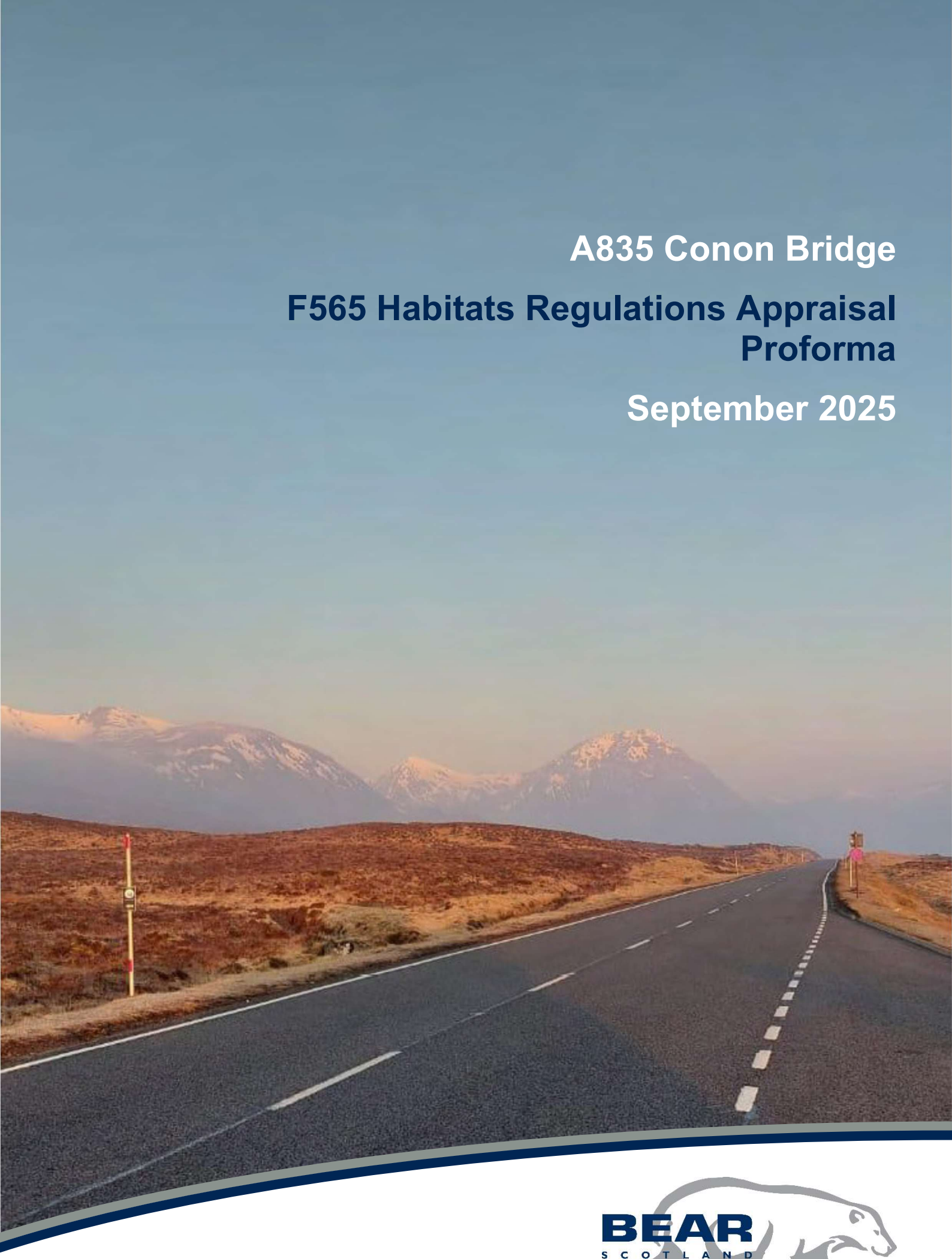
A835 Conon Bridge

F565 Habitats Regulations Appraisal Proforma

September 2025



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Document Control Sheet

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Scheme Designer	Maja Lewandowska

Document Approvals

	Name	Organisation	Signature	Date
Prepared By	Samantha Watkins	BEAR Scotland	[Re	04/09/2025
Checked By	Catriona Conroy	BEAR Scotland	[R	11/09/2025
Authorised By	Carolyn Gillen	BEAR Scotland	[R	26/09/2025

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Reference	Name of Holder
1	Maja Lewandowska (BEAR Scotland)
2	NatureScot
3	Transport Scotland

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Appraisal in relation to regulation 48 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 as amended (Habitats Regulations Appraisal

(Or, where relevant, under regulation 61 of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 as amended, or regulation 25 of The Offshore Marine Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 2007 as amended)

European Site Details

Name of European Site(s) Potentially Affected

The following European sites are located within 2km of the A835 Conon Bridge and may be affected by works:

1. Conon Islands Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (Site ID: 8230)
2. Cromarty Firth Special Protection Area (SPA) (Site ID: 8488)
3. Cromarty Firth Ramsar (Site ID: 8418)

The following European sites are located between 5-20km from A835 Conon Bridge and may have connectivity with the area of works:

4. Inner Moray Firth SPA (Site ID: 8515)
5. Inner Moray Firth Ramsar (Site ID: 8430)

In addition, the following European sites were identified within 20km of the A835 Conon Bridge but were scoped out of further assessment as no pathway to effect was identified due to the nature of the qualifying features and distance from the area of works:

- Ben Wyvis SAC
- Ben Wyvis SPA
- Dam Wood SAC
- Glen Affric to Strathconon SPA
- Loch Ussie SAC
- Monadh Mor SAC
- Moniack Gorge SAC
- Moray Firth SAC
- Moray Firth SPA
- Novar SPA

Name of Component SSSI, if Relevant

Lower Conon River Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) (Site ID 1105) is a component of the Cromarty Firth SPA. The SSSI is designated for the following features:

- Open water transition fen
- Saltmarsh
- Wet woodland

The Cromarty Firth SSSI (Site ID 467) is a component of the Cromarty Firth SPA. The SSSI is designated for the following features:

- Bar-tailed godwit (*Limosa lapponica*), non-breeding
- Mudflats
- Red-breasted merganser (*Mergus serrator*), non-breeding
- Redshank (*Tringa totanus*), non-breeding
- Saltmarsh
- Sandflats
- Whooper swan (*Cygnus cygnus*), non-breeding
- Wigeon (*Anas penelope*), non-breeding

The Beauly Firth SSSI (Site ID: 159) is a component of the Inner Moray Firth SPA. The SSSI is designated for the following features:

- Goosander (*Mergus merganser*), non-breeding
- Greylag goose (*Anser anser*), non-breeding
- Red-breasted merganser, non-breeding
- Saltmarsh
- Vascular plant assemblage

The Munlochy Bay SSSI (Site ID: 1214) is a component of the Inner Moray Firth SPA. The SSSI is designated for the following features:

- Greylag goose, non-breeding
- Mudflats
- Saltmarsh
- Wigeon, non-breeding

European Site(s) Qualifying Interest(s) and Whether Priority or Non-Priority

1. Conon Islands SAC

- Alder woodland on floodplains
  - Negative pressures: *invasive species, water management*
  - Latest assessed condition: *unfavourable, no change (30 Jun 2010)*

2. Cromarty Firth SPA

- Bar-tailed godwit, non-breeding
  - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
  - Latest assessed condition: *favourable, maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Common tern (*Sterna hirundo*), breeding
  - Negative pressures: *other, recreation/disturbance*
  - Latest assessed condition: *unfavourable, declining (31 Mar 2005)*
- Curlew (*Numenius arquata*), non-breeding
  - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
  - Latest assessed condition: *favourable, maintained (30 Dec 2010)*
- Dunlin (*Calidris alpina alpina*), non-breeding
  - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
  - Latest assessed condition: *favourable, maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Greylag goose, non-breeding
  - Negative pressures: *none*
  - Latest assessed condition: *favourable, maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Knot (*Calidris canutus*), non-breeding
  - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
  - Latest assessed condition: *favourable, maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), breeding
  - Negative pressures: *none*
  - Latest assessed condition: *favourable, maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*), non-breeding
  - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
  - Latest assessed condition: *favourable, maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Pintail (*Anas acuta*), non-breeding
  - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
  - Latest assessed condition: *favourable, maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Red-breasted merganser, non-breeding
  - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
  - Latest assessed condition: *favourable, maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Redshank, non-breeding

  - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
  - Latest assessed condition: *favourable, maintained (30 Dec 2010)*
- Scaup (*Aythya marila*), non-breeding
  - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
  - Latest assessed condition: *unfavourable, no change (31 Mar 2005)*
- Waterfowl assemblage, non-breeding
  - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
  - Latest assessed condition: *favourable, maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Whooper swan, non-breeding
  - Negative pressures: *none*
  - Latest assessed condition: *unfavourable, no change (01 Jun 2011)*
- Wigeon, non-breeding
  - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
  - Latest assessed condition: *favourable, maintained (31 Mar 2005)*

3. Cromarty Firth Ramsar

- Bar-tailed godwit, non-breeding
  - Negative pressures: *none*
  - Latest assessed condition: *favourable maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Greylag goose, non-breeding
  - Negative pressures: *none*
  - Latest assessed condition: *favourable maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Intertidal mudflats and sandflats
  - Negative pressures: *invasive species*
  - Latest assessed condition: *favourable maintained (09 Jul 2010)*
- Waterfowl assemblage, non-breeding
  - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
  - Latest assessed condition: *favourable maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Additional interest features included on the Ramsar citation sheet and for which the SPA or SSSI (Cromarty Firth or Lower River Conon) conservation status has been used:
  - Common tern, breeding – *unfavourable declining, last assessed in June 2000*
  - Curlew, non-breeding – *favourable maintained, last assessed in February 2009*
  - Dunlin, non-breeding – *favourable maintained, last assessed in February 2001*
  - Knot, non-breeding – *favourable maintained, last assessed in February 2001*
  - Osprey, foraging/breeding – *favourable maintained, last assessed in October 2004*
  - Oystercatcher, non-breeding – *favourable maintained, last assessed in February 2001*
  - Pintail, non-breeding – *favourable maintained, last assessed in February 2000*
  - Red-breasted merganser, non-breeding – *favourable maintained, last assessed in February 2000*
  - Redshank, non-breeding – *favourable maintained, last assessed in February 2009*
  - Scaup, non-breeding – *unfavourable no change, last assessed in February 2000*
  - Whooper swan, non-breeding – *unfavourable no change, last assessed in February 2010*
  - Wigeon, non-breeding – *favourable maintained, last assessed in February 2009*
  - Estuarine alder woodland – *unfavourable declining, last assessed in August 2002*
  - Open water transition fen – *favourable maintained, last assessed in August 2002*
  - Saltmarsh – *unfavourable recovering, last assessed in August 2001*

4. Inner Moray Firth SPA

- Bar-tailed godwit, non-breeding
  - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
  - Latest assessed condition: *favourable maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Common tern, non-breeding
  - Negative pressures: *other, recreation/disturbance*
  - Latest assessed condition: *unfavourable, no change (31 Mar 2005)*
- Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), non-breeding
  - Negative pressures: *other, recreation/disturbance*

    - Latest assessed condition: *unfavourable, no change (31 Mar 2005)*
- Curlew, non-breeding
    - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
    - Latest assessed condition: *favourable maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*), non-breeding
    - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
    - Latest assessed condition: *favourable maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Goosander, non-breeding
    - Negative pressures: *other, recreation/disturbance*
    - Latest assessed condition: *unfavourable, no change (31 Mar 2005)*
- Greylag goose, non-breeding
    - Negative pressures: *none*
    - Latest assessed condition: *favourable maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Osprey, breeding
    - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
    - Latest assessed condition: *favourable maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Oystercatcher, non-breeding
    - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
    - Latest assessed condition: *favourable maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Red-breasted merganser, non-breeding
    - Negative pressures: *other, recreation/disturbance*
    - Latest assessed condition: *unfavourable, no change (31 Mar 2005)*
- Redshank, non-breeding
    - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
    - Latest assessed condition: *favourable maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Scaup, non-breeding
    - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
    - Latest assessed condition: *favourable maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Teal (*Anas crecca*), non-breeding
    - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
    - Latest assessed condition: *favourable maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Waterfowl assemblage, non-breeding
    - Negative pressures: *other, recreation/disturbance*
    - Latest assessed condition: *favourable maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Wigeon, non-breeding
    - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
    - Latest assessed condition: *favourable maintained (31 Mar 2005)*

5. Inner Moray Firth Ramsar

- Bar-tailed godwit, non-breeding
    - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
    - Latest assessed condition: *favourable maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Greylag goose, non-breeding
    - Negative pressures: *none*
    - Latest assessed condition: *favourable maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Intertidal mudflats and sandflats
    - Negative pressures: *none*
    - Latest assessed condition: *favourable, maintained (11 Nov 2011)*
- Red-breasted merganser, non-breeding
    - Negative pressures: *other, recreation/disturbance*
    - Latest assessed condition: *unfavourable, no change (31 Mar 2005)*
- Redshank, non-breeding
    - Negative pressures: *recreation/disturbance*
    - Latest assessed condition: *favourable maintained (31 Mar 2005)*
- Saltmarsh
    - Negative pressures: *overgrazing (cattle)*

    - Latest assessed condition: *favourable maintained (16 Feb 2012)*
- Sand dunes
    - Negative pressures: *invasive species, under grazing*
    - Latest assessed condition: *unfavourable, no change (16 Dec 2020)*
- Shingle
    - Negative pressures: *invasive species, other, recreation/disturbance*
    - Latest assessed condition: *favourable declining (16 Dec 2020)*
- Waterfowl assemblage, non-breeding
    - Negative pressures: *other*
    - Latest assessed condition: *favourable maintained (31 Mar 2005)*

Condition assessment for all features was accessed via SiteLink on 01/09/2025.

Conservation Objectives for Qualifying Species

The following conservation objectives are taken from supporting documents (i.e. 'Conservation Objectives' and/or 'Conservation Advice Package') for the below European sites, accessed via SiteLink on 01/09/2025.

1. Conon Islands SAC:

1) To ensure that the qualifying feature of Conon Islands SAC is in favourable condition and makes an appropriate contribution to achieving favourable conservation status.
2) To ensure that the integrity of Conon Islands SAC is restored by meeting objectives 2a, 2b and 2c for the qualifying feature.
    2a) Maintain the extent and distribution of the habitat within the site.
    2b) Restore the structure, function and supporting processes of the habitat.
    2c) Restore the distribution and viability of typical species of the habitat.

2. Cromarty Firth SPA:

To avoid deterioration of the habitats of the qualifying species (as listed above) or significant disturbance to the qualifying species, thus ensuring that the integrity of the site is maintained; and

To ensure for the qualifying species that the following are maintained in the long term:

- Population of the species as a viable component of the site
- Distribution of the species within the site
- Distribution and extent of habitats supporting the species
- Structure, function and supporting processes of habitats supporting the species
- No significant disturbance of the species

(NatureScot, 2005)

3. Cromarty Firth Ramsar:

For Ramsar interest feature: mudflat, estuarine alder woodland, saltmarsh:

- To avoid deterioration of the qualifying habitats thus ensuring that the integrity of the site is maintained and the site makes an appropriate contribution to achieving favourable conservation status for each of the qualifying features; and
- To ensure for the qualifying habitats that the following are maintained in the long term:
    - Extent and distribution of the habitat on site
    - Structure and function and supporting processes of the habitat
    - Distribution and viability of typical species of the habitat

(NatureScot, n.d.)

For open water transition fen:

- To ensure that except where due to natural environmental change the following are maintained in the long term:
    - Extent and distribution of the habitat on site
    - Structure and function and supporting process of the habitat
    - Distribution and viability
    - of typical species of the habitat.

For bar-tailed godwit, common tern, curlew, dunlin, greylag goose, knot, osprey, oystercatcher, pintail, red-breasted merganser, redshank, scaup, whooper swan and wigeon:

- Refer to the conservation objectives for the Cromarty Firth SPA.

(NatureScot, n.d.)

4. Inner Moray Firth SPA

To avoid deterioration of the habitats for the qualifying species (listed above) or significant disturbance to the qualifying species, thus ensuring that the integrity of the site is maintained; and

To ensure for the qualifying species that the following are maintained in the long term:

- Population of the species as a viable component of the site
- Distribution of the species within site
- Distribution and extent of habitats supporting the species
- Structure, function, and supporting processes of habitats supporting the species
- No significant disturbance of the species

(NatureScot, n.d.)

5. Inner Moray Firth Ramsar

For Ramsar interest feature: mudflat, sandflat, saltmarsh, sand dune and shingle:

- To avoid deterioration of the qualifying habitats thus ensuring that the integrity of the site is maintained and the site makes an appropriate contribution to achieving favourable conservation status for each of the qualifying features; and
- To ensure for the qualifying habitats that the following are maintained in the long term:
    - Extent and distribution of the habitat on site.
    - Structure and function and supporting process of the habitat.
    - Distribution and viability of typical species of the habitat.

For bar-tailed godwit, common tern, cormorant, curlew, goldeneye, goosander, greylag goose, osprey, oystercatcher, red-breasted merganser, redshank, scaup, teal and wigeon:

- Refer to the conservation objective for Inner Moray Firth SPA.

(NatureScot, n.d.)

Stage 1: What is the Plan or Project?

Proposal Title

A835 Conon Bridge

Name of Competent Authority

- Transport Scotland
- Marine Directorate

Name of Consultee

Consultation with Marine Directorate and NatureScot will be carried out. Consultation was also carried out with the Scottish Raptor Study Group (Appendix A).

Details of Proposal

The works are scheduled to be undertaken on the A835 Conon Bridge, approximately 1km northeast of the settlement of Conon Bridge (21km northeast of Inverness), within the Highland Council region (Figure 1). The scheme is located at National Grid Reference NH 54724 56351. The River Conon is tidal at this location; therefore, the bridge spans the marine environment and a marine licence is required to permit the proposed works.

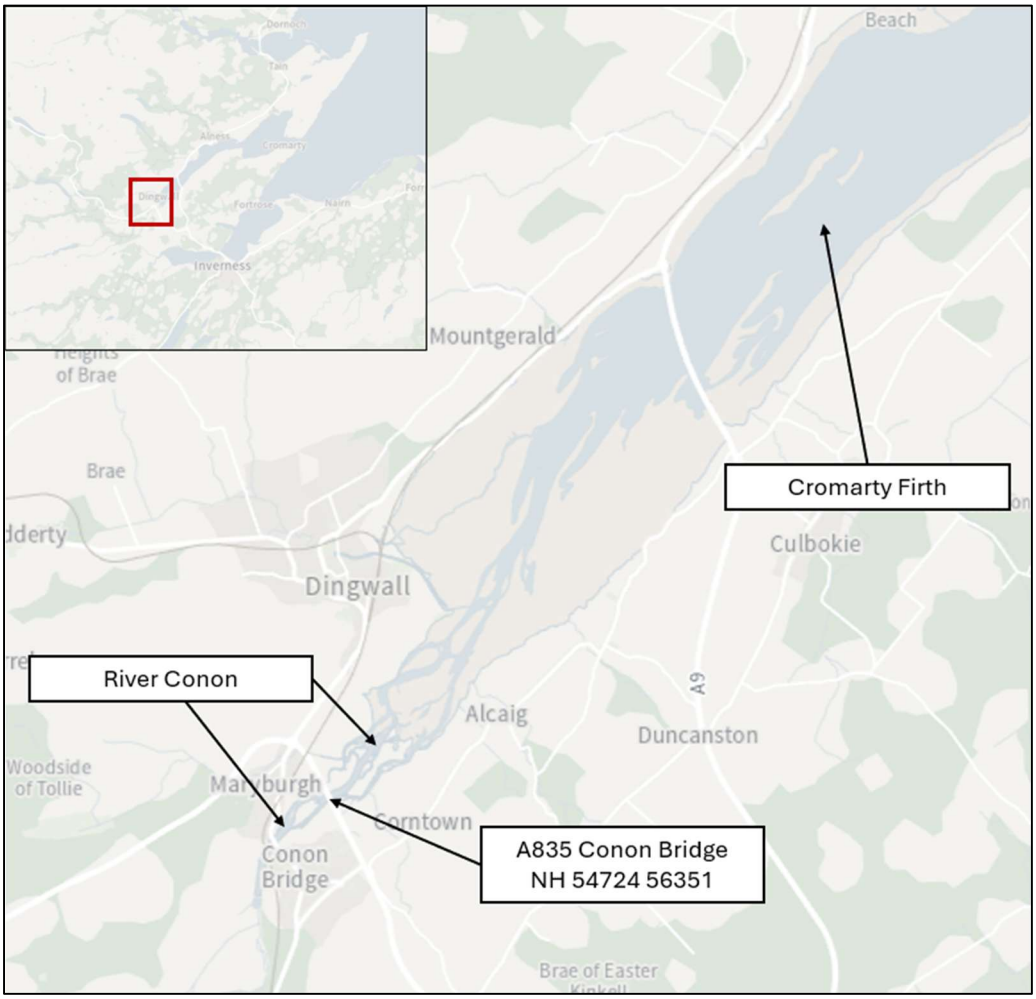

Figure 1. Location of A835 Conon Bridge. Inset map shows location in north of Scotland. Source: NS SiteLink

It is expected that the works will be undertaken in summer/autumn 2026. The works are currently programmed to commence from 01/09/2026, during daytime working hours (08:00-18:00); however, the start date is dependent on the results of additional bat surveys and issue of the marine licence. Traffic management will involve single lane closure with two-way temporary traffic lights. Works are anticipated to have a duration of 16 weeks.

Works will involve various bridge deck refurbishment works, including:

- Intrusive inspection for asbestos on the carriageway, near the expansion joints
- Repair/replacement of the expansion joints
- Removing surfacing and waterproofing layer on the full deck
- Resurfacing and re-waterproofing on the full deck
- Excavation of the existing carriageway
- Concrete repairs to the deck
- Hydro-demolition of top of concrete deck with necessary encapsulation and water processing using a 'Siltbuster' discharged to nearby grass embankment
- Maintenance works including repairs to an off-deck pedestrian fence, removal of minor vegetation on wing walls, removal of graffiti and pigeon droppings on abutments and underneath the bridge decking within the enclosure

The above works are described in further detail below. Most works will take place from the bridge deck only, but some maintenance may require access beneath the bridge deck or to the abutments and wing walls. Any maintenance works below deck will be undertaken within the enclosed aluminium bridge soffit (accessed via hatches in the abutments) and there is no requirement for temporary works or a mobile elevated moving platform (MEWP).

BEAR Scotland follow good practice guidance produced by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) as standard for works in or near water to reduce the risk of water pollution as much as possible. These measures will ensure that any potential pollutants, including fine sediments and materials required for the works in or near water, will not enter the water environment and travel downstream during the works. In addition, good practice measures to reduce noise will be in place to comply with Section 72 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 and BS5228-1:2009-A1:2014 Code of Practice for Noise and Vibration Control on Construction and Open Sites. These measures and working practices would be in place regardless of the presence of nearby designated sites and therefore are not considered to be mitigation. All relevant pollution controls and other good practice measures will be detailed in the Site Environmental Management Plan (SEMP) for each scheme and adhered to on site. Refer to **Appendix B** for details of these good practice measures.

Activity-specific methods

Inspection methodology

The make up of the deck waterproofing layer is not currently known. Prior to construction, an intrusive inspection for asbestos will be carried out, where cores of the carriageway will be taken. Licensed contractors will use small hand tools to remove the waterproofing layer, which will be removed from site by a licensed special waste carrier. Small amounts of water will be sprayed (e.g. during use of hand tools) to suppress any dust created during removal of the waterproofing layer. This and any other material produced during the inspection and asbestos removal will be collected and removed from site as special waste.

Summary methodology:

- Set up of traffic management
- A set of cores taken from the road surfacing to the top of the carriageway deck
- Makeup of deck noted
- Samples of waterproofing at each core taken to be tested for asbestos
- Cores in the deck to be filled with appropriate material chosen by subcontractor
- Demobilise and traffic management removal

Expansion joint repair/replacement

The northbound expansion joint is required to be repaired due to nosing and welding at the joint failing. The southbound buried joint may require a replacement as the above road surfacing has cracked all throughout the length

of the joint. Joint replacement will be on a like-for-like basis and will be carried out from the bridge deck within the trunk road boundary. Works generally entail cutting through the road surface, removal of the old joint, replacement with a like-for-like new joint and resurfacing of the road around the replaced joint. Joint replacement works will take three days for each joint (six days total).

Summary methodology:

- Establish traffic management
- Existing road surfacing to be planed off
- Repair or removal and replacement of joint(s)
- Resurfacing of road around the joint(s)
- Demobilise from site

In addition to the standard working practices and measures listed in Appendix B, full containment measures will be put in place to ensure no loss of material to the surrounding environment.

Removing surfacing and waterproofing layer on deck / re-surfacing and re-waterproofing layer on deck

Resurfacing will be completed as required to repair potholes and large-scale resurfacing to restore the surfacing condition of the trunk road. Resurfacing/waterproofing works are expected to take 21 days for each phase (42 days in total).

Summary methodology:

- Establish traffic management as required
- Excavate or plane off surfacing
- Lay binder and surface course
- Demobilise traffic management

In addition to the standard working practices and measures listed above, the following measures will be in place during the construction phase:

- Resurfacing works will be carried out during suitable periods of weather (i.e., low wind, no rain) where possible.
- Gullies and grips will be blocked during tack coat spraying operations.

Concrete repairs to deck

Concrete repair works on the bridge deck will likely require the use of hydro-demolition and are expected to take 34 days for each phase (68 days in total). Debris netting or sheeting will be applied around the working area to prevent materials and/or hydro-demolition water from entering the water environment. Material will be collected and removed from site by licensed waste carriers. All concrete repair works will be undertaken from the bridge deck.

Wastewater generated from hydro-demolition works is considered to be a trade effluent and is required to either be collected and removed off-site for disposal under appropriate permits/authorisation or discharged on site with appropriate consents in place from SEPA to comply with the Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2011 (as amended) (CAR Regulations). It is currently expected that BEAR Scotland will obtain the required authorisation from SEPA to permit discharge of treated hydro-demolition water on site. The following measures will be implemented:

- Immediately after the hydro-demolition commences operation, wastewater must be contained, collected, and then pumped to an appropriate treatment unit (e.g., a Siltbuster HD Unit) for the treatment phase.
- Wastewater from hydro-demolition must undergo two-phase treatment using a unit which is specifically designed to treat wastewater from hydro-demolition operations (e.g., Siltbuster HD). The system must firstly remove suspended solids to an acceptable level and then neutralise the high pH by using a fully automated CO_2 dosing process to neutralise the alkalinity. Safe estimate target values are: (i) suspended solids (80mg/l), (ii) pH level to be neutral (4 to 9) at discharge.
- Hydro-demolition works must avoid periods of heavy rainfall which could affect the performance of the treatment units.
- Treated water will be discharged on land where possible, rather than into the water environment.

Discharge of water used in hydro-demolition will not take place until any relevant authorisation is obtained and any conditions of the authorisation will be adhered to during construction.

Summary methodology:

- Establish traffic management
- Establish access system and containment measures
- Hydro-demolition/break out of damaged concrete
- Clean steelwork and prepare surface
- Install new concrete
- Clean working area and remove containment measures
- Remove access system and demobilise from site

In addition to the standard working practices and measures listed above, the following measures will be in place during the concrete repairs:

- Hydro-demolition water will be contained using protective sheeting and a sump pit to catch runoff water.
- Debris material and hydro-demolition water will be pumped back up to the bridge deck, where it will then be collected and removed from site by licensed waste carriers, or treated and discharged on site are under relevant authorisation from SEPA.
- For manual breakout of concrete, debris netting to be installed around the area being broken out.
- Containment of the working platform will be achieved using the debris netting and flooring layers.
- Fresh concrete will be poured in such a manner that no concrete is lost or can enter the water environment.
- During concrete mortar works, wet cement must not be allowed to discharge into drains, watercourses or waterbodies. Concrete batching must be carried out on an impermeable surface and at least 10m away (or as far as possible within 10m where space is restricted) from drains and watercourses.
- All waste concrete will be removed from site by licenced waste carriers.

Maintenance works

Various maintenance works will be carried out as part of the proposed works. This will include:

- Repairs to an off-deck pedestrian fence
- Removal of minor vegetation on wing walls
- Removal of graffiti and pigeon droppings on abutments and underneath the bridge decking within the enclosure.

Summary methodology:

- Repair of timber pedestrian fence
  - Top rail to be reinstated
- Removal of minor vegetation
  - Establish temporary works
  - Remove vegetation, green waste to be set aside for composting
- Removal of pigeon droppings
  - Safe access to the underdeck walkway
  - Remove all bird droppings safely and dispose of in a bag marked special waste
  - All waste to be removed by licensed waste carriers

Stage 2: Is the Plan or Project Directly Connected with or Necessary to Site Management for Nature Conservation?

Connection to Site Management
This test is to identify and remove from further assessment those proposals which are clearly necessary to, or of value to, or inevitable as part of, management of the site for its qualifying interests. For the majority of proposals competent authorities deal with the answer to Stage 2 will be 'no'. However, where it is thought this could be applicable the following points should be considered: I. Has the effect on all qualifying interests been considered? II. Is the proposal part of a fully assessed and agreed management plan? If not, then further consideration or supporting information will be required. III. Is there a clear rationale to justify the connection with the conservation objectives? IV. If there is a clear connection with the conservation objectives will any benefits arising from the proposal outweigh any negative effects? V. Have any alternative methods of implementing the proposal been explored, including building in any relevant mitigation, to demonstrate that this is the least damaging option? VI. Give a Yes / No conclusion in terms of whether the plan or project is considered directly connected with or necessary to site management for nature conservation. If Yes for all elements of a plan or project, for all the European site qualifying interests (preferably as part of a fully assessed and agreed management plan), then consent can be issued. The rationale should be detailed below, and no further appraisal is required (no need to proceed to Stage 3 or 4). If No for one or more European site qualifying interests then proceed to Stage 3. If a plan has multiple elements (e.g., a range of policies or management objectives), elements of the plan considered directly connected with or necessary to site management for nature conservation should be discussed below and a rationale given for this conclusion. No further appraisal is then required for those elements. All other elements of the plan must proceed to Stage 3.

This project is not connected with or necessary to the management of the qualifying interests of the sites, therefore further assessment is required.

Stage 3: Is the Plan or Project (Either Alone or in Combination with Other Plans or Projects) Likely to Have a Significant Effect on the Site?

Assessment for LSE

The test of Likely Significant Effect (LSE) is a simple screening stage to determine whether or not an appropriate assessment is required. Each qualifying interest must be considered in relation to their conservation objectives. The following points should be considered:

I. Briefly indicate which qualifying interest could be affected by the proposal and how; if none, provide a brief justification for this decision, and then proceed to v), otherwise continue:
II. consider whether there is connectivity between the proposal and each of the qualifying interests i.e. are there processes or pathways by which the proposal may influence the site's interests? Conclude no LSE only if there is no connection, or it is obvious that the proposal will not undermine the conservation objectives despite a connection. The potential for negative effects on the qualifying interests may be immediately obvious, in which case conclude likely significant effect and move straight to the next step.
III. consider the nature, scale, location, longevity, and reversibility of effects.
IV. consider whether the proposal contributes to cumulative or incremental impacts in combination with other plans or projects completed, underway or proposed.
V. Where the impacts of a proposal are the same for different qualifying interests these can be considered together however a clear conclusion should be given for each interest.
VI. give Yes / No conclusion for each interest.

If Yes, or in cases of doubt, continue to Stage 4.

If No for all features, a consent can be given and recorded below. There is no need to then proceed to Stage 4.

Remember if mitigation is required to prevent there being an effect on qualifying interests, then LSE must be concluded, and an appropriate assessment (Stage 4) must be conducted. Further guidance on the handling of mitigation can be found as part of the European site Casework Guidance.

Below is an assessment of the potential for Likely Significant Effects (LSE) of the proposed works on the qualifying features of the following designated sites:

1. **Conon Islands SAC** – within/adjacent to the area of works
   - Lower River Conon SSSI (wet woodlands) – within/adjacent to the area of works
2. **Cromarty Firth SPA and Cromarty Firth Ramsar** – 550m northeast of works
   - Cromarty Firth SSSI (all features) – 1.3km northeast of works
3. **Inner Moray Firth SPA and Inner Moray Firth Ramsar** – 7.5km southeast of works
   - Beauly Firth SSSI (all features, 7.5km southeast of works) and Munlochy Bay SSSI (all features, 11km east of works)

Although SSSIs are not subject to HRA, an assessment of potential effects on two component SSSIs within the assessments of the relevant European Sites are included below for completeness.

Where a European Site overlaps with a Ramsar Site and both are designated for the same or related features, these have been grouped into one assessment for brevity as the potential effects of works will be the same.

Assessment of the potential effects of the proposed maintenance activities has been carried out below. Qualifying features for each site have been grouped where possible for brevity.

1. Conon Islands SAC

Includes assessment of wet woodland feature of Lower River Conon SSSI and estuarine alder woodland feature of Cromarty Firth Ramsar site for completeness.

Site description

The Conon Islands SAC is comprised of several discrete areas along the River Conon between the settlements of Contin and Dingwall. The Lower River Conon SSSI overlaps with the SAC but extends further northeast into the Cromarty Firth than the SAC. The SAC supports the Annex I habitat 'alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (*Alno-Padion*, *Alnion incanae*, *Salicion alvae)*' which is a priority habitat on the Habitats Directive. This alluvial woodland habitat dominated by alder and willow is fragmented and occurs in discrete strips or tree lines within the SAC/SSSI. This has resulted from historic clearance of alluvial woodland to make room for agricultural fields, which are often found adjacent to Conon Islands SAC/SSSI (NS 2020). The qualifying feature 'alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (*Alno-Padion*, *Alnion incanae*, *Salicion alvae*)' is subject to periodic inundation and depends on a high water table, wet conditions, and hydrological variation common to floodplains (NS 2020, Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) 2024a). It is sensitive to invasive species and water management. The Cromarty Firth Ramsar feature 'estuarine alder woodland' occurs at the mouth of the River Conon and is assumed to be the same or associated with the qualifying woodland of the Conon Islands SAC.

The A835 Conon Bridge spans both the SAC and SSSI. However, the SSSI extends further into the Cromarty Firth to encompass some intertidal habitats, which have been considered within the assessment for the Cromarty Firth SPA/Ramsar below. The Ramsar site is approximately 550m northeast of the scheme. It is included here to assess the potential effects on the qualifying feature wet woodland, which is assumed to be present within overlapping areas of Conon Islands SAC. Therefore, we have assumed that this feature would be located within the scheme extents (i.e. within the SAC boundary).

Assessment against the conservation objectives for qualifying woodland habitats

The risk of direct effects (e.g., habitat loss, mortality of typical species) and indirect effects (e.g., pollution, spread of invasive species) on the qualifying habitat as a result of proposed works at A835 Conon Bridge are considered below.

The works at A835 Conon Bridge entail works within the boundaries of the SAC/SSSI and approximately 550m from the Ramsar site. However, all proposed works within the SAC/SSSI boundary are restricted to engineered ground of the A835 carriageway, bridge deck and immediate surroundings which the site visit confirmed do not support areas of qualifying habitats, and no in-water works will be undertaken. Required vegetation clearance for works will be highly restricted to vegetation (scrub/gorse) located on the wing walls of the bridge, and no trees will be felled. Therefore, works will not result in direct alteration or removal of qualifying woodland habitats within the SAC/SSSI.

There is potential for indirect effects on the qualifying habitats and their typical species as a result of pollution or disturbance from construction activities. However, the standard working practices noted in Stage 1 and Appendix B include robust containment measures to prevent pollution events for all works, including methods such as hydro-demolition. These working practices also include provisions to reduce the risk of transporting invasive species during works, such as washing equipment or vehicles prior to moving between water bodies. Where hydro-demolition is required, the working area will be encapsulated and the wastewater will be contained, collected, and treated through a Siltbuster before being discharged (under SEPA authorisation) to a nearby area on land, likely the embankments along the A835. The wastewater must meet certain parameters before it can be discharged: a pH of between 4-9, a suspended solids limit of 80mg/l and volume of discharge must not exceed 10m³ per day. Wastewater from hydro-demolition will not be discharged within areas of the SAC or areas of alder woodland. With these and the additional good practice measures listed in Stage 1 and Appendix B in place during works, the risk of indirect effects on the qualifying habitats and typical species as a result of works is limited. Therefore, **no LSE on the qualifying habitats and their typical species have been identified as a result of the proposed works** and the conservation objectives to maintain the extent, distribution, structure and function, and supporting processes of the habitats will be met.

Cumulative and in-combination effects

The proposed works will be highly localised to the A835 Conon Bridge and immediate vicinity. A search has been undertaken for other plans and projects that could have cumulative or in-combination effects in the vicinity of the proposed works; BEAR Scotland is carrying out works at the A9 Cromarty Bridge, approximately 6.5km northeast of the scheme. The works at A9 Cromarty Bridge are due to be completed between January and March 2026, approximately 6 months before the proposed works at A835 Conon Bridge are anticipated to start. A range of good practice and mitigation measures have been implemented at A9 Cromarty Bridge to reduce potential impacts to the qualifying features of Conon Islands SAC, Cromarty Firth Ramsar, and Lower River Conon SSSI. Considering this, and due to the distance between the bridges and lack of overlap in timing of works, no significant cumulative or in-combination effects are expected. No other works that could have cumulative or in-combination effects in the vicinity of the works were identified. In addition, considering the nature and scale of the works, and the distance to the

SAC/Ramsar/SSSI, there is likely to be limited potential for significant cumulative or in-combination effects in the event of additional plans or projects are undertaken.

BEAR Scotland programme all proposed works in line with appropriate guidance and contractual requirements to take into account existing and future planned works on the trunk roads, with a view of limiting any cumulative effects relating to traffic management impacts. As a result of this approach, disturbance in localised areas due to construction noise and activities is also limited. Therefore, no cumulative or in-combination effects of the proposed works are expected on the qualifying features of the Conon Islands SAC and component SSSI or Cromarty Firth Ramsar.

Conclusion
Taking the above into account, **no LSE, either alone or in combination with other projects, are expected on any of the qualifying features of the Conon Islands SAC or the woodland feature of the Ramsar site as a result of the proposed works, and all conservation objectives for these features will be met. This feature is not considered further.**

Similarly, no significant negative effects have been identified on the wet woodland feature of the Lower River Conon SSSI and this feature is not considered further.

2. Cromarty Firth SPA and Cromarty Firth Ramsar

Includes assessment of features of Cromarty Firth SSSI (all features) and Lower River Conon SSSI (open water transition fen, saltmarsh) for completeness.

The Cromarty Firth is a large, narrow estuary that extends for approximately 25km from the mouth of the River Conon northeast to where it joins the wider Moray Firth at Cromarty. The Cromarty Firth SPA encompasses both coasts of the Cromarty Firth, including extensive areas of intertidal flats, which are the largest in the Moray Firth. The intertidal habitats present in the Cromarty Firth support a wide variety of marine invertebrates, which in turn support nationally and internationally important numbers of wintering wildfowl and wading birds. The Cromarty Firth SPA overlaps with the Cromarty Firth Ramsar site, the Cromarty Firth SSSI, and part of the Lower River Conon SSSI.

The A835 Conon Bridge lies approximately 550m southwest of the SPA and Ramsar, approximately 1.3km southwest of the Cromarty Firth SSSI and spans the Lower River Conon SSSI.

Assessment against the conservation objectives for osprey
Osprey are summer visitors to the UK that feed primarily on fish and generally nest in trees or on artificial platforms near fresh water (Goodship and Furness 2022). The SPA/Ramsar are known to support osprey populations of European importance, which regularly forage within the SPA/Ramsar. The Citation for the SPA noted that between 2008 and 2012, there was a five-year mean of up to 25 osprey territories within foraging range of the SPA/Ramsar and one breeding pair recorded within the SPA boundary (NatureScot 2018). No negative pressures for osprey are noted in the site documents for Cromarty Firth SPA or Ramsar; however, osprey are expected to be sensitive to certain types of disturbance. NatureScot recommends a disturbance buffer distance of 350m-750m for osprey during the breeding season.

As there is potential for connectivity between the works and breeding and/or foraging osprey present within the vicinity of proposed works on A835 Conon Bridge, **proposed works may result in LSE on breeding or foraging osprey within the SPA/Ramsar. This feature is assessed further in Stage 4**.

Assessment against the conservation objectives for breeding common tern and overwintering birds
Includes assessment of overwintering birds in Cromarty Firth SSSI for completeness.

Common terns are summer visitors to the UK that feed primarily on fish and, in Scotland, typically breed in coastal areas between April and July, leaving in late summer to head south for the winter (Goodship and Furness 2022, British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) 2024a). The SPA/Ramsar are known to support common tern populations of European importance, which breed and forage within the SPA/Ramsar. Ardullie Point, which is located 7km northeast of the A835 Conon Bridge, is known to support a breeding colony. Common terns are sensitive to recreation and disturbance. NatureScot recommends a disturbance buffer distance of 200-400m for common tern during the breeding season.

The Cromarty Firth SPA/Ramsar and component SSSI support a range of overwintering wader and wildfowl species which are known to forage and roost within the designated site boundaries. The majority of the overwintering bird species are noted to be sensitive to recreation and disturbance. No negative pressures for greylag geese or whooper swan were noted in the site documents for Cromarty Firth SPA or Ramsar; however, they are expected to be sensitive to some types of disturbance.

No works will take place within the SPA and Ramsar; therefore the works will not result in any alteration or removal of habitat within the SPA/SSSI/Ramsar and no direct effects on the qualifying species or their habitats have been identified. Indirect effects on the qualifying species as a result of pollution are unlikely due to the distance from the scheme, limited connectivity and lack of in-water works. Additionally, the standard working practices noted in Stage 1 and Appendix B include robust containment measures to prevent pollution events from construction works. With these measures in place during the works, the risk of indirect effects on the qualifying species, their supporting habitats, and food availability as a result of pollution is highly limited.

Although works will result in a temporary (localised) increase in noise, the nearest part of the scheme in the A835 carriageway is 550m from the SPA/SSSI/Ramsar with intervening topography which provides acoustic and visual screening between the works and SPA/SSSI/Ramsar. NatureScot recommends the following disturbance buffers for the qualifying non-breeding bird species of the SPA/Ramsar/SSSI during the non-breeding season (Goodship and Furness 2022):

- Bar-tailed godwit: 200-300m
- Curlew: 200-650m
- Dunlin: 150-300m
- Greylag goose: 200-600m
- Knot: 100-300m
- Oystercatcher: 150-300m
- Pintail: 100-200m
- Red-breasted merganser: N/a
- Redshank: 200-300m
- Scaup: 150-450m (estimate for greater scaup)
- Whooper swan: 200-600m
- Wigeon: 200-500m

Recommended disturbance distances for most species is under 550m (distance to the site); therefore, it is unlikely that these species will be significantly affected by works at A835 Conon Bridge. Given the distance between the scheme location and the SPA/SSSI/Ramsar, intervening landscape features and topography, and the scale and duration of the works, **no LSE have been identified on the qualifying bird species (except for curlew, greylag goose, and whooper swan) as a result of the works and all conservation objectives will be met for these species.**

However, curlew, greylag goose, and whooper swan have larger disturbance distances and may forage in agricultural fields near the area of works. Consequently, there is a risk that proposed works on A835 Conon Bridge could result in disturbance to these species and **LSE on curlew, greylag goose, and whooper swan associated with the Cromarty Firth SPA/Ramsar/SSSI cannot be ruled out at this stage. These species are considered further in Stage 4**.

<u>Assessment against the conservation objectives for Ramsar qualifying habitats</u>
Includes assessment of qualifying habitats in Cromarty Firth SSSI (mudflats, saltmarsh, sandflats) and Lower River Conon SSSI (open water transition fen, saltmarsh) for completeness.

The qualifying habitats of Cromarty Firth Ramsar include intertidal mudflats and sandflats, open water transition fen, and saltmarsh, which provide foraging and breeding habitat for the qualifying bird species of the SPA/Ramsar (estuarine alder woodland is included in the assessment for Conon Islands SAC above). Similarly, the qualifying habitats of Cromarty Firth SSSI and Lower River Conon SSSI also provide supporting habitats for the qualifying birds species.

The works at A835 Conon Bridge entail works within the boundaries of the Lower River Conon SSSI, approximately 550m from the Ramsar site, and approximately 1.3km from the Cromarty Firth SSSI. However, all proposed works are restricted to engineered ground of the A835 carriageway, bridge deck and immediate surroundings which the site visit confirmed do not support areas of qualifying habitats, and no-in-water works will be undertaken; therefore, works will not result in direct alteration or removal of this feature within the Ramsar/SSSIs.

There is potential for indirect effects on the qualifying habitats and their typical species as a result of pollution or disturbance from construction activities. However, the standard working practices listed in Stage 1 and Appendix B include robust containment measures to prevent pollution events for all works, including methods such as hydro-demolition. These working practices also include provisions to reduce the risk of transporting invasive species during works, such as washing equipment or vehicles prior to moving between water bodies. Where hydro-demolition is required, the working area will be encapsulated and the wastewater will be contained, collected, and treated through a Siltbuster before being discharged (under SEPA authorisation) to a nearby area on land, likely the embankments along the A835. The wastewater must meet certain parameters before it can be discharged: a pH of between 4-9, a suspended solids limit of 80mg/l and volume of discharge must not exceed 10m³ per day. Wastewater from hydro-demolition will not be discharged within areas of the Ramsar/SSSI qualifying habitats. With these and the additional good practice measures listed in Stage 1 and Appendix B in place during works, the risk of indirect effects on the qualifying habitats and typical species as a result of works is limited. Therefore, **no LSE on the qualifying habitats and their typical species have been identified as a result of the proposed works and the conservation objectives to maintain the extent, distribution, structure and function, and supporting processes of the habitats will be met**.

Cumulative and in-combination effects for breeding common tern and overwintering birds, Ramsar qualifying habitats
The proposed works will be highly localised to the A835 Conon Bridge and immediate vicinity. A search has been undertaken for other plans and projects that could have cumulative or in-combination effects in the vicinity of the proposed works; BEAR Scotland is carrying out works at the A9 Cromarty Bridge, approximately 6.5km northeast of the scheme. The works at A9 Cromarty Bridge are due to be completed between January and March 2026, approximately 6 months before the proposed works at A835 Conon Bridge are anticipated to start. A range of goof practice and mitigation measures have been implemented at A9 Cromarty Bridge to reduce potential impacts to the qualifying features of Conon Islands SAC, Cromarty Firth Ramsar, and Lower River Conon SSSI. Both NatureScot and the Marine Directorate are aware of these works at A9 Cromarty Bridge. Considering this, and due to the distance between the bridges and lack of overlap in timing of works, no significant cumulative or in-combination effects are expected. No other works that could have cumulative or in-combination effects in the vicinity of the works were identified. In addition, considering the nature and scale of the works, and the distance to the SAC/Ramsar/SSSIs, there is likely to be limited potential for significant cumulative or in-combination effects in the event of additional plans or projects are undertaken.

BEAR Scotland programme all proposed works in line with appropriate guidance and contractual requirements to take into account existing and future planned works on the trunk roads, with a view of limiting any cumulative effects relating to traffic management impacts. As a result of this approach, disturbance in localised areas due to construction noise and activities is also limited. Therefore, no cumulative or in-combination effects of the proposed works are expected on the breeding common tern and overwintering birds in the Cromarty Firth SPA/Ramsar and component SSSIs, and qualifying habitat features in Cromarty Firth Ramsar, and component SSSIs.

An assessment of cumulative and in-combination effects on breeding/foraging osprey and overwintering curlew, greylag goose, and whooper swan in the Cromarty Firth SPA/Ramsar has been undertaken in Stage 4.

Conclusion
Due to the proximity of works at A835 Conon Bridge to the Cromarty Firth SPA/Ramsar designated sites, there is **potential for works to result in LSE on some of the qualifying features within these sites (breeding and/or foraging osprey and overwintering curlew, greylag geese and whooper swan within the Cromarty Firth SPA/Ramsar). Further assessment of these qualifying features has been undertaken in Stage 4, including an assessment of cumulative and in-combination effects.**

Taking the above into account, **no LSE, either alone or in combination with other projects, have been identified on breeding tern or any of the remainder of the qualifying overwintering bird species of the SPA/Ramsar as a result of the proposed works. In addition, no LSE have been identified on any of the qualifying habitat**

features of the Cromarty Firth Ramsar as a result of works. All conservation objectives for these features will be met and these features are not considered further.

Similarly, no significant negative effects have been identified on the same qualifying bird species within Cromarty Firth SSSI or the qualifying habitats of Lower River Conon SSSI (open water transition fen and saltmarsh only) as a result of works. These features are not considered further.

3. Inner Moray Firth SPA and Inner Moray Firth Ramsar

Includes assessment of all features for Beauly Firth SSSI and Munlochy Bay SSSI for completeness.

The Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar sites overlap and are located approximately 7.5km from the A835 Conon Bridge at the nearest point. The sites are comprised of several discrete areas within the Beauly and Inverness Firths, including both shores at the head of the Beauly Firth, Munlochy Bay, Longman Bay, and Castle Stuart Bay within the Inverness Firth, and Whiteness Head at the mouth of the Inverness Firth. All of these areas are designated as SSSIs. The Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar sites encompass a variety of coastal and wetland habitat types that support large populations of several wader and wildfowl species. Beauly Firth SSSI is located approximately 7.5km southeast of A835 Conon Bridge and Munlochy Bay SSSI is located approximately 11km east of A385 Conon Bridge. Only these two SSSIs are considered in this assessment as they are within the foraging distance for greylag geese, which is a qualifying feature of both SSSIs as well as the SPA and Ramsar.

Assessment against the conservation objectives for breeding common tern and osprey

Common terns are summer visitors to the UK that feed primarily on fish and, in Scotland, typically breed in coastal areas between April and July, leaving in late summer to head south for the winter (Goodship and Furness 2022, British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) 2024a). Osprey are also summer visitors to the UK that feed primarily on fish and generally nest in trees or on artificial platforms near fresh water (Goodship and Furness 2022). The SPA/Ramsar are known to support osprey and common tern populations of European importance, which regularly forage within the SPA/Ramsar. The risk of direct effects (e.g., mortality during construction, habitat loss) and indirect effects (e.g., pollution, disturbance) on breeding common tern and osprey as a result of proposed works at A835 Conon Bridge are considered below.

No works will take place within the boundaries of the SPA/Ramsar; therefore, works will not result in any loss of supporting habitats for osprey or common terns within the SPA/Ramsar. Due to the distance between these sites and the area of works, the risk of injury or mortality of these species during construction is considered to be negligible.

Pollution during works at the A835 Conon Bridge could potentially affect supporting habitats or food resources of breeding common terns and osprey within the SPA/Ramsar. However, although the shortest distance between the Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar and A835 Conon Bridge is 7.5km, this is a straight-line distance over land. The distance between connected waterways is significantly greater, as water would need to travel a much further distance from the bridge around the Black Isle peninsula and into the Inverness and Beauly Firths. Due to this highly limited hydrological connectivity between the area of works and the SPA/Ramsar, the risk of effects on breeding common terns and osprey within the SPA/Ramsar as a result of pollution from works on the A85 Conon Bridge is considered to be negligible.

Although the SPA/Ramsar is located 7.5km (straight-line distance) from the A835 Conon Bridge, common terns and osprey associated with the Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar may commute or forage in the Cromarty Firth near the area of works. As recreation and disturbance are noted pressures for common terns and osprey within the SPA/Ramsar, proposed works at A835 Conon Bridge could result in disturbance of these species. NatureScot recommends a disturbance buffer of 200-400m for common tern during the breeding season and a disturbance buffer of 350-750m for osprey during the breeding season (Goodship and Furness 2022). These distances are significantly less than the closest distance between the A835 Conon Bridge and the Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar, so disturbance of common terns or osprey nesting in the Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar will not occur. Common terns and osprey that may forage in the vicinity of works are unlikely to be significantly disturbed by works at A835 Conon Bridge, as the area of works would only affect a small area of the potential foraging habitat within the Cromarty Firth and there is ample alternative foraging habitat in other parts of the Cromarty Firth that would be available outside the disturbance distance for these species. There is also plenty of suitable foraging habitat for common terns and osprey within the Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar boundary outwith the direct works area which they would be more likely to use. Therefore, the risk of indirect effects on these species as a result of disturbance from works at A835 Conon Bridge is considered to be negligible.

Assessment against the conservation objectives for overwintering birds
Includes assessment of overwintering birds in Beauly Firth SSSI and Munlochy Bay SSSI for completeness.

The Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar and component SSSIs support a range of overwintering wader and wildfowl species. These species are highly mobile and may be present within proximity of the A835 Conon Bridge. Therefore, the risk of direct effects (e.g., mortality, habitat loss) and indirect effects (pollution of supporting habitats, disturbance) on overwintering birds within the SPA/Ramsar/SSSIs as a result of proposed works are considered below.

No works will take place within the boundaries of the SPA/Ramsar or SSSIs; therefore, works will not result in any loss of supporting habitats for overwintering birds within the SPA/Ramsar/SSSIs. Due to the distance between these sites and the area of works, the risk of injury or mortality of these species during construction is considered to be negligible.

Pollution during works at the A835 Conon Bridge could potentially affect supporting habitats or food resources of overwintering birds within the SPA/Ramsar/SSSIs. However, although the shortest distance between the Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar and A835 Conon Bridge is 7.5km, this is a straight-line distance over land. The distance between connected waterways is significantly greater, as water would need to travel a much further distance from the bridge around the Black Isle peninsula and into the Inverness and Beauly Firths. Due to this highly limited hydrological connectivity between the area of works and the SPA/Ramsar, the risk of effects on overwintering birds within the SPA/Ramsar/SSSIs as a result of pollution from works on the A835 Conon Bridge is considered to be negligible.

The SPA/Ramsar and nearest SSSI (Beauly Firth SSSI) are located 7.5km (straight-line distance) from the A835 Conon Bridge. NatureScot's recommended disturbance buffers during the non-breeding season for ten of the twelve non-breeding qualifying bird species (including greylag geese) are less than the distance between the Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar and A835 Conon Bridge (Goodship and Furness 2022). No information on disturbance distances was available for the other two species (red-breasted merganser, cormorant) but it is expected that they would have comparable disturbance distances to similar species. Of the twelve overwintering bird species, only greylag geese and potentially cormorant have a foraging range that could come within disturbance distance of the working area at A835 Conon Bridge. Therefore, individuals of those species that are associated with the Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar/SSSIs may have potential to use parts of the Cromarty Firth (NS 2016a; Fijn et al 2022). The rest of the species in this group are more likely to be present in or near the Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar/SSSIs and individuals associated with the Inner Moray Firth sites are unlikely to use the Cromarty Firth. Therefore, for the majority of overwintering bird species, there is no connectivity between the area of works and the Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar/SSSIs and there is no pathway to effect via disturbance.

Although greylag geese and possibly cormorant associated with Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar may forage within the Cromarty Firth, they are unlikely to be significantly disturbed by works at A835 Conon Bridge, as the area of works would only affect a small area of the potential foraging habitat within the Cromarty Firth. There is also ample alternative foraging habitat in other parts of the Cromarty Firth that would be available outside the disturbance distance for these species. The Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar/SSSIs support plentiful foraging habitat which foraging geese and cormorants associated with those sites would be more likely to use. Therefore, the risk of indirect effects on these species as a result of disturbance from works at A835 Conon Bridge is considered to be negligible.

Assessment against the conservation objectives for qualifying habitats
Includes assessment of qualifying habitats (mudflats, saltmarsh, vascular plant assemblage) in Beauly Firth SSSI and Munlochy Bay SSSI for completeness.

The qualifying habitats for Inner Moray Firth Ramsar include marine habitats (intertidal mudflats and sandflats) and coastal habitats (saltmarsh, sand dunes, shingle). The two component SSSIs are also designated for some of these habitats, which likely provide supporting habitat for the qualifying bird species within Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar and the two SSSIs. No negative pressures have been noted for intertidal mudflats and sandflats. However, negative pressures including invasive species, recreation/disturbance, and over- or under-grazing have been noted for the coastal habitats. The only one of these pressures that could be affected by proposed works is the spread of invasive species. The risk of direct effects (e.g., habitat loss, mortality of typical species) and indirect effects (e.g., pollution, spread of invasive species) on the qualifying habitats as a result of proposed works at A835 Conon Bridge are considered below.

As noted, the distance between the SPA/Ramsar/SSSIs and the area of works at A835 Conon Bridge is over 7.5km via straight-line distance. None of the proposed maintenance activities at A835 Conon Bridge would entail works within the boundaries of these sites and there is no connectivity between the area of works and the qualifying habitats. Due to the distance from the bridge and lack of connectivity, no direct effects (e.g., habitat loss, mortality of typical species due to construction activities or vehicles) on the qualifying habitat or its typical species within the SPA/Ramsar/SSSIs will result from the proposed maintenance activities.

The A835 Conon Bridge is located over 7.5km (straight-line distance) from the SPA/Ramsar and nearest SSSI (Beauly Firth); therefore, there is very limited hydrological connectivity between these sites and the area of works within the Cromarty Firth, and there will be no in-water works as part of the scheme. Consequently, there is limited potential for works to result in indirect effects on the qualifying habitats and their typical species as a result of pollution. The standard and activity-specific working practices noted in Stage 1 and Appendix B include robust containment measures to prevent pollution events for the works, including hydro-demolition. These working practices also include provisions to reduce the risk of transporting invasive species during works, such as washing equipment or vehicles prior to moving between water bodies. These, in combination with standard containment measures, are expected to significantly reduce the risk of transporting invasive species within or around the Cromarty Firth and therefore to the wider marine environment (e.g., Inner Moray Firth). Therefore, the risk of indirect effects on the qualifying habitats of the SPA/Ramsar/SSSIs as a result of pollution or spread of invasive species during proposed works at A835 Conon Bridge is considered to be low.

Cumulative and in-combination effects

The proposed works will be highly localised to the A835 Conon Bridge and immediate vicinity. A search has been undertaken for other plans and projects that could have cumulative or in-combination effects in the vicinity of the proposed works; BEAR Scotland is carrying out works at the A9 Cromarty Bridge, approximately 6.5km northeast of the scheme. The works at A9 Cromarty Bridge are due to be completed between January and March 2026, approximately 6 months before the proposed works at A835 Conon Bridge are anticipated to start. A range of good practice and mitigation measures have been implemented at A9 Cromarty Bridge to reduce potential impacts to the qualifying features of Conon Islands SAC Cromarty Firth Ramsar, and Lower River Conon SSSI. Both NatureScot and the Marine Directorate are aware of these works at A9 Cromarty Bridge. Considering this, and due to the distance between the bridges and lack of overlap in timing of works, no significant cumulative or in-combination effects in the vicinity of the works were identified. No other works that could have cumulative or in-combination effects in the vicinity of the works were identified. In addition, considering the nature and scale of the works, and the distance to the SPA/Ramsar/SSSIs, there is likely to be limited potential for significant cumulative or in-combination effects in the event of additional plans or projects are undertaken.

BEAR Scotland programme all proposed works in line with appropriate guidance and contractual requirements to take into account existing and future planned works on the trunk roads, with a view of limiting any cumulative effects relating to traffic management impacts. As a result of this approach, disturbance in localised areas due to construction noise and activities is also limited. Therefore, no cumulative or in-combination effects of the proposed works are expected on the qualifying features of the Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar and component SSSIs.

Overall, due to the nature and scale of the proposed works, the distance between the area of works and the designated sites, it is highly unlikely that proposed works would result in significant cumulative or in-combination effects on the qualifying features of the Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar and component SSSIs.

Conclusion:

Taking into account the considerable distance between the area of works at A835 Conon Bridge and the Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar alongside the good working practices for pollution control as noted in Stage 1 and Appendix B, **no LSE, either alone or in combination with other projects, have been identified on any of the qualifying features of the Inner Moray Firth SPA or Inner Moray Firth Ramsar as a result of the proposed activities and all conservation objectives for these features will be met. These features are not considered further.**

Similarly, no significant negative impacts have been identified on any of the qualifying features of the Beauly Firth SSSI or Munlochy Bay SSSI as a result of the proposed works and these features are not considered further.

Stage 4: Undertake an Appropriate Assessment of the Implications for the Site in View of its Conservation Objectives

Appropriate Assessment

It is the responsibility of the competent authority to carry out the appropriate assessment. The competent authority must consult SNH (NatureScot) on the appropriate assessment. NatureScot can provide advice on what issues should be considered in the appropriate assessment, what information is required to carry out the assessment, in some circumstances carry out an appraisal to inform an appropriate assessment and/or provide comments on an assessment carried out.

An 'appropriate assessment' consists of two parts: a scientific, reasoned appraisal (Stage 4) and a conclusion (Stage 5). Consider the proposed plan/project, its impact on the qualifying interests assessed against their conservation objectives and take account of any possible in combination effects with other plans or projects.

The following points should be considered:

I. Describe for each qualifying interest the potential impacts of the proposal detailing which aspects or effects of the proposal could impact upon them and their conservation objectives.
II. Evaluate the potential impacts, e.g., whether short/long term, reversible or irreversible, and in relation to the proportion/importance of the interest affected, and the overall effect on the site's conservation objectives. This should be in sufficient detail to ensure all impacts have been considered and sufficiently appraised. Record if additional survey information or specialist advice has been obtained.
III. Each conservation objective should be considered, and a decision reached as to whether the proposal will affect achievement of this objective i.e., whether the conservation objective will be undermined if the proposal is consented to. Restore objectives may have been set where qualifying features of a site are in an unfavourable condition. In such cases the appropriate assessment should consider whether the plan or project would prevent the qualifying feature from being able to be restored.

The assessment in Stage 3 concluded that the works at A835 Conon Bridge would not result in LSE on the following qualifying features:

- Conon Islands SAC
  - Alder woodland on floodplains
- Cromarty Firth SPA
  - Breeding populations of the following bird species:
    - Common tern
  - Non-breeding (overwintering) populations of the following bird species:
    - Bar-tailed godwit
    - Dunlin
    - Knot
    - Oystercatcher
    - Pintail
    - Red-breasted merganser
    - Redshank
    - Scaup
    - Waterfowl assemblage
    - Wigeon
- Cromarty Firth Ramsar
  - Breeding populations of the following bird species:
    - Common tern
  - Non-breeding (overwintering) populations of the following bird species:
    - Bar-tailed godwit
    - Waterfowl assemblage
  - Estuarine alder woodland
  - Intertidal mudflats and sandflats
  - Open water transition fen
  - Saltmarsh

- Inner Moray Firth SPA
    - All qualifying features
- Inner Moray Firth Ramsar
    - All qualifying features

The assessment in Stage 3 could not rule out LSE on the following qualifying features as a result of proposed works at A835 Conon Bridge. These features are considered further below and have been grouped where possible for brevity. As the Cromarty Firth SPA and Ramsar overlap and are designated for the same bird species, these sites have been grouped into one assessment for brevity as the potential effects of works will be the same.

- Cromarty Firth SPA and Ramsar
    - Breeding populations of the following bird species:
        - Osprey
    - Non-breeding (overwintering) populations of the following bird species:
        - Curlew
        - Greylag goose
        - Whooper swan

1. Cromarty Firth SPA/Ramsar

Breeding osprey
As noted above, the A835 Conon Bridge lies approximately 550m southwest of the Cromarty Firth SPA and Ramsar. These sites are designated for breeding populations of osprey. Osprey are known to regularly breed and forage within the SPA/Ramsar. Due to the proximity of the bridge to these designated sites and the likely programming of works during the breeding season for osprey, there is a risk of works affecting breeding osprey directly due to mortality or habitat loss and indirectly due to disturbance and pollution during construction.

Risk of mortality/injury or habitat loss due to construction
Proposed works at A835 Conon Bridge will be highly localised to the immediate vicinity of the bridge and works will not require access within the SPA/Ramsar boundary. The bridge lies relatively low on the water and does not have high towers or poles that may present an obstacle to commuting or foraging birds in the area. Osprey in the area will likely be accustomed to the presence of the bridge and movement of vehicles on the bridge, and likely already avoid the bridge in their usual flight paths for commuting and foraging. BEAR Scotland collects and records reports of roadkill incidents but does not hold any roadkill incidents of osprey in the database, which includes records from 2013-2024. In addition, the highly localised nature of all works reduces the risk that osprey would collide with any machinery or equipment on the bridge. Therefore, the risk of mortality or injury to osprey as a result of proposed works is considered to be low.

Osprey tend to nest in trees or on artificial platforms near freshwater (Goodship and Furness 2022) and are not expected to nest on the bridge or within working areas near the bridge. An ecological constraints survey was undertaken in September 2025 and did not identify any osprey nests within 200m of working areas. Additionally, no tree felling will be undertaken as part of the works. Therefore, the risk of direct effects on breeding osprey and their supporting habitats due to mortality or habitat loss is highly limited.

Risk of disturbance
Although disturbance tolerance can vary among osprey, NatureScot recommends a disturbance buffer of 350-750m for osprey during the breeding season (March to September inclusive) (Goodship and Furness 2022). Osprey are considered to occupy core ranges of 10km on average and can regularly forage up to 20km (NatureScot 2016a). Therefore, there is a risk that works on A835 Conon Bridge could result in disturbance to breeding or foraging osprey associated with the SPA/Ramsar due to increased presence of vehicles, plant, personnel, and lighting on the bridge during works.

Works are currently expected to be carried out between September-December 2026, which is outside of the osprey breeding season. If works are carried out according to this programme, no impacts on breeding osprey are expected. However, various consents and other ecological surveys are required, which may result in works being delayed into the osprey breeding season. Therefore, potential impacts on breeding osprey are considered below.

Most of the proposed works will take place on or in the immediate vicinity of the A835 Conon Bridge deck where there is already an existing level of activity, noise, and light from traffic throughout the year and at all hours. Osprey in the vicinity of A835 Conon Bridge are likely to be accustomed to existing levels of traffic and activity on the bridge and proposed works are unlikely to significantly differ from baseline levels of traffic noise, light, and activity on the bridge. Although an increase in baseline noise level is expected during works, any increase in noise will be temporary, intermittent, of short duration, and localised to the trunk road. Works may require access or lighting outside of the carriageway (e.g., wingwalls); however, these works will be highly localised and will last for two days or less. Full containment/encapsulation will be required for hydro-demolition, which will provide some visual and acoustic screening between the working area and SPA/Ramsar. Additionally, an ecological constraints survey was undertaken in September 2025 and no ospreys or their nests were identified within 200m of the works area. Consultation with the Highland Raptor Study Group was carried out and confirmed no known osprey nests are located within 750m of the works (Appendix A). There is ample alternative habitat for breeding and foraging osprey within the SPA/Ramsar and wider Moray Firth area that will remain available outside of the working area and of the disturbance buffers for this species. Working hours will be during the day (08:00-18:00) however, the following measures will be in place to reduce the effects of disturbance on breeding or foraging osprey in the vicinity of the bridge:

- An osprey survey will be carried out prior to the start of construction to identify any new nests that may become active prior to works.
- If any are identified, additional consultation will be carried out with NatureScot to agree suitable mitigation measures to reduce the risk of disturbance to breeding osprey, such as:
    - Seasonal constraints on works to avoid the osprey breeding season.
    - Timing restrictions on works to reduce the risk of effects during the breeding season.
    - Use of acoustic barriers within working areas or at site compound locations.
- The 'Birds' Toolbox Talk will be included in the SEMP and provided to all site staff prior to works commencing.
- Any artificial lighting required during periods of low light levels will be directed at the area of works as far as is safe and reasonably practicable. Light spillage will be reduced as much as possible (e.g., via use of shades).
- A daily cessation of noisy works (e.g., hydro-demolition) will be planned during construction to allow a quiet period each day.
- Plant, machinery and equipment fitted with effective silencers where available will be utilised for the works. Where fitted, and where permitted under Health and Safety requirements, white noise reversing alarms will be utilised during construction.
- Where possible, inherently quiet plant will be selected for construction works. Where appropriate, pumps and generators will be sound-reduced models with fitted, lined, and sealed acoustic covers.
- All plant will be operated in such a way that minimises noise emissions and be switched off when not in use.
- All ancillary plant such as generators will be positioned so as to cause minimum noise disturbance. Where deemed necessary, acoustic screens will be utilised.
- An Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) will attend site regularly during works to monitor sensitive ecological receptors (e.g., breeding osprey) and mitigation measures to reduce impacts.

There is a risk of disturbance to osprey as a result of the proposed works at A835 Conon Bridge, however works do not require in-water works or access, or noisy works at night. With the above measures in place to reduce the effects of noise, lighting, and presence of construction equipment and staff, the risk of significant disturbance to breeding osprey within the SPA/Ramsar is considered to be low.

Risk of pollution

There is potential for indirect effects on breeding osprey, their supporting habitats, and prey species as a result of pollution from construction activities or from discharge of water used in hydro-demolition. However, the standard working practices listed in Stage 1 and Appendix B include robust containment measures to prevent pollution events. Furthermore, additional measures will be in place to ensure that water used in hydro-demolition is captured, appropriately treated to reduce pH and suspended solids, and discharged under an appropriate authorisation from SEPA. Where hydro-demolition is required, the working area will be encapsulated and the wastewater will be contained, collected, and treated through a Siltbuster before being discharged (under SEPA authorisation). The discharged wastewater must meet the following parameters required to permit discharge: a pH of between 4-9, a suspended solids limit of 80mg/l and volume of discharge must not exceed 10m³ per day. Discharge will be to a nearby grass embankment (along the A835 verges) and not within areas of the SPA/Ramsar boundary. A Registration-level authorisation will be sought from SEPA to permit discharge of wastewater as required prior to the

start of works and no discharges will take place until the appropriate authorisation is secured. All conditions of this registration will be adhered to during works.

No in-water works are required and works will not result in changes to the water levels, tides, or other hydrological processes in the River Conon or Cromarty Firth. The proposed works will be highly localised and adhere to standard good practice for pollution prevention; therefore, no significant effects on fish (i.e., prey for osprey) within the River Conon and Cromarty Firth SPA/Ramsar have been identified.

With these measures in place during works, the risk of indirect effects on breeding osprey and their supporting habitats and prey species as a result of pollution is limited.

Non-breeding (overwintering) curlew, greylag goose, whooper swan
As noted above, the A835 Conon Bridge lies approximately 550m southwest of the Cromarty Firth SPA and Ramsar. These sites are designated for several non-breeding (overwintering) birds, including curlew, greylag goose and whooper swan, which have the following recommended disturbance buffers during the non-breeding season (Goodship and Furness 2022):

- Curlew, non-breeding = 200-650m
- Greylag goose, non-breeding = 200-600m
- Whooper swan, non-breeding = 200-600m

Due to the proximity of the bridge to these designated sites and the larger disturbance/foraging distances of these three species, there is a risk of works affecting these species both directly due to mortality or habitat loss and indirectly due to disturbance and pollution during construction.

Risk of mortality/injury or habitat loss due to construction
Proposed works at A835 Conon Bridge will be highly localised to the immediate vicinity of the bridge, does not include in-water works and will not require access within the SPA/Ramsar boundary. Therefore, no supporting habitats for the qualifying bird species will be lost during works and the risk of direct effects (e.g. mortality due to construction vehicles) on these species is highly limited. However, there is a risk of indirect effects on the qualifying bird species due to disturbance (e.g. construction noise, loss of foraging habitat) and pollution.

Risk of disturbance
The works are scheduled to commence in September 2026 (start date is dependent on the results of additional bat surveys and issue of the marine licence) for a duration of 16 weeks; therefore, works are currently expected to take place during the non-breeding (overwintering) season (October to March inclusive) for the qualifying bird species (Douse 2014). Some of these overwintering bird species may be present during the works and potentially forage in the vicinity of the works. An ecological constraints survey was carried out in September 2025 and no evidence of the presence of the overwintering bird species was recorded. However, the agricultural fields located in the vicinity of the bridge may provide suitable terrestrial foraging habitat for curlew, greylag goose, and whooper swan associated with the Cromarty Firth SPA/Ramsar.

Although some foraging habitat for the qualifying species is present in proximity of the bridge, no works will take place within these areas. The works will be restricted to the immediate vicinity of the A835 Conon Bridge deck where there is already an existing level of activity, noise, and light from traffic throughout the year and at all hours from the A835. Bird species within the Cromarty Firth SPA/Ramsar and surrounding area are likely to be habituated to these levels of disturbance from the A835. Although an increase in baseline noise level is expected during the works, any increase in noise will be temporary, intermittent, of short duration, and localised to the trunk road. Works may require access or lighting outside of the carriageway (e.g., wingwalls); however, these works will be highly localised and will last for two days or less. Full containment/encapsulation will be required for hydro-demolition, which will provide some visual and acoustic screening between the working area and SPA/Ramsar or nearby foraging areas. There is ample alternative habitat for overwintering bird species within the SPA/Ramsar and wider Moray Firth area that will remain available outside of the working area and of the disturbance buffers for these species.

Working hours will be during the day (08:00-18:00); however, the following measures will be in place to reduce the effects of disturbance on overwintering bird species in the vicinity of the bridge:

- The ‘Birds’ Toolbox Talk will be included in the SEMP and provided to all site staff prior to works commencing.

- Any artificial lighting required during periods of low light levels will be directed at the area of works as far as is safe and reasonably practicable. Light spillage will be reduced as much as possible (e.g., via use of shades).
- A daily cessation of noisy works (e.g., hydro-demolition) will be planned during construction to allow a quiet period each day.
- Plant, machinery and equipment fitted with effective silencers where available will be utilised for the works. Where fitted, and where permitted under Health and Safety requirements, white noise reversing alarms will be utilised during construction.
- Where possible, inherently quiet plant will be selected for construction works. Where appropriate, pumps and generators will be sound-reduced models with fitted, lined, and sealed acoustic covers.
- All plant will be operated in such a way that minimises noise emissions and be switched off when not in use.
- All ancillary plant such as generators will be positioned so as to cause minimum noise disturbance. Where deemed necessary, acoustic screens will be utilised.
- An Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) will attend site regularly during works to monitor sensitive ecological receptors (e.g., overwintering bird species) and mitigation measures to reduce impacts.

Risk of pollution

There is potential for indirect effects on overwintering bird species and their supporting habitats as a result of pollution from construction activities or from discharge of water used in hydro-demolition. However, the standard working practices listed in Stage 1 and Appendix B include robust containment measures to prevent pollution events. Furthermore, additional measures will be in place to ensure that water used in hydro-demolition is captured, appropriately treated to reduce pH and suspended solids, and discharged under an appropriate authorisation from SEPA. Where hydro-demolition is required, the working area will be encapsulated and the wastewater will be contained, collected, and treated through a Siltbuster before being discharged (under SEPA authorisation). The discharged wastewater must meet the following parameters required to permit discharge: a pH of between 4-9, a suspended solids limit of 80mg/l and volume of discharge must not exceed 10m³ per day. Discharge will be to a nearby grass embankment (along the A835 verges) and not within areas of the SPA/Ramsar boundary or nearby agricultural fields (i.e., foraging habitat for qualifying species). A Registration-level authorisation will be sought from SEPA to permit discharge of wastewater as required prior to the start of works and no discharges will take place until the appropriate authorisation is secured. All conditions of this registration will be adhered to during works. With these measures in place, no significant effects on supporting habitats for overwintering birds have been identified.

No in-water works are required and works will not result in changes to the water levels, tides, or other hydrological processes in the River Conon or Cromarty Firth. The proposed works will be highly localised and adhere to standard good practice for pollution prevention; therefore, no significant effects on fish, invertebrates or vegetation within these sites (i.e. food resources for qualifying bird species) have been identified.

With these measures in place during works, the risk of indirect effects on overwintering birds and their supporting habitats and prey species as a result of pollution is limited.

<u>Cumulative and in-combination effects</u>

The proposed works would be highly localised to the A835 Conon Bridge and immediate vicinity, and works are due to take place in summer or autumn 2026 over 16 weeks. A search has been undertaken for other plans and projects that could have cumulative or in-combination effects in the vicinity of the proposed works; BEAR Scotland is carrying out works at the A9 Cromarty Bridge, approximately 6.5km northeast of the scheme. The works at A9 Cromarty Bridge are due to be completed between January and March 2026, approximately 6 months before the proposed works at A835 Conon Bridge are anticipated to start. A range of good practice and mitigation measures have been implemented at A9 Cromarty Bridge to reduce potential impacts to the qualifying features of Conon Islands SAC, Cromarty Firth Ramsar, and Lower River Conon SSSI. Both NatureScot and the Marine Directorate are aware of these works at A9 Cromarty Bridge. Considering this, and due to the distance between the bridges and lack of overlap in timing of works, no significant cumulative or in-combination effects are expected. No other works that could have cumulative or in-combination effects in the vicinity of the works were identified. In addition, considering the nature and scale of the works, the distance to the SPA/Ramsar, and the standard working practices/robust containment measures, there is likely to be limited potential for significant cumulative or in-combination effects in the event of additional plans or projects are undertaken.

The potential for cumulative or in-combination effects resulting from multiple activities carried out by BEAR is also limited due to the minor and localised scale of most proposed maintenance activities. Although some minor cyclic maintenance could be carried out during or close to the timing of the works, large schemes with extended durations at other major trunk road bridges (e.g., A9 Kessock Bridge, A9 Cromarty Bridge) are less likely to be carried out concurrently due to budget and resourcing limitations. In addition, BEAR Scotland programme all proposed works in line with appropriate guidance and contractual requirements to take into account existing and future planned works on the trunk roads with a view to limiting any cumulative effects relating to traffic management. As a result of this approach, disturbance in localised areas due to construction noise and activities is also limited

Overall, due to the nature and scale of the proposed works, the distance between the area of works and the designated sites, it is highly unlikely that the proposed works would result in significant cumulative or in-combination effects on the qualifying features of the Cromarty Firth SPA/Ramsar and component SSSIs.

Conclusion

Upon detailed review, the risk of significant effects on the qualifying habitats of the Cromarty Firth Ramsar is considered to be low, but the proposed works may result in LSE on the qualifying bird species of the SPA/Ramsar, particularly as a result of disturbance during construction. **However, with the above measures in place alongside robust containment measures, these works are not expected to result in adverse effects on site integrity (AESI) for the Cromarty Firth SPA or Ramsar, and all conservation objectives for the qualifying bird species will be met.**

Similarly, with the above measures in place, no significant negative impacts have been identified on the qualifying features of Cromarty Firth SSSI or Lower River Conon SSSI as a result of proposed works.

Stage 5: Can it be Ascertained that the Proposal Will Not Adversely Affect the Integrity of the Site?

Assessment for AESI
In the light of the appraisal, ascertain whether the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the site. Conclusions should be reached beyond reasonable scientific doubt. If more than one SAC and/or SPA is involved, give separate conclusions. If mitigation or modifications are required, detail these below.

LSE could not be ruled out for the following qualifying features:

- Cromarty Firth SPA
    - Breeding populations of osprey
    - Non-breeding (overwintering) populations of curlew, greylag goose, whooper swan
- Cromarty Firth Ramsar
    - Breeding populations of osprey
    - Non-breeding (overwintering) populations of curlew, greylag goose, whooper swan

However, with the measures outlined in Stage 4 in place, alongside the proper application of the standard working practices and measures described in Stage 1 and Appendix B, **it is concluded that the works will not result in AESI for the above designated sites**, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

Similarly, with the proper application of the standard working practices and measures described in Stage 1 and Appendix B, it is concluded that the proposed **works would not result in LSE and therefore would also not result in AESI on the following qualifying features:**

- Conon Islands SAC
    - Alder woodland on floodplains
- Cromarty Firth SPA
    - Breeding populations of the following bird species:
        - Common tern
    - Non-breeding (overwintering) populations of the following bird species:
        - Bar-tailed godwit
        - Dunlin
        - Knot
        - Oystercatcher
        - Pintail
        - Red-breasted merganser
        - Redshank
        - Scaup
        - Waterfowl assemblage
        - Wigeon
- Cromarty Firth Ramsar
    - Breeding populations of the following bird species:
        - Common tern
    - Non-breeding (overwintering) populations of the following bird species:
        - Bar-tailed godwit
        - Waterfowl assemblage
    - Estuarine alder woodland
    - Intertidal mudflats and sandflats
    - Open water transition fen
    - Saltmarsh
- Inner Moray Firth SPA
    - All qualifying features
- Inner Moray Firth Ramsar
    - All qualifying features

Modifications Required to Ensure Adverse Effects are Avoided and Reasons for These

Required Modifications
Only list those modifications (i.e., further mitigation) that have been identified as being required to prevent there being an adverse effect on site integrity. Do not include mitigation that has already been planned in the plan/project or best practice that is already being followed unless you believe these should be added as conditions to the permission given.

The following measures will be in place to manage potential increases in noise and lighting levels due to works and to reduce the risk of disturbance to birds within the Cromarty Firth SPA and Cromarty Firth Ramsar:

- An osprey survey will be carried out prior to the start of construction to identify any new nests that may become active prior to works.
- If any osprey nests are identified, additional consultation will be carried out with NatureScot to agree suitable mitigation measures to reduce the risk of disturbance to breeding osprey, such as:
    - Seasonal constraints on works to avoid the osprey breeding season.
    - Timing restrictions on works to reduce the risk of effects during the breeding season.
    - Use of acoustic barriers within working areas or at site compound locations.
- The 'Birds' Toolbox Talk will be included in the SEMP and provided to all site staff prior to works commencing.
- Any artificial lighting required during periods of low light levels will be directed at the area of works as far as is safe and reasonably practicable. Light spillage will be reduced as much as possible (e.g., via use of shades).
- A daily cessation of noisy works (e.g., hydro-demolition) will be planned during construction to allow a quiet period each day.
- Plant, machinery and equipment fitted with effective silencers where available will be utilised for the works. Where fitted, and where permitted under Health and Safety requirements, white noise reversing alarms will be utilised during construction.
- Where possible, inherently quiet plant will be selected for construction works. Where appropriate, pumps and generators will be sound-reduced models with fitted, lined, and sealed acoustic covers.
- All plant will be operated in such a way that minimises noise emissions and be switched off when not in use.
- All ancillary plant such as generators will be positioned so as to cause minimum noise disturbance. Where deemed necessary, acoustic screens will be utilised.
- An Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) will attend site regularly during works to monitor sensitive ecological receptors (e.g., breeding osprey) and mitigation measures to reduce impacts.
- Authorisation will be sought from SEPA to permit discharge of wastewater required prior to the start of works and no discharges will take place until the appropriate authorisation is required. A CAR registration will be sought from SEPA to permit discharge of treated hydro-demolition water, and all conditions of this registration will be adhered to during works.
- Hydro-demolition water must be appropriately treated (e.g., via Siltbuster) prior to discharge to reduce pH and suspended solids to acceptable levels (4-9 for pH and 80mg/l for suspended solids and 10m³ per day for maximum volume of discharge).
- Wastewater from hydro-demolition will b discharged into a nearby grassy embankment of the A835 and not within areas of the Cromarty Firth SPA/Ramsar boundaries.

Advice Sought

Consultation
Include here details of, or clear reference to, any advice sought. If an appropriate assessment has been carried out NatureScot must be consulted.

NatureScot will be issued a copy of this HRA for comment.

Conclusion in Relation to Plan or Project

Conclusion
In view of the appraisal above select the appropriate response position and whether the plan or project can be consented/approved/undertaken. Note: this conclusion is just in relation to effects on a European site. There may be impacts to other natural heritage interests that also need to be considered.

This HRA has been undertaken to assess the potential effects of the proposed works at A835 Conon Bridge (described in Stage 1) on the qualifying features of the below European Sites and has concluded that the proposed activities will not result in LSE on the qualifying features of Conon Islands SAC, Inner Moray Firth SPA and Inner Moray Firth Ramsar. Similarly, the proposed works will not result in LSE on the qualifying features intertidal mudflat, sandflat, open water transitional fen, saltmarsh, breeding common tern, overwintering bird species or estuarine alder woodland within Cromarty Firth Ramsar. Nor will the proposed works result in LSE on the qualifying features breeding common tern or most overwintering bird species within Cromarty Firth SPA. Although LSE on the qualifying features breeding osprey and non-breeding curlew, greylag goose, and whooper swan within Cromarty Firth SPA and Cromarty Firth Ramsar could not be ruled out, it has been concluded that the proposed works will not result in AESI on these features provided that the above mitigation measures are in place.

This assessment has considered standard working practices to comply with relevant legislation (as described in Stage 1 and Appendix B) in the above conclusion. While these standard working practices will benefit the qualifying features of the above sites, these working practices and measures are not being undertaken specifically for the qualifying interests. Instead, these working practices are required to comply with The Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2011 (as amended), and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), which apply regardless of nature conservation designations.

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Appendix A - Consultation

Consultation with Scottish Raptors Study Group

Fwd: Fw: SGRS Enquiry - A835 Conon Bridge HRA (Highlands)

KD Keith Duncan [Redacted]
To Samantha Watkins

Reply | Reply All | Forward

Sun 21/09/2025 11:46

If there are problems with how this message is displayed, click here to view it in a web browser.

Hi Sam

Thank you for contacting the Scottish Raptor Study Group regarding the proposed works at Conon Bridge. Your message was forwarded to the Highland Raptor Study Group who cover this area. We have no records of breeding osprey within the 750m search area of the bridge. Our monitoring work is not carried out for any specific development purpose and nor do we have 100% coverage of breeding ospreys. You may wish to consider carrying out you own survey for this location especially if the works are planned for 2026 and ospreys could establish a new site next breeding season.

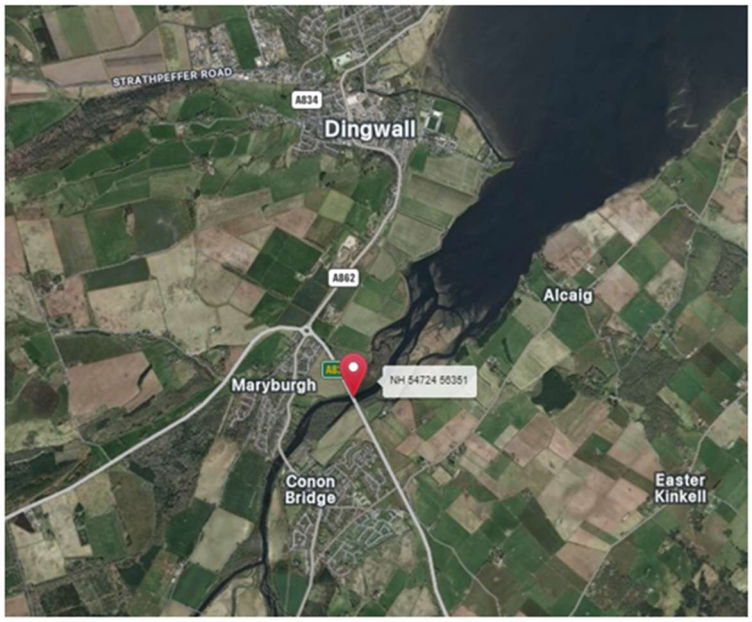
There is no charge for this data search.

Regards

Keith Duncan
Chair, Highland Raptor Study Group

From: Samantha Watkins [Redacted]
Sent: 19 September 2025 12:15
To: scottishraptorsg@gmail.com <scottishraptorsg@gmail.com>
Cc: NW Environment <NWEnvironment@bearscotland.co.uk>
Subject: SGRS Enquiry - A835 Conon Bridge HRA (Highlands)

Good afternoon
I am writing in relation to a data request for a repairs/maintenance scheme due to start in September 2026 at A835 Conon Bridge (NH 54724 56351, centred) to ensure the continued safety and operation of the A835 trunk road. These works will involve full deck refurbishment and replacement of the expansion joints, and hydro-demolition of the concrete deck. As these works lie in close proximity to the Conon Islands SAC, Cromarty Firth SPA/Ramsar/SSSI, Lower Conon River SSSI, and Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar, a Habitats Regulations Appraisal Proforma is being prepared and will be submitted to NatureScot prior to works.



To complete the HRA, it is recommended that we consult with the Highland Raptor Study Group to enquire about any information of breeding osprey sites/records in proximity (NS' suggested buffer for breeding osprey is 750m) to this site, as works are likely to overlap with the beginning of their breeding season.

Can you please advise if this is something you could offer information on and if so, what fee would be charged (so I can pass onto the lead engineer of this project for approval first) and what would the timeline be, with works scheduled for September 2026.

Let me know if you have any questions or need any further info etc.

Many thanks,

Sam Watkins

Senior Environmental Advisor | BEAR Scotland | North West Unit

Mobile: 07547 665 783 | www.bearscot.com

Appendix B – Standard Good Practice Measures

Standard working practices for works in or near water

Works will be undertaken within the marine environment and as such are generally not subject to authorisation under The Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations (CAR) 2011 (as amended). However, BEAR Scotland follow good practice guidance (including but not limited to the below list) as standard for works in or near water to reduce the risk of water pollution as much as possible:

- Engineering in the Water Environment Good Practice Guide. Temporary Construction Methods WAT-SG-29 (SEPA, 2009).
- Engineering in the Water Environment Good Practice Guide. River Crossings WAT-SG-25 (SEPA, 2010).
- SEPA Guidance for Pollution Prevention (GPP) 1: Understanding your environmental responsibilities – good environmental practices (NetRegs, 2021).
- SEPA GPP 5: Works and maintenance in or near water (NetRegs, 2018).
- SEPA GPP 21: Pollution incident response planning (NetRegs 2021).
- SEPA General Binding Rule (GBR) 6: Construction and maintenance of a minor bridge over a river, burn or ditch; (or removal) of a temporary bridge over a river, burn or ditch that has a bed width of less than 5m; or of a surface water drainage system outfall which discharges into a river, burn or ditch (SEPA, 2024).
- SEPA GBR 9: Operating any vehicle, plant or other equipment (machinery) in or near any surface water or wetland for the purpose of undertaking any other GBR activity or for the purpose of maintaining an existing man-made structure in or near any surface water or wetland (SEPA, 2024).
- SEPA GBR 10(a): The discharge of water run-off from a surface water drainage system to the water environment from buildings, roads other than waterbound roads, yards, or any other built development constructed before 1 April 2007, with the exception of motorways and trunk road where any one outfall serves a length of road greater than 1 km and the footprint of the road or its associated infrastructure is enlarged or otherwise altered on or after 1 April 2007 (SEPA, 2024).
- SEPA GBR 10(b): The discharge of water run-off from a surface water drainage system to the water environment from buildings, roads other than waterbound roads, yards, or any other built development constructed on or after 1 April 2007, with the exception of run-off from motorways and trunk roads where any one outfall serves a length of road greater than 1 km (SEPA, 2024).

Specific working practices outlined in the aforementioned guidance that must be adhered to include, but are not limited to:

- All reasonable steps must be taken to prevent silt from entering the waterbody (GPP 5).
- Plant and wheel washing to be carried out in a designated area of hardstanding at least 10m away from any waterbody or surface water drain. Where possible, washing will take place prior to moving vehicles/equipment to different water bodies to reduce the risk of transporting invasive aquatic plants or other species (GPP 5 and GBR 9).
- Refuelling must take place at least 10m away from any surface water. Appropriate containment measures (e.g., drip trays, funnels, plant nappies, bunding) must be in place to reduce the risk of spills (GPP 5, GBR 9).
- Biodegradable hydraulic oils should be used for vehicles and plant where possible (GPP 5).
- Dust, debris and contaminated water will be appropriately contained to reduce the risk of pollution (GPP 5).
- Development of a pollution incidence response plan is required (GPP 21).
- The works must not prevent the free passage of migratory fish (GBR 6).
- All reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that the discharge does not result in pollution of the water environment (GBR 10(b)).

Additional standard working practices

In addition to the standard working practices and measures described above, the following good practice and management measures will be adopted by the successful contractor for each of the above activities:

- Where required (e.g., to comply with protected species legislation), relevant ecological surveys will be carried out prior to works. If surveys identify the requirement for protected species licencing, additional consultation with NatureScot will be carried out and licences will be sought where required.
- The site supervisor will give appropriate toolbox talks prior to work commencing. These talks will highlight any sensitive features, including the designated sites and their qualifying features.
- The contractor will be required to produce a contingency plan for dealing with spills or environmental incidents on site. Spill kits must be present on site, quickly accessible, and all staff trained in their use.
- All spills must be logged and reported. In the event of any spills into the water environment, all works must stop and the incident be reported to the project manager and the BEAR Scotland Environmental Team. SEPA (and where required, the Marine Directorate) must be informed of any such incident as soon as possible, and within 24 hours at the latest. The local DSFB must also be informed of any incidents as soon as possible.
- Any waste generated will be removed from site and either recycled or disposed of in compliance with Waste Management Regulations.

The above measures will ensure that any potential pollutants, including fine sediments and materials required for works in or near water, will not enter the water environment during works. In addition, these measures will reduce the risk of transporting invasive aquatic species such as Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) which may be found on the shoreline, and carpet sea squirt (*Didemnum vexillum*) within the marine environment. All relevant pollution controls and other good practice measures will be detailed in the SEMP for each scheme and adhered to on site.