Chapter 16: Sloy Pumped Hydro Storage Scheme: Recreation

Chapter 16: Recreation - Contents

Figures

Appendices

16. Recreation

16.1. Executive Summary

An assessment of effects on recreation has been undertaken for the Proposed Development within a study area of 2.5km. The assessment has been undertaken by Environmental Consultants at ASH design + assessment Ltd (ASH), a registered practice with the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA).

The assessment considers the potential to which recreational activities which currently take place may be affected.

Mitigation measures are proposed to help minimise or offset significant and other effects of the Proposed Development.

The assessment has concluded that the Proposed Development would result in some temporary significant adverse effects during construction for recreational users of the overflow car park at Inveruglas, located within the Proposed Development Area (PDA). The temporary effects are anticipated to be locally **Major** adverse (**significant**) during construction, however, reducing to **Negligible** (**not significant**) during operation. Mitigation in the form of an Outdoor Access Management Plan (OAMP) would be developed in agreement with key stakeholders and put in place to minimise the temporary effects as far as possible. A Draft OAMP is included in **Volume 4, Appendix 16.1**.

All other effects are anticipated to be not significant and no long-term significant effects to recreation are predicted.

16.2. Introduction

This Chapter provides a general description of recreation within the study area and presents an assessment of the potential impacts of the proposed Sloy Pumped Hydro Storage Scheme (the 'Proposed Development') on recreational resources during its construction and operation. **Chapter 4: Description of Development** provides a detailed description of the Proposed Development.

The Proposed Development would be constructed and operated entirely within land owned by SSE and the majority of activities would take place within the existing Sloy Hydroelectric Power Station site, an area already affected by operational hydroelectric activities. However, the wider area is popular for recreation, and a variety of recreational pursuits occur in the vicinity of the Proposed Development including hill walking, cycling, and a variety of water sports (on Loch Lomond) including sailing, wind surfing, canoeing and kayaking. There are also many boat tours operating on Loch Lomond and a number of hotels, guest houses and a holiday park in the area. The Inveruglas Visitor Centre / café, coach and car park, picnic site and jetty is located adjacent to the A82, to the east of the existing power station. It is a popular stopping point for cars and tour buses which pass through the area, as well as providing an additional, more informal overflow car park area to the north, which is included in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) camping management zone.

This Chapter should be read in conjunction with **Volume 4, Appendix 16.1: Draft Outdoor Access Management Plan**; and **Volume 1, Chapter 4: Description of Development**; **Chapter 12: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment**; and **Chapter 13: Traffic and Transport**.

This assessment and the associated Draft Outdoor Access Management Plan (see **Volume 4, Appendix 16.1**) have been prepared by Environmental Consultants at ASH design + assessment Ltd (ASH), a registered practice with both the Landscape Institute (LI) and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA). A table presenting relevant qualifications and experience of key staff involved in

the preparation of this Chapter is included in **Appendix 5.1: EIA Team**, contained within **Volume 4** of this EIA Report.

16.3. Scope Of Assessment

16.3.1. CONSULTATION AND SCOPING

The scope of the assessment has been determined through a combination of professional judgment, reference to relevant guidance documents and consultation with stakeholders through a formal EIA scoping process.

The Scoping Opinion was issued by The Energy Consents Unit (ECU) in December 2023 (see **Volume 4, Appendix 6.1**). The Scoping Opinion for the Proposed Development identified key issues to be considered within the assessment. Issues of relevance to Recreation are outlined in **Table 16.1: Scoping and Consultation Responses Relevant to Recreation.**

Full details on the consultation responses and scoping opinion can be reviewed in **Chapter 6: Scoping and Consultation**, and associated appendices.

Table 16.1 Scoping and Consultation Responses Relevant to Recreation

Organisation	Response	Comments
Energy Consents Unit (ECU)	The mitigation measures suggested for any significant environmental impacts identified should be presented as a conclusion to each chapter. Applicants are also asked to provide a consolidated schedule of all mitigation measures proposed in the environmental assessment, provided in tabular form, where that mitigation is relied upon in relation to reported conclusion of likelihood or significance of impacts.	Mitigation has been suggested for any significant impacts on recreation and included in **Section 16.9**. See also **Volume 4, Appendix 4.3: Schedule of Mitigation**.
Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA)	The adjacent transformer replacement and associated tracks and UGL connection, A82 upgrade between Tarbet and Invernarnan, access tracks to facilitate undergrounding OHLs as part of the VISTA scheme, and the Cruach Tairbet access road, forest felling and restocking should be included in the cumulative assessment.	Cumulative baseline sites considered are described in **Chapter 5: EIA Process and Methodology.** Sites taken forward for assessment comprise the following, as shown on **Volume 2, Figure 5.1.** • Sloy Transformer Replacement Project (pre-application phase): Replacement of the four power station transformers currently located at the rear of the existing power station with a new substation approximately 300 m to the south-southeast. • Cruach Tairbeirt Forestry Works: Extensive felling and track construction

Organisation	Response	Comments
		works over a 5 year period (2022 – 2027) to tackle *Phytothorum ramorum* in larch. A cumulative assessment for recreation is included **in Section 16.8**. The cumulative assessment for recreation has focussed on the effects during the construction phase only.
	The Inveruglas core path is a popular route. No formal monitoring but anecdotal evidence suggests there's 10-15,000 visitors / year, mainly at weekends. The EIA should assess impacts on the core path during construction, operation and decommissioning and mitigation is in place if required.	All recreational routes which have potential to be impacted by the Proposed Development (including Inveruglas core path) have been considered in this assessment, see **Section 16.7** for details. Decommissioning has been scoped out of this assessment, see **Section 16.3.4**

16.3.2. POST SCOPING CONSULTATION

Details on post-scoping consultation can be found in **Chapter 6: Scoping and Consultation**.

16.3.3. STUDY AREA

The study area encompasses the area over which data was gathered to inform the assessment presented within this Chapter where direct and indirect effects may occur as a result of the Proposed Development. Based on the nature of the potential effects, this has been set as a 2.5km buffer around the PDA footprint (see **Volume 2, Figure 16.1**).

16.3.4. ISSUES SCOPED OUT

The Proposed Development would take place entirely within land owned by SSE and the majority of activities would take place within the existing Sloy Hydroelectric Power Station site, an area dominated by operational hydroelectric activities. Therefore, an assessment of impacts on land use (including construction, operation and cumulative assessments, has been scoped out.

As the operation of the Proposed Development would be an extension to what already exists at Sloy Hydroelectric Power Station, and would be contained within the existing grounds, no operational effects are anticipated for recreation in the area and so operational effects on recreation have been scoped out of this assessment.

As noted in **Chapter 4: Description of Development**, decommissioning has been scoped out from this assessment.

16.4. Legislation, Policy and Guidance

The assessment has taken account of national, regional, and local policy and guidance relating to recreational amenity relevant to the Proposed Development. Detailed information on planning policy is contained within **Chapter 7: Planning Policy and Context**, as well as the separate Planning Statement which accompanies the EIA Report. The following provides a summary with respect to recreation.

16.4.1. NATIONAL

The following national policy documents and statements have been referred to in carrying out this assessment:

- The Fourth National Planning Framework for Scotland (NPF4) (2023); and
- The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000, with relevance to the Aims of the National Park, notably:
  - To promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public.

16.4.2. REGIONAL

Regional Policy is outlined in the Draft National Park Partnership Plan 2024-2029.

Specific Regional Planning policy is covered by the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Local Development Plan (LDP) 2017 – 2021. The following policies from the LDP are of relevance to the subject of recreation:

- Overarching Policy 2 – Development Requirements: Development proposals should not conflict with nearby land uses and where relevant, must address the following requirements:
  - Visitor and Recreational Experience: promote understanding and enjoyment (including recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public including safeguarding access rights;
- Visitor Experience Policy 1: Location and Scale of New Development;
- Visitor Experience Policy 2: Safeguarding existing Tourism sites;
- Open Space Policy 2: Protecting Other Important Open Space; and
- Renewable Energy Policy 1: Renewable Energy within the National Park.

16.5. Methodology

16.5.1. KEY STAGES OF THE ASSESSMENT

The assessment has involved the following key tasks:

- Consultation through the Scoping process with statutory agencies concerned with recreational interests in the area;
- Identification of recreational sites and recreational activities in the area;
- Site survey and recording;
- Reference to relevant Local Development Plans and other literature to obtain baseline information; and
- Evaluation of impacts based on disruption during construction.

16.5.2. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BASELINE

A review of a range of published documents and internet-based information was undertaken to provide data on existing recreational activities within the study area.

The recreation baseline review included a review of mapping and online sources, as follows:

- OS and aerial mapping;
- Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society, Scottish Hill Tracks Fifth Edition and website: https://www.scotways.com/ [Accessed April 2024];
- Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park website: https://www.lochlomond-trossachs.org/plan-your-visit/ [Accessed April 2024]; and
- LLTNP Core Paths Plan 2023. Available at: https://www.lochlomond-trossachs.org/park-authority/publications/core-paths-plan/ [Accessed April 2024];

16.5.3. ASSESSMENT OF RECREATIONAL EFFECTS

The establishment of the degree of effect is based on the evaluation of sensitivity of the activity which may be affected, and the potential magnitude of change which may occur as a result of the Proposed Development.

Sensitivity concerns the potential for amenity resources or recreational activities to be affected by the Proposed Development. Recreational activities have been evaluated for their sensitivity based on a four-point scale as set out in **Table 16.2: Criteria for Sensitivity**.

Table 16.2: Criteria for Sensitivity

Sensitivity	Criteria
High	Important recreational routes or amenity resources within the area of the Proposed Development.
Medium	Less frequently used recreation routes or amenity resources which represent a common resource locally within or adjacent to the area of the Proposed Development; or more important routes within the nearby context.
Low	Less frequently used recreation routes or amenity resources within the nearby context; or more important routes or amenity resources within the broader context.
Negligible	Less important or infrequently used recreation routes or amenity resources within the broader wider context.

Magnitude of effect concerns the degree of change which could be expected to take place to existing amenity resources or recreational activities. Magnitude has been measured on a four-point scale as set out in **Table 16.3: Criteria for Magnitude of Change.**

Table 16.3: Criteria for Magnitude of Change

Sensitivity	Criteria
High	Complete loss or obstruction to a route or amenity resource.
Medium	Partial loss or direct disruption to a route or amenity resource, comprising but not preventing the ability of an activity to take place; or, indirect (visual) effects which may compromise enjoyment of a recreational activity.
Low	Minimal disruption to a route or amenity resource which does not affect the ability of an activity to take place; or, indirect (visual) effects but which are unlikely to reduce enjoyment of a recreational activity.
Negligible	Minimal indirect (visual) effects which are very unlikely to affect enjoyment or a recreational activity.

The degree of effect significance is calculated by comparison of the magnitude of impact to the recreational resource in relation to its sensitivity. Effect significance is assessed using the criteria set out in **Table 16.4: Criteria for Significance of Effect.** For the purposes of this assessment, only adverse effects are considered and Moderate or Major effects are considered to be significant.

Table 16.4: Criteria for Significance of Effect

Effect Rating	Criteria
Major	Where the Proposed Development would prevent an existing activity from continuing, or the loss of amenity would result in that activity being deterred.
Moderate	Where the Proposed Development would lead to a notable loss of recreational amenity or enjoyment, but would not prevent the activities from continuing to take place in the longer term.
Minor	Where the Proposed Development may compromise an existing recreational activity but would not affect its ability to continue to take place or would have a small but recognisable influence on the recreational amenity or enjoyment.
Negligible	Where the Proposed Development would not result in a discernible loss of recreational amenity or enjoyment.

The assessment considers the potential adverse effects of the Proposed Development on recreational activities during the construction phase only, as operational effects have been scoped out (see **Section 16.3.4**).

16.5.4. ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

There are no recognised standards, guidelines, or methodologies for assessing the impacts of Pumped Hydro Storage schemes on recreation for the purposes of an EIA. Therefore, in order to identify and assess the significance of predicted adverse effects, the assessment has been based on a professional judgment of the degree of change resulting from the proposals.

16.6. Baseline

16.6.1. RECREATION

This section considers recreation within the 2.5km study area, as shown on **Volume 2, Figure 16.1.**

The A82 located immediately to the east of the existing power station is a busy tourist route along the west side of Loch Lomond. The Inveruglas Visitor Centre / cafe, coach / car park, picnic site and jetty, located to the east, is a popular stopping off point, particularly during the summer months, and includes an overflow car park to the north. The Inveruglas Visitor Centre and overflow car park land is owned by SSE and leased to LLTNPA. The West Highland Railway Line runs north-south along the hillside to the west of the Proposed Development and adjacent woodland areas, but views towards the PDA are generally restricted due to topography and vegetation.

16.6.1.1. Camping

The Loch Lomond Holiday Park includes camping facilities and is located just over 500m to the south of the Proposed Development. The overflow car park at Inveruglas Visitor Centre is located within the LLTNPA camping management zone and requires a permit to camp.

16.6.1.2. Paths and Trails

There are various popular walking routes located within the study area including a section of the West Highland Way which runs along the eastern shore of Loch Lomond and a section of both the Loch Lomond and Cowal Way and Three Lochs Way which overlap coming in from the south of the Proposed Development and finishing at the Inveruglas Visitor Centre and its associated paths and viewpoint overlooking the loch. A section of the Inveruglas Core Path also overlaps with these routes, with an additional short section which forks to towards the north where the other paths turn to the south.

The section of the West Highland Way walking route within the study area has distant views across Loch Lomond towards the existing power station. Walkers on the hills to the east of the loch may also have very distant views towards the power station (**Chapter 12: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment**).

The Loch Lomond and Cowal Way and Three Lochs Way also run within close proximity of the PDA from Inveruglas pier, along the A82 in front of the existing power station, continuing south to Inveruglas Water, then turning off to the west. Users of these routes would likely have good views of the existing power station and surrounding grounds from this short section. The Loch Lomond and Cowal Way, Three Lochs Way and The West Highland Way are also recognised as three of Scotland's Great Trails. (see **Chapter 12: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment** for further detail)

16.6.1.3. Hill Walking / Hill Summits

There are many hill walks including Scottish Hill Track routes within the vicinity, these include the Arrochar Alps circuit to the west and Rowardennan to Inversnaid and Inverarnan to the east. The Inveruglas car park is often used as a starting point for the ascent of Ben Vane and Ben Vorlich, two popular Munros to the west and northwest of the Proposed Development, with the preferred routes going

along the A82 past the front of the existing power station. Within the vicinity to the west is also Beinn Ime, Beinn Luibhean, Beinn Narnain and The Cobbler, which are all popular hill walks although generally accessed from Arrochar. However, these hills to the west of the existing power station are likely to have restricted views of the site, if any, as views are obscured by the rising topography and existing woodland.

16.6.1.4. Water based Recreational Activity on Loch Lomond

A small tourist ferry runs between Inveruglas jetty across Loch Lomond to Inversnaid Hotel on the east shore, during the summer months, with views towards the existing power station being gained on approach to Inveruglas jetty. Cruise Loch Lomond operates cruises on the loch from various departure points across Loch Lomond and also offers a waterbus service with a crossing that runs from Inversnaid to Tarbet. In addition, the jetty at Inveruglas and the surrounding areas of the loch are used by many other boat and water sports users, including paddle boarders, kayakers, and swimmers.

16.7. Potential Effects

16.7.1. RECREATION

This section considers the potential effect of the Proposed Development on the recreational users in the area. **Chapter 12: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment,** provides a detailed assessment of effects on Visual Amenity of sensitive recreational receptors.

16.7.1.1. Camping

The overflow car park at Inveruglas Visitor Centre forms part of the PDA and is included within the LLTNPA camping management area. The overflow cark park area would be closed to members of the public for the duration of the construction period as it would be required for the secondary construction compound / site establishment area. There are limited alternative camping locations located around Loch Lomond, although the holiday park less than 1km south of the Proposed Development does provide opportunities for camping. Mitigation to signpost alternative locations available to campers via the Visitor Centre is proposed to reduce potential impacts as far as possible. An OAMP would also be agreed with key stakeholders and implemented to ensure the continued safety of recreational users of the area (see **Volume 4, Appendix 16.1: Draft Outdoor Access Management Plan**).

The sensitivity of camping to construction activities is considered to be Medium and the magnitude of change is considered to be High during construction of the Proposed Development, reducing to Negligible during operation. The significance of effect during construction on public use of the Inveruglas Visitor Centre overflow car park is therefore locally **Major** (and **significant**) reducing to **Negligible** (and **not significant**) during operation.

16.7.1.2. Paths and Trails

There are no routes going directly through the PDA, however there are various popular paths and trails within the vicinity. A section of The West Highland Way runs along the opposite shore of Loch Lomond to the Proposed Development and would not experience direct effects from construction, however, it has potential to experience some effects on visual amenity (see **Chapter 12: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment**). The Three Lochs Way and The Loch Lomond and Cowal Way walking routes run from the Inveruglas Visitor Centre directly in front of the Proposed Development, heading south past the existing power station. The Inveruglas Core Path runs along this same route with a small additional section forking to the north where the other routes turn to the south. These walking routes have potential to experience some effects to visual amenity (see **Chapter 12: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment**) as well

as potential to be directly disrupted by construction activities occurring around the A82. To reduce impacts on walkers, it is suggested that safety measures are put in place to separate them from all construction activities and to signpost to a safe crossing point of the A82 (see **Chapter 13: Traffic and Transport** for a full assessment of construction traffic and details on traffic management in relation to walkers). An OAMP would be prepared in agreement with key stakeholders to ensure the safe and continued access to these routes by recreational users throughout construction of the Proposed Development. A Draft OAMP is included in **Volume 4, Appendix 16.1**.

Scottish Hill Tracks route 101 is located to the southwest of the Proposed Development, running from the south to the west of the study area. This route is unlikely to experience any direct effects from the construction of the Proposed Development, however, has potential to experience some effects to visual amenity (see **Chapter 12: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment**).

The sensitivity of paths and trails to construction of the Proposed Development is considered to be Medium and the magnitude of change considered to be Low. The significance of effect is therefore considered to be **Minor** (and **not significant**).

16.7.1.3. Hill Walking and Hill Summits

There are two popular hill walking routes located within the study area which lead to the summits of Ben Vorlich and Ben Vane, which are both Munros. These routes begin at the Inveruglas Visitor Centre car park and cross the A82 going south along the pavement past the existing power station before turning off to the right along a track to Sloy Dam. Walkers of these routes are therefore likely to experience some disruption from construction activities associated with the Proposed Development including effects on visual amenity (see **Chapter 12: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment**). To reduce impacts on walkers, it is suggested that safety measures are put in place to separate them from all construction activities and to signpost to a safe crossing point of the A82 (see **Chapter 13: Traffic and Transport** for a full assessment of construction traffic and details on traffic management in relation to walkers). An OAMP would be prepared in agreement with key stakeholders to ensure the safe and continued access for hillwalkers throughout construction of the Proposed Development. A Draft OAMP is included in **Volume 4, Appendix 16.1**.

The sensitivity of hill walking and hill summits to construction activities is considered to be Medium and the magnitude of change is considered to be Low. Therefore, the significance of effect is **Minor** (and **not significant**) during construction.

16.7.1.4. Water-based Recreational Activity on Loch Lomond

The construction of the Proposed Development would not directly impact the recreational users of Loch Lomond. There is potential for some effects to visual amenity to be experienced (see **Chapter 12: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment**).

The sensitivity of water-based recreational activity on Loch Lomond is considered to be High and the magnitude of change is considered to be Low. Therefore, the significance of effect is considered to be **Minor** (and **not significant**) during construction of the Proposed Development.

16.8. Cumulative Effects

Potential cumulative effects on recreation may occur when the effects of more than one development of a similar type combine to produce a greater level of effect.

Cumulative baseline sites considered are described in **Chapter 5: EIA Process and Methodology**. Sites taken forward for assessment comprise the following, as shown on **Volume 2, Figure 5.1**.

- Sloy Transformer Replacement Project (pre-application phase): Replacement of the four power station transformers currently located at the rear of the existing power station with a new substation approximately 300 m to the south-southeast.
- Cruach Tairbeirt Forestry Works: Extensive felling and track construction works over a 5 year period (2022 – 2027) to tackle Phytothorum ramorum in larch.

The cumulative assessment for recreation has focussed on the effects during the construction phase only. The potential cumulative effects on users of recreational routes with the addition of the Proposed Development to the cumulative baseline scenario is not anticipated to lead to any significant cumulative effects. The landscape and visual impact assessment provides a detailed assessment of potential cumulative effects on landscape and visual receptors, including users of recreational routes and water-based recreational receptors (refer to **Chapter 12: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment**). The addition of the Proposed Development to the cumulative baseline scenario is not anticipated to lead to any significant cumulative effects on recreational routes.

Chapter 13: Traffic and Transport provides a detailed assessment of potential cumulative effects on transport routes within the study area (including severance of the overflow car park for hill walkers), and so is not considered within this assessment.

Given the nature of the cumulative sites, the cumulative baseline for camping is anticipated to be the same as for the main assessment. As such, the cumulative effects of access to the overflow car park at Inveruglas Visitor Centre being closed to members of the public, for camping for the duration of the construction period (as noted in Section 16.7.1.1) are expected to be the same as for the main recreation assessment. The sensitivity of camping to construction activities is considered to be Medium and the magnitude of change is considered to be High during construction of the Proposed Development, reducing to Negligible during operation. The significance of cumulative effect during construction on public use of the Inveruglas Visitor Centre overflow car park is therefore locally **Major** (and **significant**) during construction reducing to **Negligible** (and **not significant**) during operation.

Mitigation to signpost alternative locations available to campers via the Visitor Centre is proposed to reduce potential impacts as far as possible. An OAMP would also be agreed with key stakeholders and implemented to ensure the continued safety of recreational users of the area (see **Volume 4, Appendix 16.1: Draft Outdoor Access Management Plan**).

16.9. Mitigation

The following mitigation measures are proposed to ensure that any adverse effects on recreational activities are minimised where possible. An OAMP would be implemented to ensure the safe and continued access of all recreational routes located within the vicinity of the Proposed Development during construction. The overflow car park at Inveruglas Visitor Centre would be securely fenced off and closed to the public during the construction of the Proposed Development and information would be provided to the public regarding alternative facilities. The main car park at Inveruglas Visitor Centre would remain open to the public during the construction of the Proposed Development. All best practice construction guidance should be followed to ensure safety for recreational users of the area surrounding the PDA during construction. See also **Chapter 12: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment**, **Chapter 13: Traffic and Transport** and **Chapter 14: Noise and Vibration** and **Volume 4, Appendix 4.3: Schedule of Mitigation** for additional relevant mitigation measures).

16.10. Residual Effects

The assessment of effects takes into account the likely benefits of mitigation inherent in the design and assumes best practice construction working methods including the implementation of an OAMP (see

Volume 4, Appendix 16.1: Draft Outdoor Access Management Plan). Therefore, the construction effects identified should be considered representative of residual effects.

16.11. Summary And Conclusion

An assessment of potential effects on recreation has been undertaken for the Proposed Development. The assessment considers the potential to which recreational activities which currently take place may be affected.

Temporary significant adverse effects have been identified for recreational users of the overflow car park next to the Inveruglas Visitor Centre for camping, due to the temporary loss of the use of this amenity during construction of the Proposed Development. These effects are anticipated to be locally **Major** adverse and temporary, reducing to non-significant levels during operation for both the main and cumulative assessments. An OAMP would be put in place to minimise effects as far as possible, a Draft OAMP is included in **Volume 4, Appendix 16.1.** The Draft OAMP would be reviewed and updated as necessary prior to commencement of construction works. Thereafter, the approved OAMP would be a live document and would be reviewed regularly during the construction period by SSE and supported by the appointed Principal Contractor.

All other effects are anticipated to be not significant and no long-term significant effects to recreation are predicted.