

## **Ballyoukan Forest Owners**

### **EIA Scoping**

#### **Upgrade of Existing Hill Track for Forestry Use, Formation of New Forest Road, Quarries for Forestry - Land to West of Carn na-h Elrig, Ballyoukan Forest, Pitlochry**

### **Project Description**

November 2021

#### **1. Introduction**

Ballyoukan Forest is situated to the north and east of the Highland Perthshire town of Pitlochry. Planted in 1986 and 1987 it comprises of around 1,000 hectares (2,400 acres) of predominantly coniferous forestry which is split across seven ownerships.

#### **2. Background**

With the development of the Ballyoukan Forest Plan (due to be completed and approved in 2022) has come the need to consider carefully how to transport timber from Ballyoukan forest to the public road network.

The Ballyoukan forest comprises around 1000 hectares of primarily coniferous forestry. There are an estimated 120,000 tonnes of timber to be harvested in the next 10 years, resulting in an estimated 4,800 loads of timber entering the public road network: equating to approximately 10,000 lorry movements. Over the first 20 year rotation of the forest an estimated 250,000 to 350,000 tonnes of timber will be produced (approximately 30,000 lorry movements – average 1500 per year).

The UK is currently the second largest net importer of timber in the world second only to China and imports over 80% of its timber needs. Longer term projections suggest that timber supplies in the UK will become constrained over the next 10 to 15 years.

([https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/documents/8205/Complete\\_FS2021.pdf](https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/documents/8205/Complete_FS2021.pdf))

The current right of access for the Forest Owners is challenging and is unsuitable for heavy haulage without significant modification. A more detailed summary of these challenges can be found in the supporting document 6. *Ballyoukan Haulage Options Considered Summary*.

A number of alternatives have been considered and with the land to the north being deemed the most suitable and least constrained for road suitability and environmental constraints. It also directs timber haulage traffic away from the Croftinloan area of Pitlochry with access to the A924 – an Agreed Route for timber transport.

The current land use of the land surrounding the track is rough grazing and deer forest. Although the site had been managed as a grouse moor in the past, this has since lapsed and the property is no longer managed for driven grouse shooting. The route follows the existing agricultural/hill track for more than 2km. There is a short section of new road required over the moor to the boundary with Ballyoukan forest where the road will follow an existing ride/area of open ground up to meet with the internal track network of the Ballyoukan forest.

The main part of the road upgrade crosses through a section of the Forest of Clunie SSSI and SPA which is designated primarily for a range of birds specifically Black grouse, Hen harrier, Osprey, Short eared owl and various other breeding birds.

In May 2021 a pre-screening site meeting was organised by Scottish Woodlands on behalf of the Ballyoukan Owners. In attendance were representatives of Perth and Kinross Council Roads Department, NatureScot (Scottish Natural Heritage) and Scottish Forestry.

The outcome of this meeting and subsequent advice from Scottish Forestry was:

- The proposed upgrade of the hill track to forest road, a section of new track and associated quarries could have a significant effect on the environment and therefore an Environmental Impact Assessment would be required.
- Scottish Forestry consider this to be a relevant project under the EIA (Forestry) Regulations and therefore would be the determining authority for the project.
- The main environmental receptors to be considered were potential negative impacts on the notified species of the SPA/SSSI, impacts on the historic environment and the landscape impacts of an upgraded/new road and quarries.

According to Environmental Impact Assessment for Forestry Projects (February 2018), scoping of the project must be carried out. The outcome of the scoping exercise will inform the EIA process and confirm the likely effects of the project on the environment and their significance:

*"[Scoping] outlines the effects on the environment that will be required to be assessed within the EIA report. Therefore, before starting to prepare the EIA report, you must discuss the significant environmental issues that will be covered within the report with us and the relevant consultation bodies."*

More details of the EIA process for forestry can be found here: <https://forestry.gov.scot/support-regulations/environmental-impact-assessment#>

### **3. Project Description**

The project will comprise of four main elements:

**3.1 Upgrade of existing track for forestry use.** From the A924 a hill track runs south and east across an area of hill ground/rough grazing. After crossing a timber bridge the track continues up towards Ballyoukan Forest. Around 160 metres from the forest boundary the track eventually fades out. The track will be widened by creating a raised formation topped with crushed stone with a running surface of around 3.5m. This will involve the removal of some vegetation where the track is being widened – some of this vegetation removal will be permanent, others temporary. The total length of this upgrade is 2,317m.

Drainage will take the form of open roadside drains with culvert crossings approximately every 100m. See supporting document 10. *Typical Forest Road Specification + Cross Sections* for more detailed drawings and dimensions.

The line and gradient of the existing farm track is mostly suitable for timber lorries which require an average gradient of 10% or less. Some corners may require minor widening and grading to allow for this.

The timber bridge crossing the Edradour Burn will require replacement with a bridge suitable for timber haulage. The construction of this will comprise of timber decking laid over steel beams supported by concrete abutments.

**3.2 Formation of New Forest Road – Over Open Ground.** A short section comprising 161 metres of new road is required to extend the line of the upgraded hill track to reach the boundary of Ballyoukan forest (coloured yellow on the maps). This will be constructed to the same specification as identified in *10. Typical Forest Road Specification + Cross Sections*

**3.3 Formation of New Forest Road – Within Ballyoukan Forest** A section of new road is required to link up the upgraded and new section of road with the existing forest road network within Ballyoukan Forest. The approximate length is 471 metres. This will be built in accordance with the specification identified in *9. Typical Forest Road - flat cross section*. The line of this follows an existing ride/firebreak. Some pruning works to the mature forestry either side may be required to accommodate the footprint of the road and some minor felling on sections where the ride/firebreak is too narrow may be required.

**3.4 Forest Quarries** To reduce the carbon and environmental impact of the project as well as manage costs, on-site stone will be used for the upgrade and new forestry works provided the stone on site is suitable and winnable. Quarries will be formed by scraping the top layer of vegetation and soil. This will be bunded on the top side of the quarry. Stone will be dug from the quarry and either spread as-dug or crushed using quarrying machinery. Following the completion of works, quarries will be reinstated by levelling out steep sides and respreading bunded topsoil and turves. The maximum size of any one quarry will be 0.25ha and 5m below ground level. Refer to map *2. Ballyoukan - Track Upgrade etc Opportunities and Constraints Map* for indicative position of quarries.

#### **4. Environmental Receptors and Likely Effects on the Environment**

The following environmental receptors were identified during the screening process.

##### **4.1 Population and Human Health**

The route will divert timber traffic away from the community of Croftinloan and reduce the amount of timber traffic going through certain parts of Pitlochry including the popular town centre.

There are opportunities for increased and improved public access with the opportunity of creating a circular walking or cycling route from Pitlochry.

The route will divert timber traffic away from vulnerable road surfaces and consultation routes, redirecting it onto agreed timber routes and A-roads.

The suitability of the proposed route will mean that timber haulage can take place over a longer period and therefore reducing the frequency of timber lorry movements vs. alternatives which would only be possible in good weather and during the late spring and summer months.

## 4.2 Biodiversity

There is a possible impact on bird habitats through a loss of forage habitat and disturbance from increased use of the existing track.

A breeding bird and black grouse survey was commissioned by Scottish Woodlands in 2020 to examine the potential impacts on birds around the proposed project area. This involved a desk based survey followed by a field survey covering the route and a 500m buffer. For more information, refer to 8. *SWD1988 Ballyoukan Breeding Bird Report Complete* in the supporting documentation. The conclusions of the report can be summarised as follows:

- There is not expected to be an impact on the black grouse, as the only active lek that was confirmed during the surveys was located over 500m from the old farm track. The track upgrade would not lead to habitat loss, only a short-term disturbance.
- Due to lack of indicative breeding behaviour by hen harrier and short-eared owl within the survey area, no impact is expected on these species as a result of the proposed track upgrade works.
- There is not expected to be an impact on species such as mistle thrush, song thrush, raven, kestrel and long-eared owl, as the proposed works will be mostly restricted to the open habitat and the forest rides, with no felling works planned [as part of the new road works in]
- Only a narrow strip of overgrown farm track will be affected as a result of the proposed upgrade works, and as such, there will be no significant habitat loss and the impact on ground nesting species such as meadow pipit, snipe and red grouse is considered negligible. In addition to this, the track upgrade works are expected to be carried out between October and February which is outside the main breeding bird season (March and September inclusive), thus reducing the likelihood of disturbance to nesting birds.
- While the increased forestry traffic within the moorland and Ballyoukan Forest may result in some of the birds nesting further away from the tracks, most bird species will eventually get accustomed to the new disturbance levels and will continue using these habitats. In addition to this, there are extensive areas of the plantation and open habitat where birds that are more sensitive to traffic may relocate. As such, the overall impact to the local bird populations is considered to be negligible.

In addition to the findings of the report, the site of the new road is a designated low flying area for the Ministry of Defence and there are regular low flights of aircraft of various sizes and it is therefore unlikely that timber haulage operations would contribute significantly to noise and disturbance of the site if it is being regularly flown by low flying military aircraft.

Mitigation for any disturbance on the breeding birds would take the form of:

Carrying out a nesting bird check if any works are taking place during the bird breeding season prior to any works commencing. The results of nesting bird checks should only be

regarded as valid for three days, after which further checks will be required to ensure that the situation with regards to nesting birds has not changed. Further surveys may be required in order to confirm that the situation regarding breeding birds at the site has not changed since this report was produced.

#### **4.2 Land**

There will be a permanent change in the land being used for forestry access with the hill track becoming more commonly used for timber transport. This will likely have a positive effect for the landowner Atholl Estates as the area becomes more accessible for farming and deer management.

#### **4.3 Soil**

There is the potential of disturbance to deep peat where the road footprint is to be widened or where the new road is to be constructed. However as the route largely follows the route of an existing farm/stalker's track there is very limited scope for deep peat (that is peat greater than 50cm in depth) will be affected. Where the new road will be constructed across the hill ground and through the forest, these areas have been surveyed for deep peat using a peat probe and none was found. The new section of road crosses a well-drained raised area of ground which does not contain any deep peat.

#### **4.4 Water**

The upgraded track will cross the Edradour Burn and will also cross the flood plain of the burn. It is believed that the Edradour Distillery's water supply is taken from this area.

Mitigation will consist of strict adherence to the Forestry and Water Guidelines and SEPA's general binding rules to prevent the risk of runoff or diffuse pollution both during road construction and during ordinary use. A CAR permit will be obtained from SEPA in order to cross the burn with the new bridge. There will be close liaison with the Edradour Distillery during the construction phase.

Preventative measures will include silt traps/netting as well as turf dams in open drains to slow water and silt as well as silt runoff areas and treatment ponds at regular intervals along the roadside.

#### **4.5 Air**

There is a possible impact from quarrying with dust generated during quarrying operations or during road construction during periods of dry weather. This is likely to be for a short time and a negligible impact. There may be some small amounts of dust generated from the road during dry periods of weather on an ongoing basis.

Water will be sprayed on the road if dust becomes a problem during construction. A speed limit will be in place on the road to lower the risk of dust during timber haulage operations.

#### **4.6 Landscape**

There is the potential impact on local landscape with the upgraded forestry road being more visible from the public road and other viewpoints in the area.

The current route follows the flow of the landscape and land form and is already visible. It may become more obvious in the short term however as the ground settles, it will become less obvious in the landscape. In many places the route is hidden by the landform and there will be few places where the entire road length is visible.

#### **4.7 Cultural Heritage**

There is one small sheiling hut at the terminus of the existing track which could be affected. There are a number of non-scheduled archaeological features within 500m of the road.

Mitigation of the archaeological feature will be primarily through avoidance in accordance with the UK Forestry Standard and guidelines in relation to the historic environment. If this is not possible the feature will be surveyed and recorded allowing it to be developed upon subject to agreement with the local authority archaeologist.

#### **Alternatives Considered**

For a full list of the other lines considered, please refer to the supporting documentation 6. *Ballyoukan Haulage Options Considered Summary*. The alternative route would be the current right of access which would require significant modification to make it suitable for forestry use. If EIA consent is not granted for the proposed work, this will become the alternative route. The other options considered either lack landowner's consent or would involve a similar or greater degree of environmental disturbance to the SPA/SSSI and offer poorer connections to agreed timber haul routes.

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