A11.2: Review of SEA Landscape and Access Environmental Design Principles

1 Introduction

1.1.1 The A9 Dualling Programme Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) includes details of Landscape and Access environmental Design Principles (Transport Scotland, August 2013). Details of how the proposed scheme design addresses these are set out in Table 1 (Landscape Principles) and Table 2 (Access Principles).

1.1.2 These principles were reviewed as part of the landscape and visual assessment of the proposed scheme and taken into account in the progression of the Stage 3 design and mitigation, as presented in the ES.

Table 1: Landscape Principles

Landscape Principles	A9 Luncarty to Pass of Birnam Scheme Design
1. Ensure that respect for the distinctive local landscape character and qualities of the A9 corridor shall inform all aspects of the dualling process.	Mainly on-line route limits impact upon distinctive features (e.g. watercourses, local woodlands and mature tree lines). Local Landscape Character Assessment has informed outline landscape design.
2. Ensure road alignment and design responds to the landscape qualities and key characteristics of each landscape character area through which the route passes.	Outline landscape design reflects and ties in with distinctive local landscape character (e.g. new hedgerows to reinforce field patterns, tree lines, mixed and scrub woodland, species rich grassland for visual interest and wildlife habitat). Consult and Comply with SNH at detailed design stage.
3. Whilst respecting the distinctive character and qualities of the landscape and places along the route, ensure a consistency of approach to design to reinforce the overall identity of the A9 between Perth and Inverness.	Design developed in consultation with A9 SEA team. Contract documents to require detailed design to ensure design approach is consistent with overall design strategy for the A9. Consult and Comply with SNH at detailed design stage.
4. Enhance the views from the road to maximise the positive traveller experience Identified key views for consideration through the dualling process. Develop View Management Plans.	No specific key views identified in Draft SEA report on the Luncarty to Pass of Birnam section of the A9;. Between Luncarty and the Pass of Birnam views from the A9 are mainly focussed within the road corridor itself, curtailed by cuttings, roadside woodland and rising landform to the east. Where longer views from the road are available, they are predominantly to the west across the surrounding rolling agricultural landscape with clusters of trees around farm buildings and field boundaries, and more distant views to the rising hills that mark the edge of the Highland Boundary Fault. The landscape design has been developed to retain and frame views of the wider landscape, including the hills that mark the Highland Boundary Fault. Contract documents to require detailed design to take account of View Management Plan.
5. Ensure both construction and long term [25 years plus] potential landscape effects inform the landscape design of the road.	Landscape assessment and outline landscape design take account of construction and long term impacts. Although the landscape and visual assessments address impacts in summer after 15 years in line with DMRB guidance, the landscape mitigation has been designed for the longer term (> 25 years), with species selected to continue to mature and provide mitigation. The planting mixes are designed to include a range of understorey and edge species to ensure a balanced woodland structure, providing lower level screening once canopy species have matured. They include long lived and native species which are expected to naturally regenerate, hence ensuring longevity of woodland and scrub planting areas.
6. Design for low maintenance and to accommodate future change.	The outline landscape design has been developed to require minimal maintenance and to provide 'flexibility' to accommodate future changes in circumstances, for example to take opportunities for wildlife habitat enhancement or management of views from the road. Outline

Landscape Principles	A9 Luncarty to Pass of Birnam Scheme Design
	landscape design follows principles set out in Cost Effective Landscape: Learning from Nature (CEL:LfN). Contract documents to require detailed design to comply.
7. Use natural characteristics in design and encourage innovation in identifying appropriate and sensitive methods to mitigate adverse environmental and visual effects.	Use of locally occurring native plant species for planting and seeding mixes. Outline landscape design follows principles set out in Cost Effective Landscape: Learning from Nature (CEL:LfN). Contract documents to require detailed design to comply. Limited impacts on natural features, therefore limited need for mitigation.
8. Protect prominent features and local natural and cultural landmarks and, where possible, enhancing their setting.	No impacts anticipated.
9. As far as possible, minimise the effect of the road on the experience of the wider landscape, including lighting and noise impacts.	On-line route and surrounding woodland and landform limits impact upon wider landscape. No road lighting proposed; Outline landscape includes screen planting to mitigate visual impact.
10. Minimise the landscape impacts of verge and boundary treatments, whilst maintaining safety standards.	Verge widths kept to minimum to avoid excessive landtake. Contract documents to require detailed design to comply.
11. Retain re-use existing vegetation to minimise effects on landscape features. Re-use site won materials wherever possible.	Existing vegetation retained where possible. Contract documents to require detailed design to comply and opportunities for recycling/reuse of felled material etc. to be taken. Limited opportunities for effective translocation/transplanting of vegetation.
12. Maintain and where possible enhance ecological and landscape connectivity and minimise fragmentation.	Development of outline landscape design informed by ecological assessment. Outline design includes enhancing ecological and landscape connectivity through planting of woodland and scrub, tree lines, hedgerows and species rich grassland to link existing habitats.
13. Protect species and habitats to support biodiversity, natural processes and LBAP targets.	Outline landscape design and ecological mitigation targeted towards LBAP local priority species and habitats (e.g. bats, birds, amphibians, reptiles).
14. Use locally native and characteristic plant species and species mixes.	Outline design includes locally native and characteristic species and mixes, informed by Phase 1 habitat survey. Contract documents to require detailed design to comply.
15. Secure adequate land for integrated landscape solutions.	Additional land acquisition identified where required for landscape and ecological mitigation.
16. Ensure design guide strategies (e.g. laybys and viewpoints, rock cuttings, public access and transport etc.) support route wide enhancement.	The number and location of lay-bys have been limited by engineering standards and junction locations. A total of three lay-bys are proposed. No key viewpoints have been identified along this section of the A9, but glimpsed views to the hills to the west that mark the Highland Boundary Fault have been maintained. Significant beneficial impacts for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians have been identified in the assessment, as a result of the provision of overbridges additional footways and cycleways. Safer and more efficient access across the A9 provided within the study area.
17. Aim to ensure the enhanced reputation of the A9 as one of the world's great tourist routes, through landscapes of national and international importance.	The Luncarty to Pass of Birnam section does not pass through any designated landscapes of national or international importance, however, the outline landscape design aims to ensure interesting and varied views from the road are provided.

Table 2: Access Principles

Access Principles	A9 Luncarty to Pass of Birnam Scheme Design
1. Continue to facilitate opportunities to access visitor attractions and recreational opportunities throughout the route.	Access maintained and enhanced.
2. Retain, and where possible enhance, connectivity between non-motorised user routes along and across the A9 corridor.	Improved connectivity of NMU routes through provision of crossings and new sections of route.
3. Incorporate effective rationalisation between non-motorised user routes, safe crossing points and provisions for access to public transport.	Significant beneficial impacts for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians have been identified in the assessment, as a result of the provision of overbridges additional footways and cycleways.
4. Ensure any rationalisation of non-motorised user routes and safe crossing points is carefully considered to minimise the distance between crossings, where possible.	Safer and more efficient access across the A9 provided within the study area.
5. Employ a preference for underpass crossings, where feasible, to minimise landscape and visual impacts	Underpasses not a practicable option due to vertical alignment of online route and drainage constraints.
6. Consider the safety and quality of experience for non-motorised users of local roads when vehicle access to the A9 is being rationalised (e.g. the potential for traffic increases on cycle route network)	Significant beneficial impacts for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians have been identified in the assessment, as a result of the provision of overbridges additional footways and cycleways. Safer and more efficient access across the A9 provided within the study area.