A specialist energy consultancy

Alternative Site Assessment

Beauly BESS

Field Beauly Ltd

16621-008-R0
19 December 2024

COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

FIELD

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1.1 Introduction

This Alternative Site Selection has been prepared by TNEI ('the Agent') on behalf of Field Beauly Ltd (the 'Applicant'), to accompany an application for consent under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 ('the Electricity Act') and associated deemed planning permission for the construction and operation of a Battery Energy Storage System ('BESS') and associated infrastructure, with a generating capacity of 100 megawatts ('MW') to be located at Dunballoch Farm, Beauly, Inverness, IV4 7AY (the 'Site').

1.2 The Applicant

The Applicant is a subsidiary of Virmati Energy Ltd (Field). Field is developing, building, and optimising the grid-scale energy infrastructure required to facilitate the transition to Net Zero. Field focuses on BESS in the UK and Europe, to create a more reliable, flexible and greener grid and to facilitate the scaling of renewables such as wind and solar. The Applicant currently has three operational BESS sites in Oldham, Gerrards Cross and Newport, with a further three sites under construction, and a further 4.5 GWh in the pipeline for development or in exclusivity with partners across the UK and Europe. Field is a committed and responsible developer for the long term, as it develops, owns, and operates its BESS sites throughout their entire lifecycles.

1.3 The Proposed Development

1.3.1 Overview

The Applicant is seeking planning permission for the construction and operation of a BESS development with a storage capacity of 100 MW. The Proposed Development will help achieve zero carbon emissions in Scotland by increasing the stability of the electricity grid and the amount of renewable energy that can be delivered to the grid network. The Proposed Development would store electricity and provide support to the grid. It will not generate its own electricity or create any emissions at the point of use, however it will store electricity generated from renewable energy sources when supply exceeds demand, then discharge green energy during periods in which demand exceeds supply without any time lag. This is to maximise the potential for renewable energy developments to replace the use of fossil fuels.

The Proposed Development would consist of a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) of up to 100 MW with associated infrastructure, earthworks, drainage, accesses and ancillary works (including landscaping and biodiversity enhancement). This equipment would be sited on a levelled and stoned platform, with appropriate surface water drainage, with the compound enclosed by suitable security fencing.

1.4 Purpose of this report

Policy 5 of the NPF4 states, amongst other things, that *"development proposals on prime agricultural land or land of lesser quality that is culturally or locally important for primary use, as identified by the LDP, will only be supported where it is for:*

i. Essential infrastructure and there is a specific locational need and no other suitable site; […]

iv. The generation of energy from renewable sources or the extraction of minerals and there is secure provision for restoration; and

In all of the above exceptions, the layout and design of the proposal minimises the amount of protected land that is required."

The NPF4, Annex F 'Glossary of definitions' identifies BESS developments as being essential infrastructure, and as detailed further below, there is a locational need for a BESS development to be located within a 2 km radius of a grid connection point. BESS infrastructure can also be seen as an extension to renewable energy generation, as it helps bolster the deployment of renewable energy projects while limiting curtailment and providing grid stability services.

As the Site is located on prime agricultural land, this report will identify potential alternative sites within the search area, that could reasonably be expected to be appropriate for a BESS development. The methodology of this assessment is set out in Section 3. Beauly BESS would be in place for a long-term temporary period of 40 years, with the Site then returning to agricultural use.

2 Planning Policies and Relevant Legislation

This Alternative Site Assessment has been prepared in accordance with local and national planning policy documents. The latest relevant local and national planning policies and legislation are:

- The Highland-wide Local Development Plan (2012) (HwLDP);
- The Inner Moray Firth Proposed LDP2 (2024) (IMFPLDP2);
- The National Planning Framework (4th Iteration) (NPF4);
- The Electricity Act (1989); and
- The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended).

For further details on how the Proposed Development complies with local and national planning policy, please refer to the Planning, Design and Access Statement that forms part of the application submission.

2.1 Local Planning Policy

The Highland-Wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) was adopted on the 5th April 2012. It sets out the overarching spatial planning policy for the whole of the Highland area.

It should be noted that a new Local Development Plan (LDP) is being prepared for release in 2027, where it will replace all current LDPs including the HwLDP, Inner Moray Firth LDP, Caithness and Sutherland LDP, and the West Highland and Islands LDP. The work for the new plan includes the preparation of an Evidence Report in early 2025 and a subsequent Gate Check, with the Proposed Plan stage in 2026[1].

The most relevant policies to this assessment are Policy 28 (Sustainable Design), Policy 29 (Design Quality and Placemaking), Policy 30 (Physical Constraints), Policy 36 (Development in the wider countryside), Policy 55 (Peat and Soils), Policy 56 (Travel), Policy 57 (Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage), Policy 58 (Protected Species), Policy 69 (Landscape), and Policy 64 (Flood Risk).

2.1.1 Policy 28: Sustainable Design

This policy states that development proposals should promote and enhance the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of local people, demonstrating compatibility with the following Supplementary Guidance: Physical Constraints on Development, and Sustainable Design Guide.

Proposals will be assessed on the extent to which they:

- Are compatible with public service provision;
- Are accessible by public transport;
- Make use of brownfield sites;
- Minimise waste generation;
- Impact on individual and community residential amenity;
- Impact on non-renewable resources; and
- Contribute to the economic and social development of the community.

[1] The Highland Council (2024) *Highland Local Development Plan* [online] Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/development_plans/1101/highland_local_development_plan_hldp (Accessed 17/07/2024).

All developments must comply with greenhouse gas emissions requirements of the Sustainable Design Guide.

2.1.2 Policy 29: Design Quality and Placemaking

Under Policy 29, the design of new developments is required to *"make a positive contribution to the architectural and visual quality of the place in which it is located, where appropriate",* as well demonstrating *"sensitivity and respect towards the local distinctiveness of the landscape"* within the design of a development.

2.1.3 Policy 30: Physical Constraints

This policy states that development proposals should consider constraints as set out in Physical Constraints Supplementary Guidance. Where a proposed development is affected by any of the constraints detailed within the guidance, developers must demonstrate compatibility with the constraint or outline appropriate mitigation measures to be provided.

2.1.4 Policy 36: Development in the Wider Countryside

This policy states that renewable energy development proposals will be assessed against the Councils Renewable Energy Policies, the non-statutory Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and the Onshore Wind Energy: Supplementary Guidance, where applicable.

2.1.5 Policy 55: Peat and Soils

Policy 55 details that development proposals should be able to demonstrate how they have avoided unnecessary disturbance, degradation or erosion of peat and soils. Unacceptable impacts on peat will need to be outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of the development. If development on peat is unavoidable, then a Peatland Management Plan is likely to be required, clearly demonstrating how impacts have been mitigated.

2.1.6 Policy 56: Travel

Proposals which generate an increase in travel, will be required to include information to sufficiently identify any likely on-site and off-site implications on travel. The proposal should also ensure the following:

- Walking and cycling routes are maximised;
- The design is safe and convenient;
- Appropriate enhancement measures are implemented where necessary; and
- An appropriate level of parking provision.

Potential bus provisions and level crossings will be protecting from development.

2.1.7 Policy 57: Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage

This policy states that development proposals will be assessed with regards to heritage by considering the level of impact on such sites designated at local, national and international levels for their type, importance and setting.

- Local/regional importance – developments will be allowed if it is demonstrated that there will be no impact on the natural environment, amenity, and heritage resource.
- National importance – developments will be allowed if it can be shown not to compromise the natural environment, amenity, and heritage resource. Where there are significant affects, these must be clearly outweighed by social or economic benefits of national importance.

- International importance – Developments likely to have a significant effect on a site, either alone or cumulatively, will be subject to an appropriate assessment.

2.1.8 Policy 58: Protected Species

This proposal states that development proposal should avoid adverse effects, individually and/or cumulatively, on European Protected Species, priority protected bird species and protected bird species, or on other protected animals and plants where the development is required for preserving public health or public safety. Development proposals should avoid adverse disturbance, including cumulatively, to badgers and badger setts, protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 (as amended by the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004. Where there is good reason to believe that a protected species may be present on site or may be affected by a proposed development, the Council will require a survey to be carried out to establish any such presence and if necessary, a mitigation plan to avoid or minimise any impacts on the species, before determining the application.

2.1.9 Policy 61: Landscape

Policy 61 details that development proposals should integrate well within the surrounding landscape, i.e., reflecting the landscape character, including the consideration of scale, pattern and materials. The potential for the generation of cumulative impacts should also be considered within the design of development proposals Furthermore, the policy states that the Council encourages incorporating landscape enhancements into development design, particularly in those developments situated within deteriorated landscapes that have lost distinctive sense of place.

In assessing the Proposed Development against this policy, the Council will take into account Landscape Character Assessments, Landscape Capacity Studies and relevant Supplementary Guidance such as 'Sustainable Design'.

2.1.10 Policy 64: Flood Risk

Policy 64 states that development proposals should avoid areas susceptible to flooding and promote sustainable flood management.

Development proposals within or bordering medium to high flood risk areas, need to demonstrate compliance with SPP through the submission of suitable information which may take the form of a Flood Risk Assessment.

Developments should not compromise the objectives of the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC).

Where flood management measures are required, natural methods such as restoration of floodplains, wetlands and water bodies should be incorporated, or adequate justification should be provided as to why they are impracticable.

2.2 National Planning Framework (4th Iteration)

The NPF4 was adopted on the 13th February 2023, setting out strategies and policies to guide development within Scotland. The most relevant policies for this assessment are Policy 5 (Soils) and Policy 11 (Energy), Policy 5 (Soils) seeks to protect carbon-rich soils, restore peatlands and minimise disturbance to soils from development. Of note is that Policy 5 is supportive of the use of prime agricultural land provided it is for essential infrastructure, there is a specific locational need, and no other suitable site is available. Likewise, Policy 11 (Energy) is supportive of energy storage and enabling works, such as grid transmission and distribution infrastructure developments. Policy 11 also states in paragraph e) ii recognises that significant landscape and visual impacts *are "to be expected"*

for some types of renewable energy development and that these will generally be considered as acceptable so long as *"impacts are localised and/or design mitigation has been applied".*

Other NPF4 policies relevant to this assessment include Policy 3 (Biodiversity), Policy 4 (Natural Places), Policy 6 (Forestry, Woodland and Trees), Policy 7 (Historic Assets and Places and Policy 22 (Flood Risk and Water management).

2.2.1 Policy 3: Biodiversity

The Policy Intent for Policy 3 is *"to protect biodiversity, reverse biodiversity loss, deliver positive effects from development and strengthen nature networks"*.

Policy 3 requires proposals to contribute to the enhancement of biodiversity through development and to also, where possible, integrate nature-based solutions. For proposals of national or major scale, or for development which requires an EIA, support will only be granted where it is demonstrated that *"the proposal will conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity, including nature networks so they are in a demonstrably <u>better state</u> than without intervention"* (emphasis added).

The policy sets out the following criteria which development proposals of national or major scale, or which require EIA, are required to illustrate:

i. "the proposal is based on an understanding of the existing characteristics of the site and its local, regional and national ecological context prior to development, including the presence of any irreplaceable habitats;

ii. wherever feasible, nature-based solutions have been integrated and made best use of;

iii. an assessment of potential negative effects which should be fully mitigated in line with the mitigation hierarchy prior to identifying enhancements;

iv. significant biodiversity enhancements are provided, in addition to any proposed mitigation. This should include nature networks, linking to and strengthening habitat connectivity within and beyond the development, secured within a reasonable timescale and with reasonable certainty. Management arrangements for their long-term retention and monitoring should be included, wherever appropriate; and

v. local community benefits of the biodiversity and/or nature networks have been considered".

Policy 3 does not however set any specific targets or offer advice on what constitutes as acceptable biodiversity gain or *"significant enhancements",* instead it is stated that *"best practice assessment methods should be used".* Guidance is undoubtedly required on this matter and is expected from the Scottish Government in Autumn 2023. However, until that point where a methodology is proposed/accepted there is likely to be uncertainty around how biodiversity gain is approached, and the assessment of the matter will be one left down to the judgement of the decision maker.

2.2.2 Policy 4: Natural Places

The Policy Intent for Policy 4 is *"to protect, restore and enhance natural assets making best use of nature-based solutions"* and the Policy Outcomes are that natural places are *"protected and restored"* and natural assets are *"managed in a sustainable way that maintains and grows their essential benefits and services"*.

Policy 4a) underlines how development proposals which will unacceptably impact the natural environment will not be supported.

With regards to nationally important designations, development proposals should not compromise the overall integrity or objectives of said areas or any significant adverse effects must be clearly

outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of national importance (policy 4c)). With regards to significant adverse effects on local designations, development proposals should not compromise the integrity of said area or the qualities for which it has been identified. If they do, for local designations, the social, environmental or economic benefits of the proposal must be of "*at least local importance"* (Policy 4d)).

Policy 4 states that *"the precautionary principle will be applied in accordance with relevant legislation and Scottish Government guidance"* and explains how if adverse effects on species protected by legislation occur, proposals will not be supported unless they meet the relevant statutory tests.

2.2.3 Policy 6: Forestry, Woodland and Trees

The Policy Intent of Policy 6 is "*to protect and expand forests, woodland and trees".*

Policy 6 states that development proposals will not be supported where there will be:

i. *"Any loss of ancient woodlands, ancient and veteran trees, or adverse impact on their ecological condition;*
ii. *Adverse impacts on native woodlands, hedgerows and individual trees of high biodiversity value, or identified for protection in the Forestry and Woodland Strategy;*
iii. *Fragmenting or severing woodland habitats, unless appropriate mitigation measures are identified and implemented in line with the mitigation hierarchy;*
iv. *Conflict with Restocking Direction, Remedial Notice or Registered Notice to Comply issued by Scottish Forestry."*

The policy demonstrates how proposals which include woodland removal will not be supported unless they *"will achieve significant and clearly defined additional public benefits in accordance with relevant Scottish Government policy on woodland removal"* and, furthermore, highlights the likelihood of compensatory planting to be required for proposals where woodland is removed.

2.2.4 Policy 7: Historic Assets and Places

The Policy Intent of Policy 7 is *"to protect and enhance historic environment assets and places, and to enable positive change as a catalyst for the regeneration of places"* and the first of the three Policy Outcomes is that *"the historic environment is valued, protected, and enhanced, supporting the transition to net zero and ensuring assets are resilient to current and future impacts of climate change".*

Part a) of Policy 7 is as follows:

"Development proposals with a potentially significant impact on historic assets or places will be accompanied by an assessment which is based on an understanding of the cultural significance of the historic asset and/or place. The assessment should identify the likely visual or physical impact of any proposals for change, including cumulative effects and provide a sound basis for managing the impacts of change".

With regards to proposals which affect conservation areas, development will only be supported where the character and appearance of the conservation area and its setting is preserved or enhanced.

Development proposals affecting scheduled monuments will only be supported where direct impacts and significant adverse impacts on the integrity of its setting are avoided, or, where exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated and effects are minimised.

Policy 7 requires, where feasible, for non-designated historic environment assets and their settings to be protected and preserved in situ.

Developers must provide an evaluation of any potential non-designated buried archaeological early on in proposal, and where impacts cannot be avoided, they should be minimised.

2.2.5 Policy 22: Flood Risk and Water Management

The intent of Policy 22 is to *"strengthen resilience to flood risk by promoting avoidance as a first principal and reducing the vulnerability of existing and future development to flooding"*. This Policy aims to strengthen resilience to the risks posed by current and future flood risk, use water resources in a sustainable way, and to use natural flood risk management techniques.

Policy 22 states the following:

c) "Development proposals will:

i. not increase the risk of surface water flooding to others, or itself be at risk.

ii. manage all rain and surface water through sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS), which should form part of and integrate with proposed existing blue-green infrastructure. All proposals should presume no surface water connection to the combined sewer.

iii. seek to minimise the area of impermeable surface.

e) Development proposals which create, expand or enhance opportunities for natural flood risk management, including blue and green infrastructure, will be supported."

2.3 The Electricity Act (1989)

In August 2020, the Scottish Government set out its position on electrical 'storage' and the appropriate consenting regime for decision making, noting the respective roles of the Town and Country Planning Act (Scotland) and the Electricity Act. The Scottish Government considers that a battery installation generates electricity and is therefore to be treated as a generating station. As a result, a battery installation should be treated as any other generating station for the purposes of a Section 36 consent under the Electricity Act.

Therefore, as it has a capacity to generate over 50 MW, the Proposed Development requires consent from the Scottish Ministers under the Electricity Act. In such cases the Planning Authority is a statutory consultee in the development management process and procedures.

Schedule 9 sub-paragraph 3 (1) of the Electricity Act advises that a developer:

(a) "shall have regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty, of conserving flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest and of protecting sites, buildings and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest; and

(b) shall do what he reasonably can to mitigate any effect which the proposals would have on the natural beauty of the countryside or on any such flora, fauna, features, sites, buildings or objects."

Under sub-paragraph 3(2), in considering proposals, the Scottish Ministers are to have regard to:

(a) "the desirability of the matters mentioned in paragraph (a) of sub - paragraph (1) above; and

(b) the extent to which the person by whom the proposals were formulated has complied with his duty under paragraph (b) of the sub-paragraph."

The provisions of Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act require to be considered by the Scottish Ministers in their determination of the Application. They set out a range of environmental matters to which regard must be had. The Developer must assess and, if required, mitigate the effects of the Proposed Development on environmental matters.

2.4 The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended)

The principal planning statute in Scotland is the Planning Act (Scotland). Section 57(2) of the Planning Act (Scotland) provides:

"On granting or varying a consent under section 36 or 37 of the Electricity Act 1989, the Scottish Ministers may give a direction for planning permission to be deemed to be granted, subject to any conditions (if any) as may be specified in the direction".

Section 25 of the Planning Act states that:

"Where, in making any determination under the planning Acts, regard is to be had to the development plan, the determination is, unless material considerations indicate otherwise-

(a) To be made in accordance with that plan…".

Section 57(2) of the Planning Act makes no reference to the provisions of Section 25 which requires regard to be had to the provisions of the Development Plan. The Courts have also confirmed that Section 57(3) does not operate so as to apply Section 25 to a decision, to make a direction to grant deemed planning permission pursuant to Section 57(2)17.

Accordingly, the Scottish Ministers will determine this Section 36 Application having regard to the statutory duties in Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act, so far as relevant, and any other relevant material considerations, one of which will be relevant aspects of the statutory Development Plan.

3 Methodology

3.1 Overview

This section sets out the methodology used to search for potential, feasible, and economically viable sites for a BESS development. Section 3.2 details the search area used for this Assessment. This is followed by the criteria used to establish what a potential site would need to consider to be a feasible option. Section 3.3 defines the search area within which the criteria set out in Section 3.2 will be used. Following on from this, Section 4 identifies potential sites and assesses how suitable they are for a BESS development.

3.2 Search Parameters

There are a number of aspects to be considered when identifying a potential alternative site. One of the key parameters to consider within this Assessment is agricultural land classification to determine if there is a suitable alternative site which does not use any prime agricultural land. Another key constraint when identifying alternative suitable sites for this Assessment, is the proximity of a site to the Beauly Substation, which holds the grid connection point for the Proposed Development. It is imperative for BESS infrastructure, such as the Proposed Development, to be situated in close proximity to the grid connection point. Lengthy transmission cables result in increased transmission losses (energy lost as heat through the cables) and significant increases in cable costs; this results in a more costly electricity grid to operate, with additional costs ultimately passed on to the consumer. Furthermore, lengthy transmission cables also result in greater environmental impacts.

Further search parameters considered within this Assessment include the following:

- Size, shape and topography of the land. BESS developments are relatively compact and do not require to be located on large areas of land to be operational. The Applicant proposed a BESS development area of approximately 3.4 ha;
- Environmental factors;
    - Landscape setting and value;
    - Residential noise and visual amenity;
    - Ecological and ornithological value;
    - Opportunities for biodiversity and landscape enhancements;
    - Forestry and woodlands;
    - Cultural heritage and archaeological value;
    - Flood risk category;
    - Drainage requirements; and
    - Access requirements.
- Nearby developments, such as renewables or residential developments;
- Existing infrastructure, such as underground or overhead cables;
- Land ownership negotiations; and
- Local Development Plan (LDP) allocations, such as for economic or residential development.

Each potential site has been given a RAG rating following the interpretation of their constraints, as per Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 RAG ratings

RAG rank	Interpretation
	Site has significant constraints
	Site has constraints which could be overcome by mitigation and/or design measures
	Site is strongly suitable

3.3 Search Area

In order for a BESS to support network grid stability, as well as help manage the ebbs and flows of renewable energy supply and electricity demand, it requires a connection to the national grid. However, securing a grid connection in the UK is currently very challenging due to the highly constrained national grid network. A BESS development requires both an import and export connection to operate effectively on the grid network.

Furthermore, potential sites are required to be situated within a certain distance from the point of connection for the project to be feasible - greater cable distances result in transmission loss and significant increase in cable costs. As a result, a 2 km radius is employed to identify potential sites around a substation.

The Applicant has accepted a grid connection from SSEN at Beauly Substation as there is capacity at this grid connection point to support grid stabilising infrastructure. Both the LDP and NPF4 offer support for renewable energy and battery energy storage. As such, it is not deemed necessary to explore further grid connection points beyond the secured connection point at Beauly Substation. Figure 3.1 shows the location of Beauly Substation, including a 2 km search area around it.

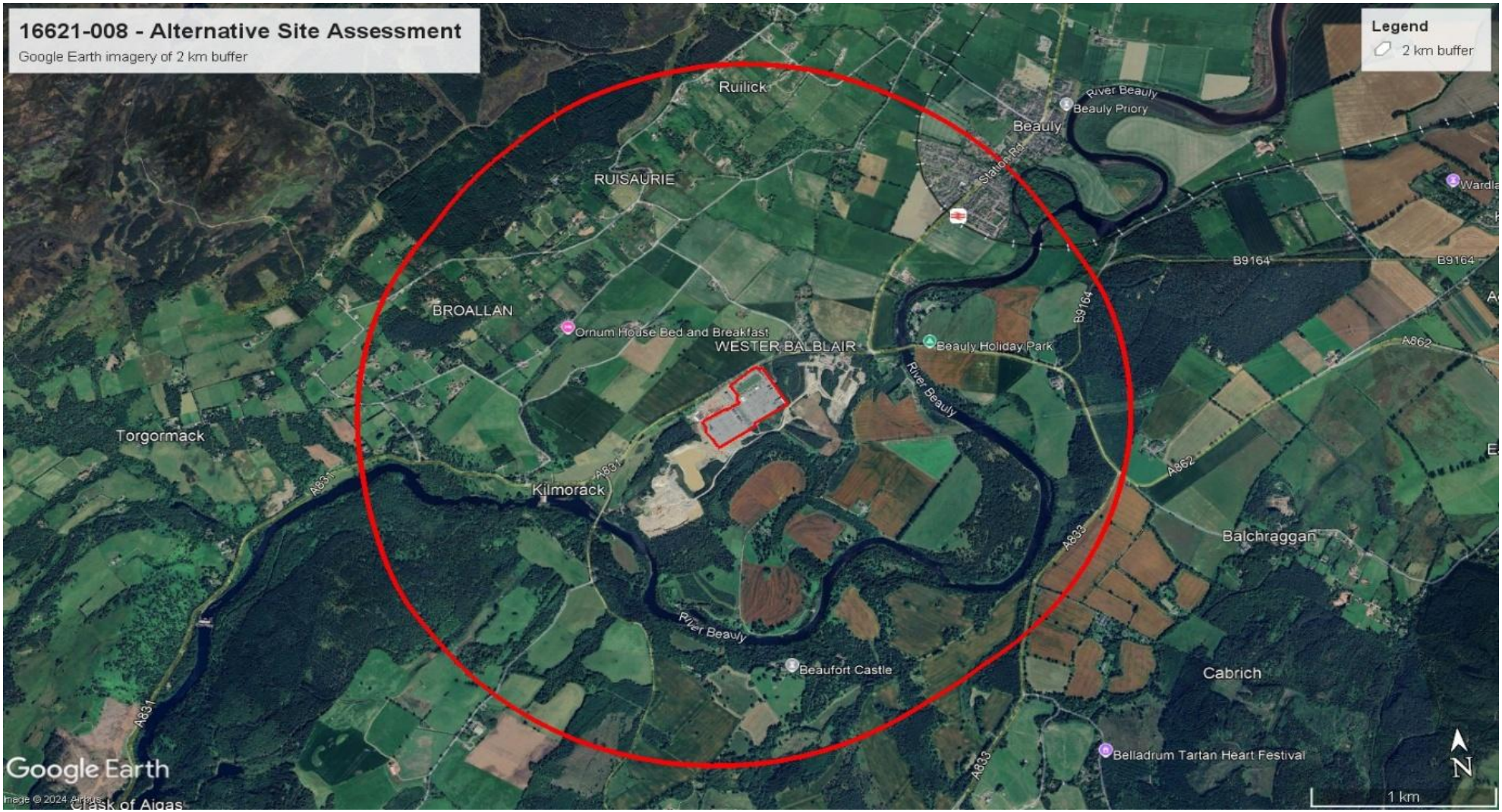

Figure 3.1 Google Earth imagery outlining the 2 km search area from Beauly Substation

4 Assessment of Alternative Sites

4.1 Planning and Environmental Constraints

The environmental constraints as well as the locations of the proposed sites can be found in Appendix B, Constraints Map. Within 2 km of the substation, there is a Garden and National Landscape, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Areas (SPA), and Special Area of Conservation (SAC), as well as prime agricultural land. There is a large amount of Ancient Woodlands, with a few cultural heritage assets in the form of Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments. The town of Beauly falls within the 2 km area of search, with further residential dwellings and holiday parks also present. While not shown in Appendix B, Constraints Map, the area has steep topography to the north and west.

4.2 Alternative Sites

After a review of the land that lies within the 2 km buffer of Beauly Substation, a long list of 16 sites were identified for further consideration, as shown in Figure 4.1. Sites G, H and I were then excluded from further analysis due to their location within the boundary for a potential upcoming planning application outlined in amber (see Scoping Request ref. 24/02655/SCOP) for the proposed Fanellan Substation and Converter.

The location of the 16 sites can be shown in Figure 4.1 below.

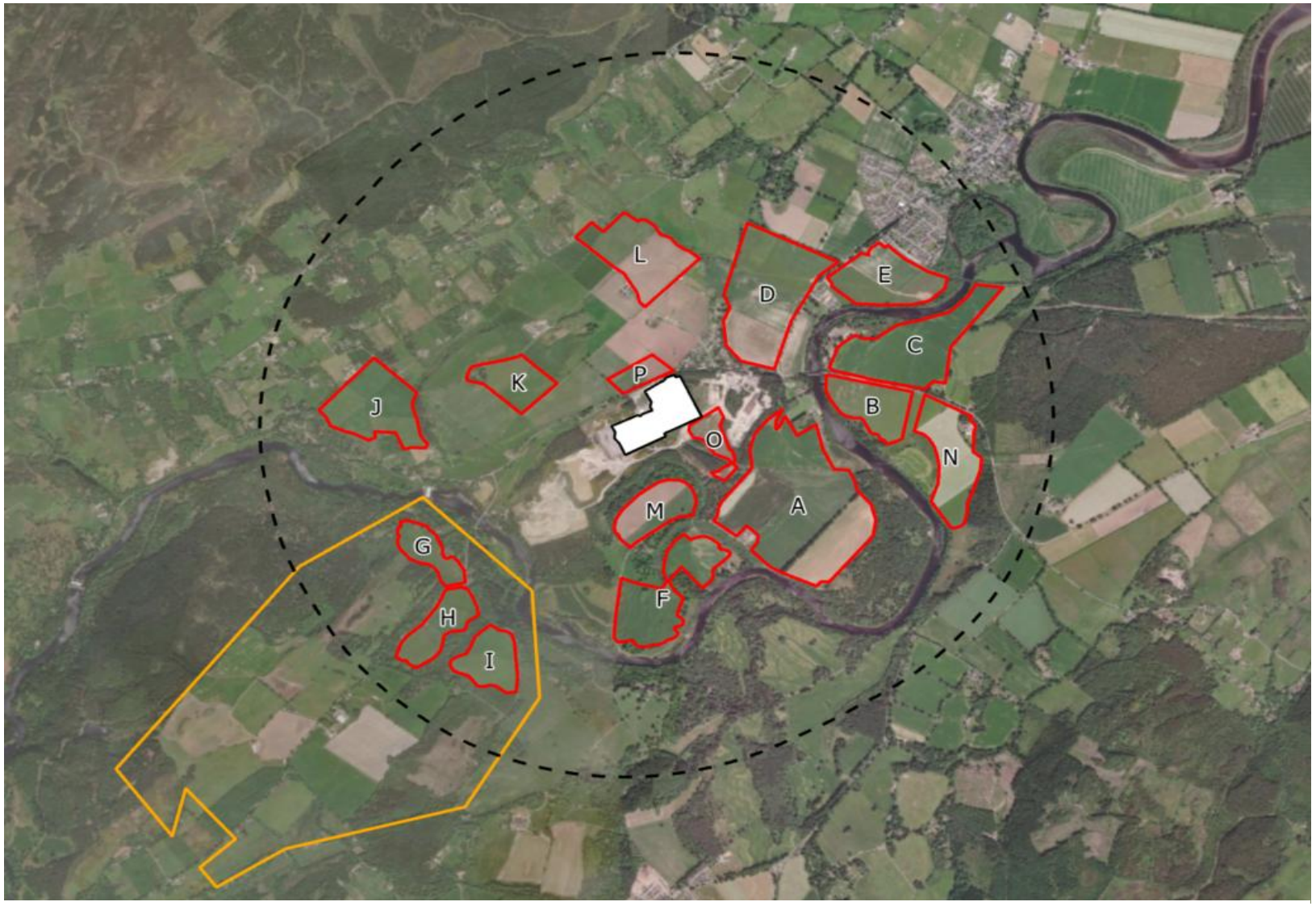

Figure 4.1 Potential sites for a BESS development

4.2.1 Potential Site A

Table 4.1 Site A

Criteria	Description
Existing and surrounding land use	Approximately 56.5 Ha in size, and 0.39 km from Beauly Substation, with residential buildings bordering the site to the southwest and northeast. The site has an Overhead Line (OHL) running through the boundary indicating that the setting of the site is already influenced by the presence of electricity infrastructure.
Visual impacts and residential proximity	There are nearby residential buildings bordering the site to the southwest and northeast. The building bordering the west of the site, Groam Farmhouse, is advertised as a holiday home, with a further holiday accommodation, River Beauly Lodge, approximately 159.6 m west of the site. The Lovat Bridge to Black Bridge Core Path borders the site boundary along the potential access road, suggesting further potential screening issues.
Planning applications	There is a planning application, 24/01900/FUL, that was submitted to The Highland Council (THC) in May 2024 to convert the existing steading to form five dwellings, the outcome of which was still pending at the time of writing. Potential additional onsite infrastructure includes a proposed 400 kV OHL that stretches between Beauly, Blackhillock, New Deer and Peterhead, approximately 194 km in length (ref. 24/03064/SCOP), for which a Scoping Opinion request was submitted in July 2024.
Agricultural land	Predominately Class 2 but also contains 3.1, 3.2 and 4.2 agricultural land, but is otherwise classed as prime agricultural land.
Ecological designations	The site borders Ancient Woodland to the east and west, with the Beauly Firth Site of SSSI, and Inner Moray Firth RAMSAR and SPA approximately 1.2 km to the northeast.
Landscape designations	No designated landscapes are within or bordering the site. The Landscape character Type (LCT) for this site is 'Enclosed Farmland'.
Cultural heritage designations	Beaufort Castle Garden and Designated Landscape is located approximately 66 m across the River Beauly to the south. Residential dwellings bordering the site are within the Lovat Estate, Groam of Annat. This is an area of historic significance as outlined on the Highland Historic Environment Record, due the presence of a Ring Ditch of an unassigned period[2].
Flooding	According to SEPA, the site contains pockets of high likelihood surface water flooding.
Access	Site access is poor due to narrow lanes, with an additional access route identified as a private road.

[2] The Highland Council (2024) *Highland Historic Environment Record* [online] Available at: https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG47476#:~:text=What%20may%20be%20a%20ring-ditch%20has%20been%20recorded%20as%20cropmarks (Accessed 07/10/2024)

Assessment	
	Site A is not more preferable for accommodating the Proposed Development as it consists of Prime Agricultural Land and most notably a single lane access road that would require upgrading to be suitable for construction traffic. This area of land was also not available to the Applicant when searching for potential sites. If the residential application gets approved, then there would be a greater number of residential properties in close proximity for which their amenity would likely be adversely impacted due to the close proximity. As the site is quite open, there would be a requirement for substantial screening which would take time to mature. The site borders the Lovat Bridge to Black Bridge Core Path, contributing to the screening issues as well as potentially impacting and/or requiring mitigation for traffic during the construction period. Site A is rated poorly for the Proposed Development due to the proximity to residential areas, Core Paths, the poor access opportunities to the site and the historical significance of the area. For these reasons, site A was excluded from further consideration.
RAG rating	

4.2.2 Potential Site B

Table 4.2 Site B

Criteria	Description
Existing and surrounding land use	Site B is agricultural land situated off the A862, east of the River Beauly, approximately 0.82 km from Beauly Substation and 12.28 Ha in size. There is an OHL running south of the site indicating that the setting of the site is already influenced by the presence of electricity infrastructure.
Visual impacts and residential proximity	There is limited screening from the road and the site is directly opposite the Lovat Bridge Caravan Park, consisting of 47 holiday touring caravan pitches and 40 camping site pitches. The caravan park advertises to be open all year round. The Lovat Bridge to Black Bridge Core Path runs to the south on the opposite side of the River Beauly, but gaps in perimeter planting suggest the need for further screening. Additionally, the site would be visible from viewpoints on high ground at Ruilick, approximately 2.2 km northwest, and from the path at Altyre, approximately 1.2 km northwest. In terms of residential areas, there are six residential buildings directly across the River Beauly, including the Corffhouse, Lovat Bridge Listed Building, approximately 0.1 km west.
Planning applications	No planning applications submitted within the site.
Agricultural land	The agricultural land classification according to the Scottish government mapping tool is Class 2 prime agricultural land.
Ecological designations	There is a parcel of Ancient Woodland to the south. With the Beauly Firth (SSSI), and Inner Moray Firth RAMSAR and Special Protection Area (SPA) approximately 1.8 km north of the site.
Landscape designations	No designated landscapes are within or bordering the site. The LCT for this site is 'Farmed River Plains'.
Cultural heritage designations	Category A (Lovat Bridge) and Category B (Corffhouse, Lovat Bridge) listed buildings are located approximately 0.1 km to the west and Category B (Dunballoch) is located approximately 0.1 km to the northeast. Otherwise, there are no listed buildings, conservation areas, scheduled monuments, or historic Gardens & Designated Landscapes directly on the site.
Flooding	Site B has pockets of high likelihood surface water flooding and medium likelihood river flooding within the site.
Access	Adjacent to the A862 so has suitable road infrastructure, however a new formal access would be required.
Assessment	

	Site B is not more preferable for accommodating the Proposed Development as it consists of prime agricultural land, has poor existing screening and would require substantial vegetation planting due to views from Ruilick and Altyre, as well as the Core Path, and the holiday accommodation to the north. The noise generated from the Proposed Development would be unacceptable on the Caravan Park, with further significant impacts identified for traffic during construction. As such, the location of the Caravan Park poses considerable issues for a BESS development at the site. There are six existing residential buildings across the River Beauly, approximately 0.1 km west, including the Corffhouse, Lovat Bridge Listed Building which could be negatively impacted in terms of visual amenity in the winter months when existing vegetation foliage is reduced. Site B is rated poorly for accommodating the Proposed Development due to the proximity to the road and residential areas, holiday accommodation, Core Paths, and the high likelihood of river flooding, as well as being more open from longer views. If brought forward, a development in this location would cause too large an impact upon the immediate and wider setting and as such is not considered further.
RAG rating	

4.2.3 Potential Site C

Table 4.3 Site C

Criteria	Description
Existing and surrounding land use	Site C is agricultural land approximately 0.87 km from Beauly Substation and 25.92 Ha in size. The site extends from the A862 from the south to the town of Beauly, approximately 0.29 km north. The River Beauly partly borders the site.
Visual impacts and residential proximity	The site has poor existing screening to the A862 and to the Lovat Bridge Caravan Park which borders the site, and as a result presents an unrealistic opportunity for a BESS development within the site. The site is relatively flat with views of higher land, such as Ruisaurie to the northwest.
Planning applications	There are no planning applications within the site.
Agricultural Land	The agricultural land classification according to the Scottish government mapping tool is Class 2 and 3.1, and so is prime agricultural land.
Ecological designations	This site borders Ancient Woodland and has the Beauly Firth SSSI, and Inner Moray Firth RAMSAR and SPA approximately 33 m to the north.
Landscape designations	No designated landscapes are within or bordering the site. The LCT for this site is 'Farmed River Plains'.
Cultural heritage designations	Bordering the southern corner of the site is a Category B listed building, Dunballoch. Otherwise, there are no listed buildings, conservation areas, scheduled monuments, or historic Gardens & Designated Landscapes directly on the site.
Flooding	According to SEPA, the site is in an area of high likelihood of river flooding.
Access	The site is adjacent to the A862 with an access gate on the access road to the caravan park. There is an unnamed road bordering the west boundary of the site.
Assessment	
	Site C is not more preferable for accommodating the Proposed Development as it consists of prime agricultural land, is within close proximity to the Caravan Park at the southern end, as well as being in closer proximity to Beauly and ecological designations to the northern end. Most notably, the site is within a high likelihood of river flooding. Site C is rated poorly for the Proposed Development primarily due to the proximity of the Caravan Park, residential areas, ecological designations and the high likelihood of river flooding. If brought forward, a development in this location would cause too large an impact upon the immediate and wider setting and as such is not considered further.
RAG rating	

4.2.4 Potential Site D

Table 4.4 Site D

Criteria	Description
Existing and surrounding land use	Site D is agricultural land, approximately 0.43 km from the Beauly Substation and 32.76 Ha in size. The site borders an 'A road' with the land to the northwest of the site steeping upwards. The site is situated in between residential areas.
Visual impacts and residential proximity	The site has poor screening due to the close proximity to the town of Beauly and a further residential area bordering the site to the west. There are no hedgerows along the A862 with only a few mature trees, suggesting further mitigation planting will be required. The end of the Lovat Bridge to Black Bridge Core Path is visible from the southernmost corner of the site. There is also a bus stop at the southern corner of the site.
Planning applications	There is one planning application that is within the site according to THC's planning portal page, an erection of a conservatory, which was approved in 2002 (the address on the application portal does not fall within the site boundary).
Agricultural Land	The agricultural land classification according to the Scottish government mapping tool is Class 2 and 3.1, so is prime agricultural land.
Ecological designations	The Beauly Firth SSSI, and Inner Moray Firth RAMSAR and SPA are approximately 0.7 km to the northeast.
Landscape designations	No designated landscapes are within or bordering the site. The LCT for this site is 'Farmed River Plains'.
Cultural heritage designations	The site is approximately 0.13 km north from Corff House fort, a scheduled monument. Otherwise, there are no listed buildings, conservation areas, scheduled monuments, or historic Gardens & Designated Landscapes directly on the site.
Flooding	According to SEPA, there are small pockets of high likelihood surface water flooding around the water course (alt a' Ghaireil) running through the site.
Access	Suitable road infrastructure to the site along the A862 with existing access gates.
Assessment	
	Site D is not preferable for accommodating the Proposed Development as it consists of prime agricultural land as well as being situated in close proximity to the Beauly and Wester Balblair residential areas with a lack of existing screening, suggesting noise and visual impacts at this site would be considered unacceptable. The site also has a high likelihood of surface water flooding which would require extensive mitigation to ensure that this risk would not be exacerbated by the Proposed Development. This area of land was also not available to the Applicant when searching for potential sites.

	Site D is rated poorly for the Proposed Development due to the proximity to residential areas, poor screening and surface water flooding. These reasons together suggested the site would require substantial mitigation and as a result, site D was excluded from further consideration.
RAG rating	

4.2.5 Potential Site E

Table 4.5 Site E

Criteria	Description
Existing and surrounding land use	Site E is agricultural land approximately 1.13 km from Beauly Substation and 16.33 ha in size. The site borders the town of Beauly via the train track. The River Beauly is to the south of the site. Agricultural buildings are located off the western border. The site is adjacent to an A road.
Visual impacts and residential proximity	The site has poor screening compounded by its proximity to the town of Beauly, as well as Teawig Farm Cottages bordering the site to the west. There are no hedgerows along the A862 with a few mature trees, suggesting further mitigation planting will be required. Potential views would be expected from the Lovat bridge caravan park during the winter months when vegetation foliage is low. There will be viewpoints from the Beauly train station car park.
Planning applications	There are no planning applications within the site.
Agricultural Land	The agricultural land classification according to the Scottish government mapping tool is Class 2, so is prime agricultural land.
Ecological designations	The Beauly Firth SSSI, and Inner Moray Firth RAMSAR and SPA borders the site to the east.
Landscape designations	No designated landscapes are within or bordering the site. The LCT for this site is 'Farmed River Plains'.
Cultural heritage designations	There are no listed buildings, conservation areas, scheduled monuments, or historic Gardens & Designated Landscapes directly on or bordering the site.
Flooding	According to SEPA, the site has high likelihood of river flooding, with a parcel of surface water flooding at the centre of the site.
Access	Adjacent to the A862 with an existing access gate.
Assessment	
	Site E is not preferable for accommodating the Proposed Development as it is situated adjacent to residential areas in Beauly suggesting mitigation for noise impacts would be difficult to achieve. The site is also situated on prime agricultural land, however, according to aerial imagery, may currently be used for sheep farming as opposed to arable purposes. The site benefits from some existing screening in the form of a railway line and trees along the northeastern boundary in between the site and Beauly, however additional screening may be required. . One of the key issues with site E is that it has a high likelihood of both river and surface water flooding and is within close proximity to ecological designations. As a result, extensive mitigation measures would be required. This

	area of land was also not available to the Applicant when searching for potential sites. Site E is therefore rated poorly to accommodate the Proposed Development due to the constraints of nearby residential areas, flood risk, and ecological designations. These reasons together suggested the site would require substantial mitigation and as a result, site E was excluded from further consideration.
RAG rating	

4.2.6 Potential Site F

Table 4.6 Site F

Criteria	Description
Existing and surrounding land use	The site is in agricultural use with Ancient Woodland separating the two working fields, is located approximately 0.61 km to the south of Beauly Substation and is 20.34 ha in size. The site borders an unnamed road and has the River Beauly to the south and southwest.
Visual impacts and residential proximity	There are two residential dwellings including the River Beauly Lodge, an advertised luxury holiday let, that border the site. The Groam Farmhouse, a further advertised holiday accommodation is approximately 165 m northeast of the site. While approximately 1 km from the site, residential buildings including a Category B building are on the narrow access road to the site; mitigation and highways improvements would likely be needed during the construction phase. The Lovat Bridge to Black Bridge Core Path runs along the access road to the north, suggesting further mitigation screening is needed, as well as a traffic and transport assessment in order to avoid any impacts to the Core Path during construction.
Planning applications	The site falls within Scoping Opinion request 24/03064/SCOP for a 400 kV OHL submitted in July 2024.
Agricultural Land	The agricultural land classification according to the Scottish government mapping tool is Class 3.1, so is prime agricultural land.
Ecological designations	There is Ancient Woodland bordering the site to the north. The Beauly Firth SSSI, and Inner Moray Firth RAMSAR and SPA are approximately 2.1 km northeast of the site.
Landscape designations	No designated landscapes are within the site. The LCT for this site is 'Enclosed Farmland'.
Cultural heritage designations	Beaufort Castle Garden and Designated Landscape are located approximately 0.1 km to the south. There are no heritage assets, such as listed buildings, conservation areas, scheduled monuments, or historic Gardens & Designated Landscapes directly on the site.
Flooding	According to SEPA, the site has large pockets of high likelihood surface water and river flooding due to the River Beauly being approximately 66 m south and southwest of the site.
Access	Site access is poor due to narrow lanes, with an additional access route identified as a private road.
Assessment	

	Site F is not preferable for accommodating the Proposed Development as it consists of prime agricultural land which, according to aerial imagery, is currently being utilised for arable purposes. The site is within close proximity to holiday accommodation and a residential building, where mitigation for noise impacts would need to be considered as well as appropriate design to ensure the landscape character is not significantly affected. Access from the A862 would be via a private lane which would require significant improvement to be suitable for construction traffic. The site borders the Lovat Bridge to Black Bridge Core Path, contributing to the screening issues as well as potentially impacting and/or requiring mitigation for traffic during the construction period. The site has high likelihood of river and surface water flooding and is just 0.1 km to the north of Beaufort Castle Garden and Designated Landscape, thereby presenting significant screening issues / mitigation challenges. This area of land was also not available to the Applicant when searching for potential sites. Site F is rated poorly for the Proposed Development due to the constraints of nearby residential and holiday buildings, poor access, flood risk and screening issues to a designated landscape. These reasons together suggested the site would require substantial mitigation and as a result, site F was excluded from further consideration.
RAG rating	

4.2.7 Potential Site J

Table 4.7 Site J

Criteria	Description
Existing and surrounding land use	The site is in agricultural use with Ancient Woodland bordering the site to the southwest. It is approximately 0.97 km from the Beauly Substation and is 18.82 ha in size. There is an OHL that passes through the site to Beauly Substation indicating that the setting of the site is already influenced by the presence of electricity infrastructure.
Visual impacts and residential proximity	There is poor screening along the road, with the undulating topography of the site exacerbating this constraint in addition to the presence of numerous residential buildings to the north. The topography of this site is extensive enough that there would be no feasible mitigation measures to screen the site effectively within a reasonable period of time. As such, the openness of the site, including its topography, renders this site as unacceptable for a BESS development.
Planning applications	The site has previously been identified as a potential BESS site in planning applications to THC in 2020, 2021 and 2023. The status of the 2020 application (ref. 20/04849/PAN) is unknown with the case closed, however the latter application (ref. 21/03353/FUL) was refused in August 2022 due to the Proposal contradicting Policies 67, 28, and 29 of the Highland-wide Local Action Plan, specifically stating failure to demonstrate sensitive siting and high quality design. The 2023 application (ref. 23/03113/FUL) was also refused on the 17th December 2024 due to significant landscape and visual impacts and failing to comply with Policy 28 of the HwLDP.
Agricultural Land	The agricultural land classification according to the Scottish government mapping tool is Class 3.1, 4.1 and 4.2. The majority of the site however is 4.1 and 4.2 which is not prime agricultural land.
Ecological designations	Ancient woodland borders the site to the southwest. The Beauly Firth SSSI, and Inner Moray Firth RAMSAR and SPA are approximately 3 km east of the site.
Landscape designations	No designated landscapes are within or bordering the site. The LCT for this site is 'Open Farmed Sloped'.
Cultural heritage designations	There is a cluster of Category B listed buildings and a Category C listed building to the south of the site. These are as follows: • Kilmorack Steading, (LB7124), Category B – 0.11 km; • Kilmorack Manse, (LB7124), Category B – 0.13 km; • Graveyard, West Parish Church, Kilmorack, (LB7122), Category B – 0.16 km; • Kilmorack Gallery, Kilmorack, (LB7122), Category B – 0.18 km; and • Old Burial Ground, Kilmorack, (LB7123), Category C – 0.22 km. There are no listed buildings, conservation areas, scheduled monuments, or historic Gardens & Designated Landscapes directly on the site.
Flooding	According to SEPA, there is no likelihood of flooding within or bordering the site.

Access	Access to the site is via a narrow single lane road, though there are at least three existing passing places. There is an existing access gate, but no internal access road.
Assessment	
	Site J is not a preferable site for accommodating the Proposed Development as the site lacks existing screening, which is exacerbated by the topography which presents significant issues for a BESS development. According to the previous BESS application on the site, it is understood that it would be difficult to comply with the HwLDP. This area of land was also not available to the Applicant when searching for potential sites. Site J has an amber rating for the Proposed Development due to the topography and screening issues as well as the required design constraints to be applied. However, even with substantial screening mitigation due to the topography of the area, the site is considered too visible and as a result, site J was excluded from further consideration.
RAG rating	

4.2.8 Potential Site K

Table 4.8 Site K

Criteria	Description
Existing and surrounding land use	The site is located on top of a steep slope that exceeds 99 m in height above the Beauly Substation which is approximately 0.37 km away. The site is 9.8 Ha in size and there is an OHL directly to Beauly Substation crossing the boundary. The site has a steep sloping topography with an average gradient of over 10% incline. Significant civils works would be required to reprofile the site for development which would have landscape implications.
Visual impacts and residential proximity	The site has poor screening, with numerous residential buildings to the north. The closest residential area not bordering the site is the Ornum House Bed and Breakfast, approximately 324 m to the northwest. There are residential buildings in the most western corner of the site. There are no trees or hedgerows bordering the site along the road. The residential area to the northwest is on higher land and would have a view into the site. The topography of this site is extensive enough that there would be no feasible mitigation measures to screen the site. As such the area the site is located in with regard to topography is unacceptable for a BESS development.
Planning applications	There have been no planning applications within the Site. Planning applications 22/03536/PNO, erection of a replacement OHL, borders the site.
Agricultural Land	The agricultural land classification according to the Scottish government mapping tool is Class 3.2 and 4.1, so not prime agricultural land.
Ecological designations	There are no ecological designations within or bordering the site. The Beauly Firth SSSI, and Inner Moray Firth RAMSAR and SPA are approximately 2.3 km east of the site.
Landscape designations	There are no landscape designations within or bordering the site. The LCT for this site is 'Open Farmed Sloped'.
Cultural heritage designations	There are no listed buildings, conservation areas, scheduled monuments, or historic Gardens & Designated Landscapes directly on or bordering the site.
Flooding	According to SEPA, there is no likelihood of flooding within or bordering the site.
Access	Access to the site is via a narrow single lane road that has no existing passing places. There are access gates, but no internal access tracks.
Assessment	

	Site K is not preferable for accommodating the Proposed Development as it is in close proximity to residential areas. The site also lacks existing screening along the north, east and south boundaries. There is a steep topographical decline from north to south from approximately 99 m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) to approximately 59 m AOD, meaning the Site would be highly visible and not feasibly mitigated against. This area of land was also not available to the Applicant when searching for potential sites. Site K is rated poorly for the Proposed Development due to the constraints of nearby residential areas, poor screening and poor access. These reasons together suggested the site would be difficult to mitigate against and as a result, site K was excluded from further consideration.
RAG rating	

4.2.9 Potential Site L

Table 4.9 Site L

Criteria	Description
Existing and surrounding land use	Site L is approximately 0.45 km from the Beauly Substation and is 18.75 Ha in size. There is an OHL connecting to Beauly Substation that passes through the most eastern corner of the Site indicating that the setting of the site is already influenced by the presence of electricity infrastructure. The site has steep topography and would require significant earth works for a BESS development to be constructed and made operational.
Visual impacts and residential proximity	The site borders a residential building to the north, with further residential buildings immediately to the northwest. These residential buildings would have viewpoints of the site due to the topography of the area, particularly along Drumindorsair road. There are limited hedgerows or trees along the boundary of the site. The site therefore has poor screening into it. The topography of this site is extensive enough that there would be no feasible mitigation measures to screen the site. As such the area the site is located in with regard to topography is unacceptable for a BESS development.
Planning applications	There have been no planning applications within the Site. Planning applications 04/01019/FULIN and 15/04465/FUL, border the site.
Agricultural Land	The agricultural land classification according to the Scottish government mapping tool is Class 3.2, so is not classed as prime agricultural land.
Ecological designations	There are no ecological designations within or bordering the site. The Beauly Firth SSSI, and Inner Moray Firth RAMSAR and SPA are approximately 1.3 km east of the site.
Landscape designations	There are no landscape designations within or bordering the site. The LCT for this site is 'Open Farmed Sloped'.
Cultural heritage designations	There are no listed buildings, conservation areas, scheduled monuments, or historic Gardens & Designated Landscapes directly on or bordering the site.
Flooding	According to SEPA, there is no likelihood of flooding within or bordering the site.
Access	The site does not adjoin an A road and is only accessible via single lanes. There are access gates, but no internal access tracks.
Assessment	

	Site L is not preferable for accommodating the Proposed Development as it is within close proximity to residential areas. The site also lacks existing screening and due to the topography of the area the site would be highly visible. This area of land was also not available to the Applicant when searching for potential sites. Site L is rated poorly for the Proposed Development due to the constraints of nearby residential areas, poor screening, and poor access. These reasons together suggested the site would be difficult to mitigate against and as a result, site L was excluded from further consideration.
RAG rating	

4.2.10 Potential Site M

Table 4.10 Site M

Criteria	Description
Existing and surrounding land use	Site M is an agricultural field, located approximately 0.25 km south of Beauly Substation and is 10.94 Ha in size. The site is surrounded by Ancient Woodland and borders an unnamed road. The site is within close proximity to the quarry and Beauly Substation suggesting any BESS development would not significantly affect the landscape character of the area.
Visual impacts and residential proximity	The area is well screened with Ancient Woodland surrounding the site, screening it from the Beauly Substation. There is however a residential building opposite the site to the south. While approximately 0.9 km from the site, residential buildings (including a Category B building) are located along the narrow access road to the site, suggesting potential mitigation, including highways improvements, may be needed during the construction phase. The Lovat Bridge to Black Bridge Core Path runs along the access road to the north, suggesting further mitigation screening may be needed, as well as a traffic and transport assessment in order to avoid any impacts to the Core Path during construction.
Planning applications	The site falls within an area covered by a Scoping Opinion request 24/03064/SCOP for a 400 kV OHL submitted in July 2024.
Agricultural land	The agricultural land classification according to the Scottish government mapping tool is Class 3.1 (Prime Agricultural Land).
Ecological designations	The site is surrounded by Ancient Woodland. The Beauly Firth SSSI, and Inner Moray Firth RAMSAR and SPA are approximately 2 km northeast of the site.
Landscape designations	There are no landscape designations within or bordering the site. The LCT for this site is 'Enclosed Farmland'.
Cultural heritage designations	There are no listed buildings, conservation areas, scheduled monuments, or historic Gardens & Designated Landscapes directly on or bordering the site, but access into the site would pass next to a listed building.
Flooding	According to SEPA, there is a high likelihood of river flooding surrounding the site with parcels of surface water flooding within the site.
Access	Site access through is poor due to narrow roads, with an additional access route identified as a private road.
Assessment	

	Site M is not preferable for accommodating the Proposed Development as it consists of prime agricultural land and is within close proximity to a residential building in an area otherwise distant to road noise. Access from the A862 would be via a private lane for which access rights may not be available and for which significant highways improvements would be expected to be required. The site borders the Lovat Bridge to Black Bridge Core Path, contributing to the screening issues as well as potentially impacting and/or requiring mitigation for traffic during the construction period. The site also falls within the scoping request for an OHL. This would mean incorporating an offset between the Proposed Development and OHL within the design which may not necessarily be possible to accommodate. This area of land was not available to the Applicant when searching for potential sites. Site M is rated poorly for the Proposed Development due to the constraints of the nearby residential building, the adjacent core path and poor access. These reasons together suggested the site would require substantial mitigation and as a result, site M was excluded from further consideration.
RAG Rating	

4.2.11 Potential Site N

Table 4.11 Site N

Criteria	Description
Existing and surrounding land use	Site N covers 18.51 Ha of primarily agricultural land at Dunballoch Farm, approximately 900 m to the south of the town of Beauly. The area immediately surrounding the site is predominantly rural in nature, including woodlands. The site gently slopes down from 16 m AOD in the east to 7 m AOD to the west of the site. Two Overhead Lines (OHLs), including pylons, traverse the Site from east to west, associated with the Beauly Substation, approximately 1.25 km to the west. This indicates that the site is already influenced by the presence of electricity infrastructure.
Visual impacts and residential proximity	The site has limited screening from the A862 for those travelling east. However, there is scope within the site to set the BESS equipment at sufficient distance from the A862 such that it would appear far less prominent in the landscape. The buildings in the northeast corner of the site are in agricultural use. An application for a visitor accommodation southeast of the site has been approved and as such noise and landscape mitigation measures would need to be considered to ensure that the Proposed Development will not be impacted. The site has existing vegetation to the east, south and west of the site that would act as an effective screening barrier to visual receptors, most notably road users and from longer views to the west. Furthermore, the existing farm building to the north ensures that the site would need less mitigation in the form of a planting scheme.
Planning applications	A planning application to THC on the 30th August 2021, 20/01783/PIP, for a visitor accommodation site, that lies southeast of the site, was approved. Mitigation measures for noise and landscape will need to be considered to ensure no unacceptable impacts.
Agricultural land	The agricultural land classification according to the Scottish government mapping tool is Class 2, prime agricultural land.
Ecological designations	There are parcels of Ancient Woodland to the east and south. The Beauly Firth SSSI, and Inner Moray Firth RAMSAR and SPA are approximately 0.8 km north of the site.
Landscape designations	There are no landscape designations within or bordering the site. The LCT for this site is 'Enclosed Farmland' and 'Farmed River Plains'.
Cultural heritage designations	There is a Category B listed building, Dunballoch (LB7811), approximately 67 m to the north. There are no listed buildings, conservation areas, scheduled monuments, or historic Gardens & Designated Landscapes directly on the site.
Flooding	According to SEPA, there is a likelihood of surface water flooding within the north part of the site and a parcel of surface water flooding in the middle of the site. There are no water bodies within the site. The River Beauly is to the south.
Access	Access to the site is available via the A862.

Assessment	
	Site N is considered a suitable site due to the existing infrastructure setting, distance from the Beauly substation and topography. Whilst there is potential for a future planning development to the south of the site, potential noise impacts can be mitigated against and existing woodland/vegetation offers effective screening. Due to the size of Site N, the Proposed Development can be micro-sited to the south of the site. The existing woodland/vegetation to the east, south and west of the site, together with the presence of farm buildings to the north, means that effective screening in addition to a well thought-out planting scheme. A BESS development site would be designed outside of any areas at risk of surface water flooding, by being located in the southern parcel of the site. Furthermore, site levelling and drainage design would be required to prevent any surface water flooding. This area of land was available to the Applicant when searching for potential sites. It was identified that a large portion of the site is underlain by Class 2 agricultural soils, however just small portion of the site would be required to host the Proposed Development. Further, the site is currently utilised for sheep grazing, as opposed to producing 'a wide range of crops' which is the capability of Class 2 soils. The current land use, sheep grazing, would naturally be able to continue within the rest of the site not up taken by the Proposed Development. NPF4 does not preclude renewable energy related development from taking place on prime agricultural land. In this instance in particular, a small area of agricultural land would be utilised for a period of 40 years before returning to agricultural use. Site N is rated highly for the Proposed Development due to visual screening being feasible without resulting in unacceptable visual impacts arising immediately post-construction. Due to the distant views, there are screening opportunities with the use of planting along the A862, as well as around the BESS compound itself, in combination with the existing back clothing of surrounding woodland. These measures would assist in ensuring that the BESS is assimilated into the landscape. The site can achieve good access, will not contribute to any flood risk, and would integrate into a site that is already influenced by the presence of electrical infrastructure. As a result, site N was considered to be a suitable site.
RAG Rating	

4.2.13 Potential Site O

Table 4.12 Site O

Criteria	Description
Existing and surrounding land use	Site O is 0.03 km south of Beauly Substation and has an OHL passing through the site. The site is 4.69 ha and has an unknown land-use but is within an industrial area. Quarry operations are immediately adjacent to the site. This suggests that a BESS development would not impact the immediate landscape setting due to the existing infrastructure.
Visual impacts and residential proximity	No visual impacts due to good screening from surrounding infrastructure and woodland. Cumulative noise impacts from the substation and quarry operations would need to be considered for the Wester Balblair residential area.
Planning applications	There are numerous planning applications within and surrounding the site including the Beauly substation. Most notably within the site is planning application 24/01548/FUL, a BESS site currently under consideration.
Agricultural Land	The agricultural land classification according to the Scottish government mapping tool is Class 888 (Urban).
Ecological constraints	The site has Ancient Woodland to the north, east and west. The Beauly Firth SSSI, and Inner Moray Firth RAMSAR and SPA are approximately 1.5 km northeast of the site.
Landscape designations	There are no landscape designations within or bordering the site. The LCT for this site is 'Enclosed Farmland'.
Cultural heritage designations	Corff House fort, a scheduled monument is present approximately 380 m to the east. There are no listed buildings, conservation areas, scheduled monuments, or historic Gardens & Designated Landscapes directly on the site.
Flooding	According to SEPA, there is a parcel of high likelihood surface water flooding within the site.
Access	It is assumed that site access would from the existing site excess that has been constructed for the Beauly Substation.
Assessment	

	Site O is a potential site for accommodating the Proposed Development as it is close to Beauly Substation, is not on prime agricultural land, it would have a limited impact on the landscape character of the immediate area, and it is well screened. However, this area of land is already being considered for a different BESS development and the land was not available to the Applicant at the time of search and therefore this site is not considered further.
RAG rating	

4.2.14 Potential Site P

Table 4.13 Site P

Criteria	Description
Existing and surrounding land use	Site P is a very open agricultural parcel of land, 4.09 ha in size and 18 m north of Beauly Substation. The topography is very steep, and an extensive cut and fill exercise would be required to facilitate a BESS development. The surrounding land use is a mix between rural, residential area, and industrial. The nearby presence of Beauly Substation suggests that a BESS development would not impact the immediate landscape setting due to existing infrastructure.
Visual impacts and residential proximity	The site would require substantial landscaping and screening for a BESS development to be constructed. Noise mitigation measures would be needed as the site is close to residential receptors and the substation, so cumulative noise impacts would need to be considered.
Planning applications	There have been no planning applications within the Site. Planning applications 22/03536/PNO, erection of a replacement OHL, borders the site.
Agricultural Land	The agricultural land classification according to the Scottish government mapping tool is Class 3.2, so is not prime agricultural land.
Ecological designations	There is Ancient Woodland to the south. The Beauly Firth SSSI, and Inner Moray Firth RAMSAR and SPA are approximately 1.7 km northeast of the site.
Landscape designations	There are no landscape designations within or bordering the site. The LCT for this site is 'Open Farmed Sloped'.
Cultural heritage designations	There is a Category C listed building, Free Church, Balblair (LB7128), 102 m to the east. There are no listed buildings, conservation areas, scheduled monuments, or historic Gardens & Designated Landscapes directly on the site.
Flooding	According to SEPA, there is no flooding predicted within the site.
Access	Access to the site could be achieved via the A831. There is an existing access gate but no existing bellmouth or junction.
Assessment	
	Site P is not preferable for accommodating the Proposed Development due the site's lack of visual screening and lack of sufficient separation distance available from the road to minimise any visual impacts. Site P is also rated poorly due to its close proximity to sensitive residential receptors making it potentially difficult to meet noise criteria in cumulation with Beauly Substation. This area of land was not available to the Applicant when searching for potential sites. If brought forward, a development in this location would cause too significant an impact upon the

	immediate and wider setting and as such was not considered further.
RAG rating	

4.3 The Proposed Site

Following an analysis of each potential alternative site and discussions with various landowners within a 2 km radius of Beauly Substation, it was identified that Site N is the preferred site for the Proposed Development following assessment against the search parameters as set out Section 3.2. Site N:

- Is suitable in regard to size, comprising 18.5 ha of relatively flat agricultural land;
- Is located in close proximity to the existing Beauly Substation;
- Is the least environmentally constrained;
    - Situated at a distance from settlements such as Beauly and Balchraggan;
    - Not located within or adjacent an ecological, historic, or landscape designation;
    - Bordered by dense woodland providing existing screening;
    - Close proximity to the A862 providing suitable vehicular access without significant highways works; and
    - The Proposed Development can be strategically sited towards the south of the site to avoid the two small areas in the north of the site at risk from river and surface water flooding.
- Has no current or proposed developments being considered by THC.
- Has no LDP allocations associated with the site.

Overall, it was considered that any identified constraints could be effectively mitigated against through appropriate design, including avoiding localised areas of surface water flooding, careful siting within the field, and by means of a well-thought-out planting scheme along the A862 and with a tree belt around the BESS compound.

Appendix A, Proposed Site Layout, shows the location of the Site and the Site boundary edged in red. The BESS compound would be positioned furthest away from the road and residential receptors and already enjoys some good levels of screening, albeit this requires strengthening towards the north west, including additional planting along the A862.

This location was presented at the first public consultation event at Kirkhill Parish Hall on the 28th May 2024. The consultation feedback was that it would be preferred if the location was at the back of the field behind the existing electrical infrastructure of the tower mast and overhead power lines, which are to be re-strung as part of the Beauly substation upgrading.

Over the course of the pre-application consultation period, Field has made several changes to the site design as a result of stakeholder engagement, the progression of environmental studies and constructability requirements. In addition to design changes, Field has also committed to the development of additional technical assessments to accompany the planning application in response to points raised during the consultation period.

These changes have included:

Following the public consultation events, the design of the Proposed Development was amended in the following ways:

- Refinement of the size and design of the proposed drainage strategy to implement an attenuation basin in addition to the infiltration basin to provide containment for water in the case of a fire.
- Strengthening the landscape design elements including incorporating perimeter planting around the field boundary, including along the A862, in addition to widening the tree belt

around the compound boundary itself, as informed by landscape and visual impact analysis and biodiversity enhancement requirements;

- Reduction of the overall development footprint and impact profile through the selection of a smaller candidate battery technology;
- Painting the fence a recessive green colour, to help soften the BESS compound's appearance within the landscape;
- Introduction of an acoustic barrier as fencing along the southern and eastern boundaries of the BESS compound to reduce noise impacts on surrounding noise sensitive receptors;
- Landscape design introducing bunds to the north and south of the compound, informed by landscape and visual impact analysis and ensuring that they look natural and not man-made; and
- Landscape design including additional planting parallel to the River Beauly to further mitigate views from the Core Path on the western side of the river.

5 Conclusion

This Alternative Site Assessment has sought to consider potential alternative sites to accommodate the Proposed Development within the identified search area from the grid connection point.

In order for a BESS to support network grid stability, it requires a connection to the national grid. However, securing a grid connection in the UK is currently very challenging due to the highly constrained national grid network. Furthermore, potential sites are required to be situated within a certain distance from the point of connection for the project to be feasible. As a result, a 2 km radius is employed to identify potential sites around a substation.

The Applicant has accepted a grid connection from SSEN at Beauly Substation as there is capacity at this grid connection point to support grid stabilising infrastructure. Both the LDP and NPF4 offer support for renewable energy and battery energy storage. As such, it was not deemed necessary to explore further grid connection points beyond the secured connection point at Beauly Substation.

Within this 2 km search radius, potential sites were then assessed against a range of key criteria including:

- Size, shape and topography of the land;
- Environmental factors;
    - Landscape setting and value;
    - Residential noise and visual amenity;
    - Ecological and ornithological value;
    - Opportunities for biodiversity and landscape enhancements;
    - Forestry and woodlands;
    - Cultural heritage and archaeological value;
    - Flood risk category;
    - Drainage requirements; and
    - Access requirements.
- Nearby developments, such as renewables or residential developments;
- Existing infrastructure, such as underground or overhead cables;
- Land ownership negotiations; and
- LDP allocations, such as for economic or residential development.

The results of this environmental constraints mapping as well as the locations of the proposed sites can be found in Appendix B, Constraints Map. The town of Beauly falls within the 2 km area of search, with further residential dwellings and holiday parks also present. While not shown in Appendix B, Constraints Map, the area has steep topography to the north and west.

As noted above, to the north is an area of steep topography, poor screening, and residential areas. Sites J, K, L and P are therefore considered less suitable for the Proposed Development due to their proximity to residential areas, poor topography and lack of screening. Site J has previously been identified for BESS development (ref. 21/03353/FUL) but was refused due to failure to demonstrate sensitive siting. As a result, it was deemed that these sites would not be suitable for further consideration.

To the south of Beauly Substation is the Beaufort Castle Garden & Designated Landscape, as well as private residential areas. The few non-constrained parcels of land (Sites G, H and I) in the west are within the planning application for a new Fanellan Substation and Converter (ref. 24/03064/SCOP) and so were not considered further. The east is predominantly Class 2 agricultural land, with potential

sites in close proximity to the town of Beauly; a number of the identified sites in this area are also at high risk of flooding.

Whilst sites B and C are close to the substation and have flat terrain, they were excluded due to the sites consisting of Class 2 prime agricultural land, as well as being near residential areas and the Beauly Holiday Caravan Park with a lack of existing screening. Site C was also noted for its high likelihood of river flooding.

Sites A, D, E, F and M are rated poorly for the Proposed Development primarily due to close proximity to residential areas. In addition:

- Site A is also in close proximity to a Core Path, has poor access opportunities and is in area of historic significance;
- Sites D offers poor screening;
- Site E has poor screening, high flood risk and is in very close proximity to ecological designations; and
- Site F is within close proximity to holiday accommodation, offers poor screening and has high likelihood of river and surface water flooding.
- Site M is in close proximity to a Core Path. The site also falls within the scoping request for an OHL.

Sites N and O were then carried forward to the next stage, with the landowners contacted to initiate discussions. Both sites have good accessibility, OHL connections, and good screening, however, site N was further away from sensitive receptors and site O was near to a scheduled monument and has a BESS development already under consideration by THC.

Given that the Proposed Site is deliverable in terms of landowner agreement, grid connection opportunity and good road infrastructure, along with the absence of flood risk, planning applications and significant cultural heritage assets in or within close proximity to the Site, as well as potential for visual screening, it is considered that Site N offers the most realistic opportunity for BESS development within the search area.