Landscape Character Types (LCTs) each with a distinctive character based upon local patterns of geology, landform, land use, cultural and ecological features. The NatureScot web-based dataset, the 2019 Landscape Character Type map and associated Landscape Character Type Descriptions provide baseline information which can be used to guide landscape change and provide a baseline against which to make judgements on the likely effects of the Proposed Development upon landscape character.

In undertaking the preliminary assessment and review of baseline material against the visibility mapping of the Proposed Development, and through subsequent fieldwork, it is considered that beyond a 20km radius, from the outermost turbines, the Proposed Development would be seen as a distant element in the landscape and that there would be only a limited influence on the characteristics, defining features and/or special qualities of the LCTs. Although there may be some effects on landscape character beyond a 20km radius from the Proposed Development Site, these will not be significant and, in this regard, LCTs (as well as Special Landscape Areas and Wild Land Areas) beyond 20km of the Proposed Development Site have not been assessed further. LCTs within a 20km radius of the Proposed Development have been reviewed in detail and provide an appropriate basis to describe the landscape character of the surrounding area. The LCTs that fall within 20km of the Proposed Development are illustrated on Figure 5-7-1, Volume 3, overlaid with ZTV mapping to blade tip and hub height.

There are five LCTs within 20km of the Proposed Development. Of these the following sub units LCTs will experience limited or no visibility to the Proposed Development, and the effects will not be sufficient to give rise to significant effects and they have, therefore, not been considered further in this assessment:

- LCT 140: sandy Beaches and Dunes – **Keiss Links/Ackergill Links Sub Unit**
- LCT 141: High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays – **Duncansby Head Sub Unit & Spear Head Sub Unit**
- LCT 144 - Coastal Crofts & Small Farms – North East Coast of Caithness - **Gills Bay Sub Unit**

The remaining areas of the five LCTs have the potential to be significantly affected by the Proposed Development and are included in the reporting of the detailed assessment in EIAR Chapter 5: LVIA

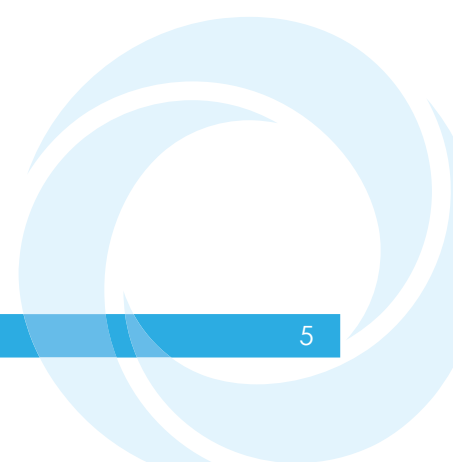
- 134 - Sweeping Moorland and Flows
- 140 - Sandy Beaches and Dunes
- 141 - High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays
- 143 - Farmed Lowland Plain
- 144 - Coastal Crofts & Small Farms

A description of each of the LCTs which will potentially be affected is provided in the baseline assessment tables below, explaining the main features, key characteristics and sensitivity of the landscape to the Proposed Development.

**Table 5-2-1: 134: Sweeping Moorland and Flows**

134: Sweeping Moorland and Flows	
Key Characteristics	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gently sloping or undulating landform which lies generally below 350 metres.</li> <li>• Occasional isolated hills of limited height form local landmark features.</li> <li>• Lochs and mature, meandering rivers.</li> <li>• Very distinct flora, dominated by sphagnum mosses, produced by the wetness and infertility of the flows.</li> <li>• Areas of peat cuttings and haggings.</li> <li>• Pockets of improved grazing, mainly within the outer fringes of sweeping moorland.</li> <li>• Coniferous forest forming a dominant characteristic within some parts of this landscape character type.</li> <li>• Ribbons of broadleaf woodland occasionally run along the water courses and loch edges.</li> <li>• Very sparsely settled with dispersed crofts, farms and estate buildings largely found on the outer edges of this landscape or near a strath.</li> <li>• Vehicular tracks within parts of the landscape.</li> <li>• Wind farms, transmission lines, the A9 and a network of minor roads are key features within the more modified outer fringes within Caithness.</li> <li>• Long, low and largely uninterrupted skylines offering extensive views across this landscape and result in a feeling of huge space.</li> <li>• Consistent views to the distant Lone Mountains and Rugged Mountain Massif – Caithness &amp; Sutherland.</li> <li>• Great sense of exposure on areas of flat peatland on upland plateau.</li> <li>• A strong sense of remoteness is associated within the largely uninhabited, inaccessible core flows and moorlands of this landscape.</li> </ul>	
Features	
<b>Landform</b>	<p>This flat, gently undulating and generally smooth landform largely accords with areas of blanket bog and supports a diverse range of wet heath, grassland and mire. Occasional isolated hills, such as Ben Alisky and Ben Dorrery, stand out amidst extensive areas of lower-lying moorland, despite their limited height. Sweeping moorlands often have lochs and mature meandering rivers which sit within the shallow valleys and basins in the landscape creating focal features. Large areas of flatter peatlands, the Flows, lie within the core of Caithness and are patterned with a dominant intricate network of water courses, dubh lochans and a diverse range of pool systems, with wet, spongy, vegetation. The Flows areas merge gradually with surrounding sweeping moorland.</p>
<b>Landcover</b>	<p>This Landscape Character Type has a simple composition of moorland and mire, which forms low, smooth and largely uninterrupted skylines, and huge skies resulting in a high degree of exposure and extensive visibility. The ground-hugging vegetation of the blanket bog accentuates the predominant smoothness of the terrain. Some areas of the distinct flora of sphagnum mosses are particularly conspicuous on account of their vibrant colours. Areas of peat cutting and haggings create dark brown scarring, conspicuous amidst heather and grass-dominated moorland and mosses. Where pockets of improved grazing exist on the outer fringes of the moorland these areas appear as green islands within the surrounding rough vegetation. They tend to relate to the present or past location of farm or croft buildings and their enclosures. Coniferous forestry has a strong presence in some areas, particularly the more modified outer fringes, interrupting the continuity of the moorland cover. Removal of forest and restoration of areas of underlying blanket bog is being undertaken in some locations. Fragments of broadleaf woodland along water courses and loch edges mainly comprise birch, alder, willow and rowan species.</p>

134: Sweeping Moorland and Flows	
<b>Settlement</b>	<p>This is currently a very sparsely settled landscape. However, the Landscape Character Type encompasses a huge land area and contains a broad range of monuments. Evidence for early prehistoric settlement in more favourable locations is evidenced through the presence of chambered cairns, other forms of burial cairns and occasional stone settings. Later prehistoric monuments include burnt mounds, hut circles with their attendant field systems, and brochs. Settlement continued into the medieval period, with farms and crofts occupying the most fertile ground, and shieling activity in more remote locations. The 18th and 19th Centuries saw the abandonment of many farms and crofts in favour of sheep rearing, but today most of the folds and shelters built at this time are ruinous. Settlement today takes the form of dispersed crofts, farms and estate buildings on outer reaches of the Landscape Character Type, or near straths. The location of ruined buildings, field boundaries and drainage channels represent a history of past depopulation.</p> <p>Vehicular tracks are used mainly to provide access for deer stalking and to fishing lochs and peat cuttings. The Inverness/Thurso railway is aligned through the core of this character type and single track roads, such as the A836, cut through areas of sweeping moorland in the west. Within Caithness the A9 and a network of minor roads, as well as wind farms and transmission lines, are more prominent features within the more modified outer fringes of the Landscape Character Type.</p>
<b>Perception</b>	<p>The landscape has a strong sense of naturalness and remoteness, particularly at its core away from more settled and modified outer fringes. Their distinctly natural character is heightened by a rich diversity of birds, including plover and curlew, whose evocative calls contribute to the perception of wildness.</p> <p>The Sweeping Moorland and Flows forms the setting to the Lone Mountains, the distinctive form and prominence of these mountains being accentuated by the simple, open and expansive nature of the low-lying moorland which surrounds them. Some areas of flat peatland occur on areas of upland plateau, for example, Knockfin Heights and also on the top of cliffs along the north coast of Caithness. The elevation of these areas and their surrounding space creates an even greater sense of exposure, particularly upon the edges of the landform, where distant views across land and sea are afforded.</p> <p>Views are long with uninterrupted largely uninterrupted skylines. Rapidly changing light and weather conditions are reflected in the smooth vegetation cover and loch systems. The Sweeping Moorland and Flows are important in providing a simple foreground to views of distant Lone Mountains and Rugged Mountain Massif – Caithness &amp; Sutherland, complementing the distinctive form of these mountains and accentuating their height and prominence. Views from the A9 between Latheron and Spittal, the B871, A836 and from the A838 across the low-lying moorland of A'Mhoine to the distant mountains are particularly dramatic.</p>
<b>Overall Sensitivity to Wind Energy Development</b>	<p>This landscape is of a large scale, with simple land cover and noticeable manmade features including large tracts of forestry and an established footprint of wind farm development, which lend it a <b>Medium</b> sensitivity.</p>



**Table 5-2-2: 140: Sandy Beaches and Dunes**

140: Sandy Beaches and Dunes	
Key Characteristics	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low shingle ridges backing many of these sandy beaches and forming the base for dune systems.</li> <li>• Undulating machair abutting dunes and dune slacks along parts of the east Sutherland coast, with golf courses occupying some of these areas.</li> <li>• Long gently curved sandy arcs of Sinclair's Bay and Dunnet Bay in Caithness.</li> <li>• Focus for recreation with camp sites, caravan parks and car parks located close to more accessible areas of coast with golf courses present where links and machair areas are more extensive.</li> <li>• Castles with historic gardens and designed landscapes, as well as prehistoric brochs and cists, cairns, and hut circles.</li> <li>• Strong sense of space, light and exposure, and extensive visibility on the larger and more open stretches of sandy beach.</li> <li>• Contained smaller beaches on the north coast with views focused along the beach to rocky headlands and out to sea to near shore islands.</li> </ul>	
Features	
<b>Landform</b>	Sandy beaches are a rarer feature along the predominantly rocky coastline of Caithness. The beaches on these coasts are relatively small, contained by rocky headlands. In contrast, the long sandy beaches of Sinclair's Bay and Dunnet Bay have a simple visual composition of sky, expansive sea and beach and a relatively narrow band of dunes backed by well-managed agricultural land and some remnant coniferous woodland. In common with the sandy beaches found in the north and west, these bays are contained by rocky headlands.
<b>Settlement</b>	There are a number of prehistoric and historic sites in this LCT. The prehistoric Carn Liath broch is also in this area. In Sinclair's Bay in Caithness Castle Lingas broch sits at Keiss Links, and at Dunnet Bay there are two cairns.  The sandy beaches of Caithness and Sutherland are a focus for recreation and the larger and more accessible coasts have caravan and camp sites, golf courses and car parks located within links areas.
<b>Perception</b>	Despite modification natural qualities of sea, beach and dunes and the dynamism of coastal processes gives all these seascapes a degree of wild character.
<b>Overall Sensitivity to Wind Energy Development</b>	The coastlines are of <b>Medium/High</b> sensitivity to the Proposed Development.

**Table 5-2-3: 141: High Cliffs & Sheltered Bays**

141: High Cliffs & Sheltered Bays	
Key Characteristics	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dunnet Head, with towering cliffs edged by low rocky reefs.</li> <li>• Occasional inlets and coves, often with very deep and sheltered waters, and sometimes containing tiny harbours tucked between cliffs and not readily visible from the main coast road and settlement.</li> <li>• Harbours on the east Caithness coast which have a strong association with settlements which are perched above the cliff.</li> <li>• Moorland largely abutting this Landscape Character Type which is particularly open and sweeping to the east and north within Caithness.</li> <li>• The most prominent and exposed headlands marked by lighthouses.</li> <li>• Exhilarating experience of being precariously perched upon a high edge on the cliff tops, offering open elevated views and a perception of huge space.</li> <li>• Views of turbulent currents at the juncture of the Pentland Firth and North Sea, heightening the</li> </ul>	

141: High Cliffs & Sheltered Bays	
<p>sense of wildness experienced from the headland.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The absence of development along the remote stretches of coast and a strong sense of naturalness creating a wild landscape character.</li> </ul>	
Features	
<b>Landform</b>	Prominent headlands on the north coast of Caithness are rimmed by high cliffs. The Old Red Sandstone cliffs found in east Caithness feature distinct horizontal banding and the increased occurrence of caves, stacks and arches associated with Caithness Flagstone, as found, for example at Duncansby Head.
<b>Landcover</b>	Moorland abuts this Landscape Character Type. A very short mat of vegetation tends to cover the top edge of the cliffs and small ledges. Some of the more slumped cliffs along the north-east Caithness coast are partially vegetated with banks of bracken, gorse and short grasses.
<b>Settlement</b>	<p>In some of the inlets and coves there are tiny harbours which are tucked between cliffs, not visible from the main coast road or settlement.</p> <p>The harbours are reached by narrow roads or even by stone steps carved into cliff sides as at Whaligoe. The most prominent headlands are marked by lighthouses, making them a focal point for visitors.</p> <p>Historic environment features include the lighthouses at Duncansby Head and Dunnet Head.</p>
<b>Perception</b>	<p>This character type has an elemental character influenced by the proximity of often turbulent seas, especially at the junction between the Pentland Firth and the North Sea from Duncansby Head. This is heightened by the dramatic rugged character and sheer height of the cliffs. A strong sense of wild character is particularly associated with the more remote stretches of coast. This is heightened by the sight and sound of soaring and nesting seabirds.</p> <p>The cliff tops offer open, elevated views, yet views of this coastline from adjacent inland areas are often restricted due to convex slopes and sheer cliffs. Views tend to be directed along the coast and out to sea, especially where there are offshore foci such as islands, rigs or boats.</p>
<b>Overall Sensitivity to Wind Energy Development</b>	The coastlines are of <b>Medium/High</b> sensitivity to the Proposed Development.

**Table 5-2-4: 143: Farmed Lowland Plain**

143: Farmed Lowland Plain	
Key Characteristics	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A generally open, low-lying plain, gently undulating to form shallow broad valleys, which are often filled with lochs and mosses, and subtle low ridges.</li> <li>Occasional smooth hills rise above the more low-lying plain forming local landmarks.</li> <li>The broad and shallow valley of the River Wick forming the largest of a series of valleys generally aligned south-east/north-west across the plain.</li> <li>Agriculture the predominant land cover.</li> <li>More intensively managed farmland near the coast around Thurso and Wick, and close to Loch Watten.</li> <li>Distinctive Caithness flagstone fences in some parts, creating low, sharp edges to fields.</li> <li>Sparse woodland, mainly comprising small angular coniferous plantations planted for shelter on farms.</li> <li>Larger conifer woodlands located at the transition with the Sweeping Moorland and Flows standing out where they are planted on poorer wetter ground on low ridges.</li> <li>Farm buildings and houses forming focal points within the landscape.</li> </ul>	

143: Farmed Lowland Plain	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occasional loose clusters of croft houses located on more marginal upper slopes and near the coast.</li> <li>• A number of historic environment features, including conspicuous castles, Baronial mansions and tall 'Lairds' houses, usually with broadleaf shelter woods planted around them.</li> <li>• Roads reinforce the settlement pattern, often following the field and property boundaries, running straight and then swinging around sharp corners.</li> <li>• A number of large settlements, including the towns of Thurso and Wick, situated on the coast, as well as several smaller settlements.</li> <li>• Many historic features, including brochs and cairns, dotted across farmland and situated on hills within, or adjacent to, this area.</li> <li>• Small groups of large wind turbines sited on some of the low ridges and hills and prominent visibility of larger wind farms in adjacent Landscape Character Types.</li> <li>• Extensive views due to the openness of the landscape, and the clarity of northern air and light.</li> <li>• Dramatic views from the northern part of this landscape to Dunnet Head and the distant Orkney islands, and views from the A9 on the western edge of this landscape of the Lone Mountains of Movern and Scaraben seen across the low-lying Sweeping Moorland and Flows.</li> </ul>	
Features	
<b>Landform</b>	<p>The gently undulating landform of this landscape has a wide horizontal emphasis and this, together with huge skies and the clarity of the northern air, give a characteristically open, light and exposed character. Occasional smooth hills, such as Spittal Hill and Hill of Odrig, rise above the plain to form local landmarks.</p> <p>The undulating landform forms a series of broad, shallow valleys running south-east/northwest across the plain, of which the valley of the River Wick is the largest, accommodating Lochs Watten and Scarmclate in its upper section.</p>
<b>Landcover</b>	<p>Although this landscape is predominantly farmed, areas of wetter rough pasture and moss, and occasional lochs, also occur within valley floors and shallow basins. These lochs form key foci set amidst well-managed farmland, especially in bright conditions where their deep blue waters contrast with the greens and yellows of arable fields. Large arable fields are present close to the coast and within the broad Wick valley. Farmland is more mixed elsewhere with improved pastures and occasional arable fields interspersed with areas of rougher grazing and wetland. The pattern of fields within this Landscape Character Type is delineated by the route of fences, low stone walls, dykes and locally distinctive Caithness stone flagstone fences with their regularly shaped, thin stone slabs which create low sharp edges to fields. This pattern of fields is highlighted by a variety of different crops, the character of which changes throughout the year.</p> <p>Woodland is sparse, limited to small coniferous shelterbelts and clumps of broadleaf trees sheltering farms. More diverse wooded policies and arable fields, some of these enclosed by low hedgerows and neat walls, are associated with occasional estate houses. Broadleaf trees are largely restricted to clumps of wind-stunted sycamore around larger and generally older houses, with some ash planted along roads. Mixed hedgerows and wooded policies are a rare feature but are notable around Odrig House. Larger coniferous woodlands are present at the transition of this Landscape Character Type and the Sweeping Moorland and Flows, planted on former moors and less fertile ridges. These are visible across this open landscape.</p>
<b>Settlement</b>	<p>This is a well-settled landscape with farms regularly spaced across the plain and occasional loose clusters of croft houses located on more marginal upper slopes and near the coast. Areas of crofts and loosely clustered newer houses tend to be associated with more marginal land on higher slopes or close to the fringes of the Sweeping Moorland and Flows. Larger settlements, including Wick and Thurso, are generally situated along the coast. There are also a number of smaller settlements such as Halkirk, Watten and Spittal inland, and Castletown on the north coast. Some of these settlements feature an intact core of 19th Century planned streets</p>

143: Farmed Lowland Plain	
	<p>and buildings. Past and current stone quarries are located near Spittal and Castletown.</p> <p>There are a large number of historic environment features, including brochs and cairns, castles, Baronial mansions and 'Lairds' houses, usually with broadleaf shelter woods planted around them. They include the Castle of Mey and its associated historic garden and designed landscape, Castle Girnigoe and Castle Sinclair, Ackergill Tower and Noss Head lighthouse.</p> <p>A network of often angular roads, the railway line and transmission lines cross this plain. The long tradition of occupation of this landscape is evident in the many archaeological features dotted across farmland and on the less cultivated hill fringes. Ruined crofts, drainage channels and field boundaries with neglected grassland and rushes/bracken, are present in more marginal areas, often lying at the transition with the Sweeping Moorland and Flows. These are an indication of past land use.</p> <p>There are small groups of large wind turbines located on some of the low ridges and hills. More extensive wind farms are located within areas of forest, moorland and moss within the Sweeping Moorland and Flows lying close to the boundary of this landscape. These often closely-spaced developments are prominent from roads and settlement within the very open Caithness Farmed Lowland Plain.</p>
<b>Perception</b>	This landscape is vast, exposed and open, generally dominated by a horizontal emphasis. This, as well as the clarity of the air and light, allows for extensive views both within the lowland plain and to the landscapes and seascapes beyond.
<b>Overall Sensitivity to Wind Energy Development</b>	The landscape is of a medium scale, with simple land cover, expansive views and noticeable manmade features, which lend it a <b>Medium/Low</b> sensitivity.

**Table 5-2-5: 144: Coastal Crofts & Small Farms**

144: Coastal Crofts & Small Farms	
<b>Key Characteristics</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narrow, settled and farmed coastal fringe with subtle variations in topography, from long stretches of strongly contained coastal shelves and raised beaches, to smaller pockets at river mouths and squeezed between dunes and areas of Cnocan – Caithness &amp; Sutherland.</li> <li>• Pastures and occasional arable fields, most often divided by post and wire fences, with the division of fields marked by crop colour and texture rather than boundaries.</li> <li>• Low stone walls enclosing fields on the shelf above the High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays between Dunbeath and Wick.</li> <li>• Little woodland within the more exposed east and north Caithness coasts.</li> <li>• Settlement most concentrated where this Landscape Character Type broadens at the mouths of major rivers along the east coast, where larger farms and crofts are concentrated.</li> <li>• Small, hunkered-down croft houses and outbuildings loosely clustered or sometimes aligned in a linear fashion on the top of terraces or ridges above the coast or a river floodplain.</li> </ul>	
<b>Features</b>	
<b>Landform and Landcover</b>	<p>The Landscape Character Type is more open and broader in extent around the east and north Caithness coasts where it borders the lower-lying Sweeping Moorland and Flows. There is a gradual transition between the two Landscape Character Types. These areas tend to have a particularly open and light character, often accentuated by pale hues of stone and white-rendered buildings and lichen-mottled field walls.</p> <p>These coastal landscapes predominantly support crofting although occasional small farms are also present.</p> <p>There is little woodland in areas on exposed east and north Caithness coasts with a greater proportion of rougher pastures dotted with gorse and rush and pockets of</p>



144: Coastal Crofts & Small Farms	
	heather moorland, particularly close to the transition with the Sweeping Moorland and Flows.
<b>Settlement</b>	The long history of settlement in these coastal areas is apparent in the range of prehistoric and historic sites. For example, archaeological sites are particularly rich at the transition with the Sweeping Moorland and Flows in east Caithness around Loch of the Yarrows and Camster. This includes numerous archaeological sites at the Yarrows Archaeological Trail (such as cairns, brochs, hut circles, standing stones, stone rows, etc), and the Hill o' Many Stanes stone rows at Mid Clyth. There are also numerous churches, castles, mills, cemeteries and other sites represented. These include the Whaligoe curing yard and steps, house and burial ground at Mains of Ulbster in the east.
<b>Perception</b>	The various characteristics of this landscape create a complex visual composition, with views tending to focus on the detail of houses, field patterns and crops, yet with the wider context of backdrop hills and sea adding diversity to this landscape.
<b>Overall Sensitivity to Wind Energy Development</b>	This landscape is of a small scale with a <b>Medium</b> sensitivity.

