Beinn Ghlas Wind Farm Repowering Habitat Walkover Survey Update 2025

Alba Ecology Ltd.

Donald Shields MCIEEM

June 2025

Registered Office: Coilintra House, High Street, Grantown on Spey, Moray, PH26 3EN, Tel: 01479 870238, kate@albaecology.co.uk

Summary

Alba Ecology Ltd. was commissioned by Nadara Limited (hereafter Nadara) to conduct a walkover habitat survey within the Application Boundary of Beinn Ghlas Wind Farm Repowering, Argyll. This was to comply with CIEEM guidance on the age of ecological data, to identify if there were any substantive changes in habitats since the original survey were undertaken.

The walkover habitat surveys were undertaken in late March 2025. There were no perceivable differences in the habitat and communities present compared to those previously recorded in surveys undertaken in 2021 and 2023.

The only noted difference was in areas of the access track which had recently been subjected to felling. The regenerating vegetation had increased in size and extent in the intervening two years. However, this did not fundamentally alter the community present, though it would be likely to in the future.

No new habitat types were recorded within the Application Boundary. Consequently, the habitat sensitivities previously identified during 2021 and 2023 remain and no new habitat sensitivities were identified.

Introduction

Alba Ecology Ltd. was commissioned by Nadara to conduct a walkover habitat survey within the Application Boundary of Beinn Ghlas Wind Farm Repowering, Argyll. This was to comply with CIEEM guidance on the age of ecological data, to identify if there were any substantive changes in habitats since the original survey were undertaken.

The Application Boundary consists of two distinct areas. The Turbine Area and the Site Access Area. The Turbine Area is the open area at the south of Figure 1, while the access track is the strip of ground heading north from the turbine area to the A85 road between Taynuilt and Oban.

The purpose and scope of this survey and report is to identify any noticeable changes/additions to the habitats and communities identified in the previous surveys.

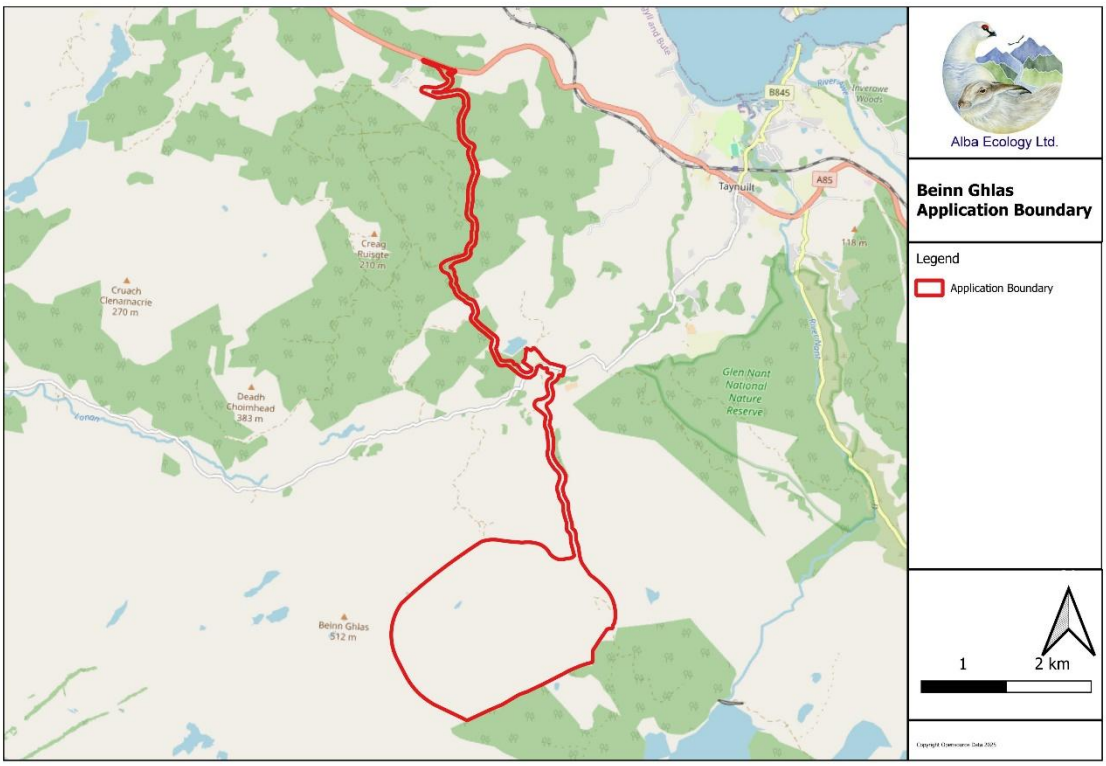


Figure 1: Application Boundary including the access track.

Detailed habitat surveys of the Turbine Area were undertaken by Avian Ecology as part of the Beinn Ghlas Wind Farm Repowering (Technical Appendix (TA) 6.2 Beinn Ghlas Wind Farm Habitat and Botanical Survey Report). This reported:

"A variety of habitats characteristic of upland sites were recorded across both the wind farm site and adjacent habitat management area. The terrain comprised a complex of steep-sided hills and valleys with a few flatter patches of bogs or marshy grassland, with several scattered small lochs and lochans. The vegetation comprised mostly of a mosaic of wet heath and bogs, interspersed with areas of acid and marshy grassland. The very

steep and rocky slopes supported a mosaic of dry heath and acid grassland. Several watercourses were present across the site, a few of which were flanked by small remnants of deciduous woodland and willow scrub.

The vegetation communities present were characteristic of dry and wet upland habitats, including some that are likely to comprise groundwater dependent terrestrial ecosystems. Varying levels of grazing pressure by sheep and deer was evident throughout, which in some localities was likely to be resulting in the degradation of the vegetation communities present."

Detailed surveys of the Site Access Area were completed by Alba Ecology Ltd. In 2023 (TA 6.4 Beinn Ghlas Wind Farm Repowering Site Access Habitat Survey Report). This reported:

"The Access Track Study Area was characterised by habitats common to the west of Scotland including coniferous plantation, felled plantation and semi-natural broadleaved woodland (W4, W7, W11, W14). There were areas of acid grassland (U4 and U5), marshy grassland (MG10a), neutral grassland (MG9), dry heath (H10a) and bracken (U20). There were small amounts of other habitats within the Study Area including scrub (W1, W23), tall ruderal vegetation (OV27) and the introduced shrub, rhododendron.

Some of the vegetation communities within the Access Track Study Area were defined as wetlands and potential GWDTE. NVC communities W4 and W7 are considered to be potentially highly groundwater dependent, depending on the hydrological setting (SEPA, 2017a; SEPA, 2017b). NVC communities MG9, MG10 and W1 are considered to be potentially moderately groundwater dependent, depending on the hydrological setting (SEPA, 2017a; SEPA, 2017b)."

TA 6.3 Beinn Ghlas Wind Farm Repowering Peatland Condition Assessment (PCA) Survey Report provides details on the condition of the peatland habitats within the Turbine Area.

This document reports the findings of the updated walkover habitat survey that was undertaken by Alba Ecology Ltd in late March 2025.

Methods

Detailed Phase 1 Habitat, NVC, GWDTE and peatland condition assessment (PCA) surveys were undertaken across the Application Boundary (Figure 1) by Avian Ecology Ltd. In October 2021 and are reported in TA 6.2. Phase 1 Habitat, NVC and GWDTE surveys for the access track were completed by Alba Ecology Ltd. In February 2023. This is reported in TA 6.4. The methods and limitations for these surveys are not repeated here for brevity but are detailed in both TA 6.2 and TA 6.4.

The habitat and communities from TA 6.2 were consulted and considered for the updated walkover habitat survey. The Phase 1 Habitat and NVC maps were taken out during the

walkover survey on a field tablet using QField along with the Application Boundary. The previously mapped habitats and communities were compared to site conditions in late March 2025 whilst walking the route of the Development Footprint. Target notes were made, and photographs taken.

The Phase 1 Habitats and NVC communities that are described in TA 6.2 and TA 6.4 are referred to in this report. Peatland condition was considered in relation to TA 6.3. Full description can be seen in TA 6.2 -TA 6.4.

This updated walkover habitat survey provides localised consideration of the habitats within the Development Footprint and considers whether the habitats and communities recorded in TA 6.2 and 6.4 have appreciably changed since they were undertaken between 2021/2023 and 2025.

Results

The Development Footprint was walked in late March 2025 by Donald Shields of Alba Ecology. Target notes and example photographs are provided in Appendix 1. Conditions were dry and sunny in the first days with wet weather subsequently coming in during the period of the field survey. Habitats could all be seen, and plant species identified. Donald Shields is a highly experienced habitat surveyor who is familiar with the site at Beinn Ghlas having undertaken various ecological surveys on the site.

The main habitats and plant communities that were noted in the updated walkover habitat surveys were:

Dry heath

Dry heath habitats were usually found on the drier ground found on hillocks and hummocks that were present within the Application Boundary. It was often around or mapped in matrices with acid grassland habitats. The only dry heath community recorded in the 2021 habitat survey was H10. It was dominated by heather, with glittering wood-moss the most commonly recorded moss species. Blaeberry and heath bedstraw were also frequent in the vegetation.

Wet heath

The M15 wet heath community was the most extensive within the Application Boundary and was recorded across it. It often formed/was mapped as a mosaic with the M17 blanket bog communities, particularly in areas where the blanket bog communities were of a lower quality. In some areas there was a gradual change from wet heath to blanket bog communities which was not distinct.

Blanket bog

M17a was widespread across the Application Boundary, though often was rather mixed in quality as described in TA 6.3, with some areas having a much thicker and more extensive covering of bog-mosses such as papillose bog-moss. The water table was at or near ground level at ground level, though in some of the lower quality areas, it could be very dry. Other blanket bog communities recorded included M19b and M25a. The mapped M19b was found mostly in the northwest of the site and forms of flat to gently sloping ground on deep peat that is fairly well drained. The vegetation was typical of the community, being dominated by heather and hare's tail cottongrass growing in tussocky forms. M25a was species poor, with purple moor-grass and heather dominant with sparse acute-leaved bog-moss and woolly fringe moss present.

Acid grassland

U4 grassland was well-represented across the Application Boundary, with patches recorded often on steeper ground, where hummocks were present between the flatter wet heath/blanket bog areas. It appeared to be subject to grazing by sheep and/or deer which could be high in areas. As a result, this community was generally quite short. The community was relatively species poor. There was no true dominant, with sweet vernal grass and common bent-grass the most abundant, though sheep's fescue was also abundant. Where mat grass was abundant, the community was noted as U5d. As with other grassland communities within the Application Boundary, U5d could often be recorded on steeper hillocks, with exposed rocks indicating much shallower soil in these areas.

Another acid grassland community recorded was U6a. This community was found patchily across the site in the same areas where other grass communities were recorded. Grazing pressure on this community also appeared high. Heath rush was the dominant species in this community, and in some stands, could be overwhelmingly so. However, other grass species included Mat grass, with some areas with sweet vernal grass.

Marshy grassland

Two main marshy grassland communities were recorded within the Application boundary. These were M23a and MG10a. M23a was usually recorded in damp areas, often by the edges of streams or at the bottom of hillocks, where water accumulated. The vegetation was dominated by sharp-flowered rush and soft rush, though sharp-flowered rush was always dominant. The MG10a community was in the southwest of the Application Boundary. Usually on fairly flat, wet ground. The vegetation was dominated by soft rush, with Yorkshire fog and common bent-grass. There was a lack of bog mosses in this community when compared to M23a.

Flushes

A small number of flush communities were recorded, though the only one of sufficient size

to be mapped was M6. Flushes were recorded frequently during surveys, though they were often small. As they were found often on shallow, sloping ground, they were considered to be potentially highly groundwater dependant. Carnation sedge and common yellow sedge were the usual dominant species, with glaucous sedge and star sedge also frequent.

Semi-natural broadleaved woodland

Several different types of semi-natural broadleaved woodland were recorded during surveys. These included birch-dominated woodland on wetter ground (W4). Birch could also be found in a mix with other species such as alder and ash (W7). This could be drier or wetter depending on the aspect of the ground. Another community in this habitat type was W14. This was dominated by beech and was found at the northern part of the access track and had little understorey present, rather an extensive covering of beech leaves.

In the Turbine Area, semi-natural broadleaved woodland was sparse but could be found in gullies along watercourses. They were often dominated by eared willow (W1). W1 woodland was also occasionally recorded as gorse/willow scrub along the access track.

Coniferous plantation

Much of the northern part of the Site Access Area ran through coniferous plantation woodland. Sitka spruce was the main dominant species, with patches of European larch present either as distinct stands or in rows (likely as a fire break). These areas also included some patches of recently (<5 years) felled plantation, where trees and shrubs were re-growing, but it had not reached a stage where it could be described as a distinct community yet. It was however, taller, more extensive and further along the timeline than had been the case during the 2023 survey.

Other habitats

Other habitat types included swamp community S9 (which was dominated by bottle sedge over various bog-mosses) and U20 bracken community.

Discussion

All the habitats and plant communities encountered in 2025 were very similar in terms of location and appearance as were mapped and described in TA 6.2 and TA 6.4, within the limitations as described in both (e.g. transitional boundaries).

The only notable difference was along the access track (TA 6.4) where coniferous plantation had been felled. The updated survey, having been undertaken over 2 years from the initial survey, found that the re-generation of trees, shrubs and other vegetation in these areas was more extensive, and the trees were taller than in the previous survey. This is to be expected, given the nature of the vegetation at the time of the initial survey. This

however did not meet the criteria for a new habitat type, though this would likely change given enough time.

There were no perceivable or substantial differences in the habitat and communities present compared to those previously recorded in surveys undertaken in 2021 and 2023. No new habitat types were recorded within the Application Boundary in 2025. Consequently, the habitat sensitivities previously identified during 2021 and 2023 remain and no new habitat sensitivities were identified.

References

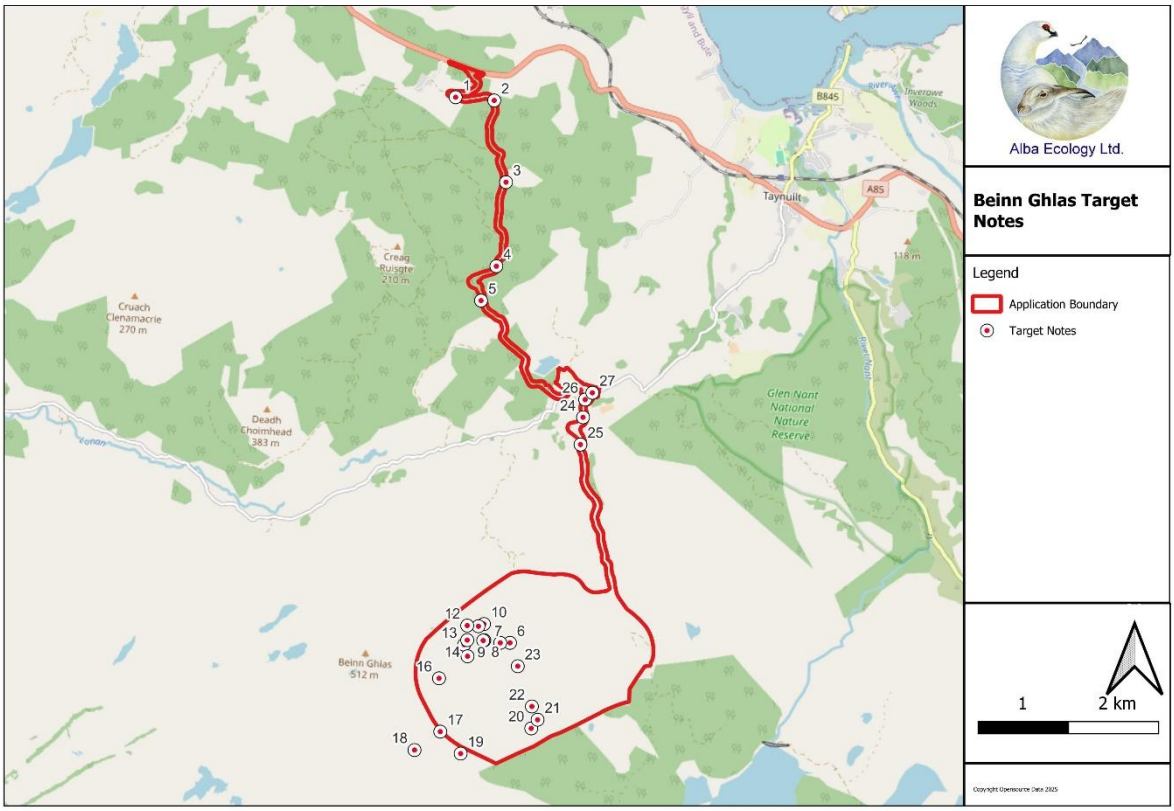
Avian Ecology. 2022. Technical Appendix 6.2 *Beinn Ghlas Wind Farm Habitat and Botanical Survey Report.* Commissioned Report.

Massey, K. 2023. Technical Appendix 6.3*: Beinn Ghlas Wind Farm Repowering Peatland Condition Assessment (PCA) Survey Report.* Commissioned Report.

Massey, K. 2023. Technical Appendix 6.4: *Beinn Ghlas Wind Farm Repowering Site Access Habitat Survey Report.* Commissioned Report.

CIEEM. 2019. *On the lifespan of ecological reports and surveys.* chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Advice-Note.pdf.

Appendix 1 Target Notes



No.	Grid ref	Note	Photo
1	NM 96725 32118	Birch woodland (W4) as described in TA 6.4	
2	NM 97153 32082	Felled area with regeneration further along than in the 2023 survey, though community is still as described in TA 6.4.	

No.	Grid ref	Note	Photo
			
3	NM 97284 31177	Example of patch of broadleaved trees growing in open area between Sitka spruce. Mix of gean, grey willow and downy birch.	
4	NM 97177 30246	Timber stacks next to track where felling has been undertaken.	
5	NM 97007 29865	Young plantation is a little taller than in the previous surveys, but is the same habitat type.	
6	NM 97328 26073	Example of M17a blanket bog community. As described in TA 6.2.	

No.	Grid ref	Note	Photo
7	NM 97220 26073	Patch of M17a in low valley situation.	
8	NM 97043 26102	Example of U4 acid grassland as described in TA 6.2.	
9	NM 97031 26098	Example of heath rush dominated U6a as described in TA 6.2	
10	NM 97039 26281	Area of bog habitat with cutting through the peat. Water running down the cut area.	
11	NM 96978 26257	Example of M19b blanket bog habitat as previously described in TA 6.2.	

No.	Grid ref	Note	Photo
12	NM 96854 26264	Young Sitka spruce growing on the hill.	
13	NM 96819 26053	Example of M23a as described in TA 6.2.	
14	NM 96854 26103	Example of M25a as described in TA 6.2	
15	NM 96857 25924	Area of U4 grassland with eroded bare patches of stoney ground. Not uncommon in this habitat type.	
16	NM 96541 25680	Cliff area by watercourse, vegetation includes hard fern, male fern and several lichens and liverworts.	

No.	Grid ref	Note	Photo
17	NM 96555 25089	Example of H10 dry heath community as described in TA 6.2.	
18	NM 96269 24885	Example of transition habitats frequently found within the Application Boundary. H10 transitioning into M23a	
19	NM 96781 24846	Example of M15 wet heath community as described in TA 6.2	
20	NM 97564 25125	Example of exposed and eroding peat haggs.	
21	NM 97634 25221	Example of U5d acid grassland community as described in TA 6.2	

No.	Grid ref	Note	Photo
22	NM 97571 25368	Area of blanket bog.	
23	NM 97414 25814	Exposed peat haggs forming islands that appear to be actively eroding.	
24	NM 98138 28572	Example of W7:W11 semi-natural woodland matrix along access track. As described in TA 6.4.	
25	NM 98110 28270	An example of a small patch of U20 bracken vegetation. As described in TA 6.4.	
26	NM 98162 28768	Areas used by cattle by the side of the access track. Ground heavily trampled and poached.	

No.	Grid ref	Note	Photo
27	NM 98242 28843	Example of coniferous plantation by access track. As described in TA 6.4.