



## Blair Hill Wind Farm

### Technical Appendix 6.4 - Wild Land Area Assessment

---

Author	LDA
Date	December 2024

---

This document (the "Report") has been prepared by Renewable Energy Systems Ltd ("RES"). RES shall not be deemed to make any representation regarding the accuracy, completeness, methodology, reliability or current status of any material contained in this Report, nor does RES assume any liability with respect to any matter or information referred to or contained in the Report, except to the extent specified in (and subject to the terms and conditions of) any contract to which RES is party that relates to the Report (a "Contract"). Any person relying on the Report (a "Recipient") does so at their own risk, and neither the Recipient nor any person to whom the Recipient provides the Report or any matter or information derived from it shall have any right or claim against RES or any of its affiliated companies in respect thereof, but without prejudice to the terms of any Contract to which the Recipient is party. This Report is confidential and shall only be disclosed to duly authorised Recipients.

# Contents

1	Introduction .....	3
2	Wild Land Context .....	3
3	Methodology .....	4
4	Step 1 - Define the study area and the scope of the assessment .....	7
5	Step 2 – Verify the WLA baseline .....	7
6	Step 3 – Assess the sensitivity of the qualities .....	9
7	Step 4 – Assess the magnitude of the effects and Step 5 – Judge the significance of the effects .....	11
8	Conclusions .....	14

# 1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This Wild Land Area Assessment (WLAA) has been prepared to assess the likely effects of the Proposed Development on the physical attributes and perceptual responses that contribute to the WLA qualities identified in the WLA descriptions published by Scottish Natural Heritage (now NatureScot), as they are experienced from within the WLA, not from outwith.
- 1.1.2 Guidance on assessing the impact of development and other proposals on WLAs is provided in the NatureScot guidance document ‘Assessing impacts on Wild Land Areas - technical guidance’ (Revised August 2023)<sup>1</sup>, and grounded within the principles of The Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment’s Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (GLVIA3). The guidance indicates that *“The assessment of effects of a proposal on a WLA is an exercise distinct from landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) that can draw on but should not duplicate its information”*. It also indicates *“This guidance should only be applied to proposals whose nature, siting, scale or design are likely to result in a significant effect on the qualities of a WLA. Given this, assessments are more likely for proposals within a WLA, and are less-likely for proposals outwith the WLA”*.
- 1.1.3 In relation to the Proposed Development, requests were made by consultees as part of the responses provided as part of the Scoping Opinion to include a WLAA within the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR). Whilst the Proposed Development is located outside the Merrick WLA, and therefore a WLAA is not a requirement of the guidance, this WLAA has been prepared to address the concerns raised by consultees.

## 2 Wild Land Context

### 2.1 National Planning Framework 4

- 2.1.1 National Planning Framework 4<sup>2</sup> (NPF4) policy 4(g) sets out the policy for Wild Land Areas. Policy 4 (g) indicates that only certain types of development will be supported within WLAs and that *“All such proposals must be accompanied by a wild land impact assessment which sets out how design, siting, or other mitigation measures have been and will be used to minimise significant impacts on the qualities of the wild land, as well as any management and monitoring arrangements where appropriate. Buffer zones around wild land will not be applied, and effects of development outwith wild land areas will not be a significant consideration”*.

### 2.2 Wildness in Scotland’s Countryside: Policy Statement 02/03

- 2.2.1 Scottish Natural Heritage (now known as NatureScot) prepared a Policy Statement in 2002 on ‘Wildness in Scotland’s Countryside’<sup>3</sup>. This Policy Statement set out the *“the value of wildness to society and its significance as a distinctive part of Scotland’s natural heritage”*. It describes Wild Land as *“those now limited core areas of mountain and moorland and*

---

<sup>1</sup> NatureScot (August 2023) Assessing impacts on Wild Land Areas - technical guidance. Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/doc/assessing-impacts-wild-land-areas-technical-guidance#F1>

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government. (February 2023). National Planning Framework 4. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/>

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Natural Heritage. (2002) Wildness in Scotland’s Countryside: Policy Statement 02/03. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20220427160403/https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2019-10/Wildness%20in%20Scotland's%20Countryside%20-%20Policy%20Statement.pdf>

*remote coast, which mostly lie beyond contemporary human artefacts such as roads or other development”.*

2.2.2 Policy Statement 02/03 identifies at Annex 1 five physical attributes that contribute to the experience of wildness:

- *“a high degree of perceived naturalness in the setting, especially in its vegetation cover and wildlife, and in the natural processes affecting the land;*
- *the lack of any modern artefacts or structures;*
- *little evidence of contemporary human uses of the land;*
- *landform which is rugged, or otherwise physically challenging; and*
- *remoteness and/or inaccessibility.”*

2.2.3 It also identifies four perceptual responses evoked by the physical attributes:

- *“a sense of sanctuary or solitude;*
- *risk or, for some visitors, a sense of awe or anxiety, depending on the individual's emotional response to the setting;*
- *perceptions that the landscape has arresting or inspiring qualities; and*
- *fulfilment from the physical challenge required to penetrate into these places.”*

## 2.3 Mapping of Scotland's Wildness and Wild Land: Non-technical Description of the Methodology

2.3.1 SNH's identification of WLAs was a phased approach, as set out in 'Mapping of Scotland's Wildness and Wild Land: Non-technical Description of the Methodology'<sup>4</sup>. 42 WLAs were identified, with an overall map and descriptions of each WLA prepared<sup>5</sup>. The wild land qualities (physical and perceptual) of each WLA are described under the heading of “*Key attributes and qualities of the wild land area*” within the descriptions. As set out in section 1.1, these descriptions form the basis of the WLAA.

# 3 Methodology

3.1.1 The methodology for this RVAA adopts the five-step approach recommended in 'Assessing impacts on Wild Land Areas - technical guidance', which comprises:

- Step 1 - Define the study area and the scope of the assessment - Identify a study area appropriate to the scale of the proposal and extent of likely significant effects on the WLA.
- Step 2 - Verify the WLA baseline - Confirm the wild land qualities (set out in the WLA description) relevant to the study area, describing any major changes that have occurred since the description was prepared and the nature of their contribution to the WLA.
- Step 3 - Assess the sensitivity of the qualities - Through detailed field assessment within the study area, assess the sensitivity of the wild land qualities scoped in (including their physical attributes and perceptual responses), to the type and scale of change proposed.
- Step 4 - Assess the magnitude of the effects - Assess the effects on individual and / or combinations of qualities, drawing out which physical attributes and perceptual responses will be affected, how and to what degree. This should reflect the size or scale of change, its extent and duration.

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Natural Heritage. (2014) Mapping of Scotland's Wildness and Wild Land: Non-technical Description of the Methodology. Available at: <https://www.dpea.scotland.gov.uk/Document.aspx?id=862716>

<sup>5</sup> Scottish Natural Heritage. (2014) Wild Land Areas map and descriptions. Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/doc/wild-land-areas-map-and-descriptions-2014>

- Step 5 - Judge the significance of the effects - Conclude on the overall significance (taking into account any mitigation), in terms of the study area and where relevant the wider WLA.

## 3.2 Step 1 - Define the study area and the scope of the assessment

- 3.2.1 The technical guidance advises that the study area should “reflect the extent of likely significant effects on the WLA(s), rather than necessarily seeking to cover the entire WLA, taking in to account that:
- impacts on qualities that affect only a geographically limited part of the WLA are still capable of resulting in significant effects;
  - where cumulative effects with other developments or management changes require to be considered the study area may be considerably larger, encompassing the entire WLA or possibly multiple WLAs; and
  - effects of the proposal on the study area must be considered in addition to the contribution that the study area makes to the wider WLA, which will be informed by its description.”
- 3.2.2 This step identifies a study area appropriate to the scale of the Proposed Development and extent of likely significant effects on the WLA, with the output consisting of a brief justification and map or description of the area that will be assessed.

## 3.3 Step 2 - Verify the WLA baseline

- 3.3.1 This step describes the baseline at the time of the assessment. The technical guidance advises that the “WLA descriptions (prepared during 2013 - 2015) are important for understanding the baseline condition of the WLAs, along with the results of our desk-based mapping work”.
- 3.3.2 This step confirms the wild land qualities (set out in the WLA description) relevant to the study area, with the output consisting of the identification of relevant qualities and explanation of how any changes since preparation of the WLA Description have affected them.

## 3.4 Step 3 - Assess the sensitivity of the qualities

- 3.4.1 The technical guidance advises that the sensitivity of the qualities “*is a combination of the nationally important value attached to WLAs and susceptibility to the type of change proposed. Susceptibility should take into account any evidence of past or current use and how they enhance or detract from the qualities*”. This definition of sensitivity reflects that provided in Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, third edition<sup>6</sup> (GLVIA3) and used in **Chapter 6 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment**.
- 3.4.2 The technical guidance lists the following factors that influence sensitivity:
- The strength of the qualities expressed within the area likely to be affected by the proposal, together with the influence of existing detractors on the individual qualities.
  - Where there may be overlap between individual qualities and their contributing attributes or responses, explanatory text should clearly state how the WLA description has been interpreted and which qualities, and associated attributes and responses, are considered in the assessment.

---

<sup>6</sup> Landscape Institute with the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013). The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition. Routledge, Oxon.

- Whilst the qualities experienced from well visited destinations and routes within the WLA will be particularly sensitive, the assessment should recognise that WLAs even if not highly visited are sensitive.

3.4.3 This step assesses the sensitivity of the wild land qualities scoped in to the type and scale of change proposed. The output consists of *“A clear and concise narrative explaining the susceptibility of individual qualities and/or combinations of qualities where there is some commonality between their contributing attributes and responses, and their overall sensitivity”*.

## 3.5 Step 4 - Assess the magnitude of the effects

3.5.1 The technical guidance advises that the assessment of the magnitude of effects on the wild land qualities *“should be set out in terms of the size or scale of change, geographical extent of the area influenced, and their duration and reversibility”*. This again reflects the definition provided in GLVIA3 and used in **Chapter 6 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment**.

3.5.2 The technical guidance suggests that the likely change to wild land qualities may be considered in relation to the following factors:

- Effects on the seeming expansiveness of the WLA and potentially its visual connectivity with other less developed landscapes (including other WLAs).
- Reduction in the sense of solitude as a result of visibility, noise and/or movement of the Proposed Development.
- Impacts that vary over time, for example drawdown margins associated with a loch storage hydro scheme affecting the sense of naturalness, or artificial lighting affecting the sense of sanctuary or risk.
- Attrition of qualities through cumulative effects, for example a series of run of river hydro schemes affecting water courses and reducing perceived naturalness.

3.5.3 This step assesses the effects on individual and / or combinations of qualities, drawing out which physical attributes and perceptual responses will be affected, how and to what degree. The output consists of *“A clear and concise narrative explaining the effects of the various elements of the proposal on individual qualities and / or combinations of qualities”*.

## 3.6 Step 5 - Judge the significance of the effects

3.6.1 The guidance states that the *“assessment should clearly separate out: the identification of any significant effects; any mitigating measures to reduce significant effects; and identification of any residual significant effects on the wild land qualities”*. This again reflects the approach promoted in GLVIA3 and used in **Chapter 6 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment**.

3.6.2 This step provides a conclusion on the overall significance (taking into account any mitigation), in terms of the study area and where relevant the wider WLA. The output is *“A clear narrative explaining the overall significance of residual effects identified on the individual qualities and/or combination of qualities”*.

## 4 Step 1 - Define the study area and the scope of the assessment

- 4.1.1 The Merrick WLA is located approximately 4.7 km to the north east of the closest proposed wind turbine. **Technical Appendix (TA) 6.4, Figure 1** shows the boundary of the WLA in relation to the Site and NatureScot’s Map of Relative Wildness. **TA 6.4, Figure 2** shows the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) Study for the Proposed Development, along with the visibility of all operational and consented wind farms located within the 45 km study area for **Chapter 6: Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment**.
- 4.1.2 As the Merrick WLA is located entirely within the 45 km study area for **Chapter 6: Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment**, it is judged appropriate to consider the effects on the whole WLA in this WLAA.

## 5 Step 2 - Verify the WLA baseline

- 5.1.1 The Merrick WLA is identified as WLA 01 and covered by the Merrick Description of Wild Land Area - 2017<sup>7</sup>. **TA 6.4, Figure 1** indicates that the areas of highest relative wildness are generally located towards the core of the WLA and include a number of the lochs that are set between the Galloway Hills, as well as sheltered flanks of many of the higher peaks.

### 5.2 Baseline Characteristics

- 5.2.1 The key attributes and qualities of the Merrick WLA, as set out in the WLA Description, have been considered in the light of desk-based review and field survey work undertaken between September 2023 and April 2024. The main location visited to inform this assessment was Merrick and the approach from Loch Trool via Benyellary. Merrick has been used as a representative viewpoint (Viewpoint 7 at **Figure 6.20**) in the **Chapter 6: Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment**. A photomontage of the Proposed Development is provided for reference.
- 5.2.2 The key attributes and qualities of the wild land area are summarised in Table 6.4.1 below, with comment on their relevance and any more recent changes set out alongside.

**Table 6.4.1: Merrick WLA key attributes and qualities**

Wild Land Attribute/Quality (from WLA description)	Relevant physical attributes and perceptual responses (from WLA description)	Relevance within Study Area
A relatively small wild land area but with a strong perception of naturalness, few human artefacts and little contemporary land use	Sense of naturalness Sense of awe Sense of sanctuary or solitude Lack of human artefacts or contemporary land use Arresting or inspiring qualities	As the whole WLA is within the study area for the WLAA, this attribute applies to varying degrees across the study area. As the WLA description states, the interior of the WLA, including the lower enclosed loch areas, feel remote and have a strong sense of naturalness, whilst the uplands inspire a sense of awe from their scale and

<sup>7</sup> Scottish Natural Heritage (2017). Description of Wild Land Area -01 Merrick Wild Land Area. Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2021-06/Wild%20land%20Description%20Merrick-July-2016-01.pdf>

Wild Land Attribute/Quality (from WLA description)	Relevant physical attributes and perceptual responses (from WLA description)	Relevance within Study Area
		<p>rocky appearance. However, the approach to high points such as Merrick is often through commercial forestry and elevated views frequently include expansive visibility of distant wind turbines.</p>
<p>A wild land area that contrasts with the adjacent Forest Park, especially in terms of human activity</p>	<p>Sense of remoteness, sanctuary and solitude Arresting or inspiring qualities Rugged landform</p>	<p>The surrounding high level recreational activity of the Galloway Forest Park contrasts with the remoteness and relative inaccessibility within the WLA. Glentrool Visitor Centre is located to the south west of the WLA, as are car parks and popular walks and cycle trails associated with Loch Trool. These heavily used areas form part of the most well used approach to Merrick from the south, with well worn routes to the summit from this direction.</p>
<p>Human elements are widely visible from the tops and outermost slopes but lower-lying areas have a much stronger sense of remoteness</p>	<p>Evidence of contemporary land use Felling coupes reduce the sense of remoteness and sanctuary Non-native tree species diminish the sense of naturalness Obvious human artefacts, particularly operational wind farms. Reduced sense of sanctuary from hill tops as a result Lower-lying moorland and lochs retain a sense of remoteness and sanctuary</p>	<p>Forestry plantations and felling activity are a feature around the peripheries of the WLA, introducing visibility of contemporary land uses and reducing the sense of remoteness, sanctuary and naturalness. As shown by <b>TA 6.4, Figure 2</b>, there are very few locations within the WLA that do not currently have some visibility of operational wind turbine developments. Whilst these are distant, they are extensive in elevated views to the west and north east, introducing the presence of human artefacts and reducing the sense of sanctuary.</p> <p>The lower lying areas of moorland and lochs are generally enclosed by the surrounding hills, which screen views towards human artefacts and</p>



Wild Land Attribute/Quality (from WLA description)	Relevant physical attributes and perceptual responses (from WLA description)	Relevance within Study Area
		contemporary land uses. These areas retain more of a sense of remoteness and sanctuary.
A rugged landscape that provides a surprisingly high degree of physical challenge	Rugged landform Sense of awe Degree of physical challenge Strong sense of remoteness and sanctuary Sense of risk	There are no roads into the core of the WLA, requiring relatively long walks to even the most accessible hills. This provides a relatively high degree of physical challenge to access the WLA and a sense of remoteness.  The steep slopes, exposed rock and crags of the hills create a rugged and awe inspiring landscape that is often exposed with little shelter.  Lower lying areas are often boggy and difficult to cross, making them challenging to access and increasing the sense of remoteness.

5.2.3 Whilst the WLA description is dated 2017, and based on survey work undertaken during 2013 and 2014, little has changed that would affect the Wild Land attributes and qualities of Merrick WLA since that time. The number of operational wind farms visible to the north east and west is likely to have increased. However, views of wind farms were already frequent enough to be identified as affecting the remoteness and sanctuary, and introduce obvious human artefacts into many views.

## 6 Step 3 - Assess the sensitivity of the qualities

6.1.1 Section 6.5 of Chapter 6: Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment sets out the methodology used for the LVIA. The criteria for landscape susceptibility, value and sensitivity are applicable to the assessment of the sensitivity of the attributes and qualities of Merrick WLA.

6.1.2 As set out in the SNH technical guidance, all WLAs are of nationally important value. It is therefore the difference in susceptibility of each of the attributes and qualities of the WLA that will lead to differences in susceptibility. Table 6.4.2 below sets out the judgments of the sensitivity of each attribute and quality of Merrick WLA to the type of development proposed.

**Table 6.4.2: Sensitivity of Merrick WLA key attributes and qualities**

Wild Land Attribute/Quality (from WLA description)	Susceptibility	Sensitivity
A relatively small wild land area but with a strong perception of naturalness, few human artefacts and little contemporary land use	This Wild Land Attribute is experienced across the majority of the WLA. Any proposed wind farm development outside the WLA is unlikely to impact the sense of naturalness within the interior of the WLA or the awe-inspiring qualities of these hills. Given that human elements already influence the peripheries of the WLA, the susceptibility of this attribute is assessed to be Medium.	Medium susceptibility and National value combined are assessed to result in High-medium sensitivity.
A wild land area that contrasts with the adjacent Forest Park, especially in terms of human activity	Any proposed wind farm development outside the WLA is unlikely to impact the contrast between the level of human activity in the adjacent Forest Park and within the WLA. It would not affect the lower level of recreational activity within the WLA or the contrast between forest plantations surrounding the WLA and the open moorland and rugged mountain backdrop. The susceptibility of this attribute is assessed to be Medium-low.	Medium-low susceptibility and National value combined are assessed to result in Medium sensitivity.
Human elements are widely visible from the tops and outermost slopes but lower-lying areas have a much stronger sense of remoteness	Any proposed wind farm development outside the WLA is likely to add further human elements to views and has the potential to further impact the sense of remoteness from Merrick and other tops. Any proposed wind farm development outside the WLA is unlikely to impact the sense of remoteness within the interior of the WLA. The susceptibility of this attribute is assessed to be High-Medium.	High-medium susceptibility and National value combined are assessed to result in High sensitivity.
A rugged landscape that provides a surprisingly high degree of physical challenge	Any proposed wind farm development outside the WLA is unlikely to impact the rugged and awe	Medium-low susceptibility and National value combined are assessed to result in Medium sensitivity.

Wild Land Attribute/Quality (from WLA description)	Susceptibility	Sensitivity
	inspiring steep slopes, areas of exposed rock and crags. It would not affect the high degree of physical challenge required to reach the main tops or the challenging accessibility of the lowland areas. The susceptibility of this attribute is assessed to be Medium-low.	

## 7 Step 4 - Assess the magnitude of the effects and Step 5 - Judge the significance of the effects

- 7.1.1 This section sets out the effects that the Proposed Development would have on each of the attributes and qualities of the WLA. The effects are considered to be reversible, as after a period of 50 years the wind farm would be removed, unless a further application to extend the life of the Proposed Development is applied for and granted, or an alternative application to ‘repower’ with new wind turbines and associated infrastructure is applied for and granted. Whilst 50 years is regarded as Permanent for the purposes of this assessment, the effects of the Proposed Development on the landscape can be fully reversed.
- 7.1.2 Section 6.5 of **Chapter 6: Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment** sets out the methodology used for the LVIA. The criteria for scale, duration and extent of effect are applicable to the assessment of the magnitude of the effects on the attributes and qualities of Merrick WLA. Equally, the criteria within the LVIA methodology are applicable for combining the sensitivity of the attributes and qualities of Merrick WLA with the magnitude of effect.
- 7.1.3 The Proposed Development would not be located within the Merrick WLA and as shown on **TA 6.4, Figure 2**, areas of potential visibility of the Proposed Development within the WLA would be relatively limited. Almost all of the locations with potential visibility of the Proposed Development already have some visibility of operational wind farms, with the exception of the crag to the south east of the Neive of Spit between Benyellary and Merrick and parts of the eastern slope of Benyellary.
- 7.1.4 Potential cumulative effects of the Proposed Development with other proposed wind farms in the planning system are considered in Section 6.5 of **Chapter 6: Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment**. Where relevant, potential cumulative effects are identified in the following sections.

### 7.2 A relatively small wild land area but with a strong perception of naturalness, few human artefacts and little contemporary land use

- 7.2.1 There would be no direct effects on the perception of naturalness within the Merrick WLA, especially in the interior where there would be no visibility of the Proposed Development. The Proposed Development would not add any human artefacts or contemporary land uses

within the WLA, and would not appear against the backdrop of rugged hills in views within or immediately around the WLA.

- 7.2.2 Small scale effects would occur on this attribute of the WLA, across a Limited extent of the Merrick WLA, for a Permanent duration. The Proposed Development would be located outside the WLA and visible from only a small number of locations, largely behind landform and at a distance of approximately 4.7 km from the boundary of the WLA to the closest proposed turbine. Effects would be of Negligible magnitude.
- 7.2.3 Combining the High-medium sensitivity of this attribute of Merrick WLA with the Negligible magnitude of effect is assessed to result in a Minimal effect that is not significant.
- 7.2.4 In terms of potential cumulative effects, there are no wind farm developments currently proposed within the Merrick WLA. Other current schemes in planning are generally located within and adjacent to existing wind farm clusters to the north east and west of Merrick WLA, with the exception of the proposed Glenvernoch wind farm which would be closer to the WLA but still not within it.
- 7.2.5 Effects would remain Small scale across a Limited extent of the Merrick WLA, for a Permanent duration. Cumulative effects would be of Negligible magnitude. Effects would remain not significant.

### 7.3 A wild land area that contrasts with the adjacent Forest Park, especially in terms of human activity

- 7.3.1 There would be no direct effects on the strong sense of remoteness and solitude within the Merrick WLA that result from the relatively light recreational activity. In views close to the WLA, the Proposed Development would not affect the contrasts between forestry plantation and the surrounding WLA, and would not therefore impact the inspiring qualities of the rugged mountain backdrop.
- 7.3.2 Negligible scale effects would occur on this attribute of the WLA, across a Wide extent of the Merrick WLA, for a Permanent duration. The Proposed Development would be located outside the WLA and would not alter the contrast between the recreational activity in the Galloway Forest Park and that within the WLA. Effects would be of Negligible magnitude.
- 7.3.3 Combining the Medium sensitivity of this attribute of Merrick WLA with the Negligible magnitude of effect is assessed to result in a Minimal effect that is not significant.
- 7.3.4 In terms of potential cumulative effects, there are no wind farm developments currently proposed within the Merrick WLA. None of the other current schemes in planning would alter the contrast between the recreational activity in the Galloway Forest Park and that within the WLA.
- 7.3.5 Effects would remain Negligible scale across a Wide extent of the Merrick WLA, for a Permanent duration. Cumulative effects would be of Negligible magnitude and remain not significant.

### 7.4 Human elements are widely visible from the tops and outermost slopes but lower-lying areas have a much stronger sense of remoteness

- 7.4.1 Operational wind farms are already visible from almost all of the Merrick WLA. These are acknowledged to appear as obvious human artefacts, with some to the west sufficiently close or extensive to be clearly visible, so reducing the sense of sanctuary. The Proposed Development would introduce new human artefacts in views from some higher ground

within the WLA, in a different direction to the areas where wind farm developments are currently experienced. However, as shown on Viewpoint 7 at **Figure 6.20**, only three blade tips would be visible above the hills to the south of Merrick, which is a pattern that would be repeated elsewhere in the WLA. There would be no more than 4 blade tips visible from anywhere within the WLA, except the top of Shalloch in the north west of the WLA where up to 6 blade tips could be visible. Up to 2 hubs would be visible in isolated locations at Shalloch and Shalloch on Milloch in the north west of the WLA, with no hub visibility anywhere else in Merrick WLA.

- 7.4.2 Small-negligible scale effects would occur on this attribute of the WLA, across a Limited extent of the Merrick WLA, for a Permanent duration. The Proposed Development would be located outside the WLA and visible from only a small number of locations, largely behind landform with only a small number of blade tips visible, and at a distance of approximately 4.7 km from the boundary of the WLA to the closest proposed turbine. Effects would be of Negligible magnitude.
- 7.4.3 Combining the High sensitivity of this attribute of Merrick WLA with the Negligible magnitude of effect is assessed to result in a Minimal effect that is not significant.
- 7.4.4 In terms of potential cumulative effects, there are no wind farm developments currently proposed within the Merrick WLA. Other current schemes in planning are generally located within and adjacent to existing wind farm clusters to the north east and west of Merrick WLA, with the exception of the proposed Glenvernoch wind farm which would be closer to the WLA and in an area where operational wind farms are much further away.
- 7.4.5 Should Glenvernoch wind farm be consented, it would increase the visibility of wind farm developments from within the WLA. Medium-small scale effects would occur as a result, across a Limited extent of the Merrick WLA, for a Permanent duration. Cumulative effects would be of Low-negligible magnitude and remain not significant.

## 7.5 A rugged landscape that provides a surprisingly high degree of physical challenge

- 7.5.1 The Proposed Development would have no direct effects on the rugged and awe inspiring steep slopes, areas of exposed rock and crags within Merrick WLA. Neither would it affect the high degree of physical challenge required to reach the main tops or the challenging accessibility of the lowland areas.
- 7.5.2 Negligible scale effects would occur on this attribute of the WLA, across a Wide extent of the Merrick WLA, for a Permanent duration. The Proposed Development would be located outside the WLA and would not alter the degree of physical challenge required to access the WLA. Effects would be of Negligible magnitude.
- 7.5.3 Combining the Medium sensitivity of this attribute of Merrick WLA with the Negligible magnitude of effect is assessed to result in a Minimal effect that is not significant.
- 7.5.4 In terms of potential cumulative effects, there are no wind farm developments currently proposed within the Merrick WLA. None of the other current schemes in planning would alter the degree of physical challenge required to access the WLA.
- 7.5.5 Effects would remain Negligible scale across a Wide extent of the Merrick WLA, for a Permanent duration. Cumulative effects would be of Negligible magnitude and remain not significant.

## 7.6 Summary

- 7.6.1 The four attributes and qualities of Merrick WLA identified in the WLA description largely apply across the whole of Merrick WLA, given the relatively small area it covers. Effects as a result of the Proposed Development would occur across a limited extent of the WLA, as demonstrated by TA 6.4, Figure 2.
- 7.6.2 Given the Negligible magnitude of effect on the attributes and qualities of Merrick WLA, these effects are assessed to be Neutral (neither Adverse nor Beneficial). As a consequence, there would be relatively little impact on the wildness of Merrick WLA, either in localised areas or as a whole.

## 8 Conclusions

- 8.1.1 The Proposed Development is located outside the Merrick WLA. Protection of WLAs is recognised in the NPF4. However, it is noted that *"effects of development outwith wild land areas will not be a significant consideration"*.
- 8.1.2 The NatureScot guidance document 'Assessing impacts on Wild Land Areas - technical guidance' (Revised August 2023) indicates that the guidance *"should only be applied to proposals whose nature, siting, scale or design are likely to result in a significant effect on the qualities of a WLA. Given this, assessments are more likely for proposals within a WLA, and are less-likely for proposals outwith the WLA"*. However, consultation responses have requested a full Wild Land Area Assessment for the Proposed Development.
- 8.1.3 The WLAA undertaken above for the Proposed Development concludes that effects on the wild land qualities identified within the WLA description and confirmed in the assessment are judged not to undermine the overall integrity of the WLA. No significant effects are anticipated on any of the attributes and qualities of Merrick WLA as a result of the Proposed Development. All of the physical and perceptual attributes of wild land would still be present, and all of the attributes and qualities of Merrick WLA would still be experienced.