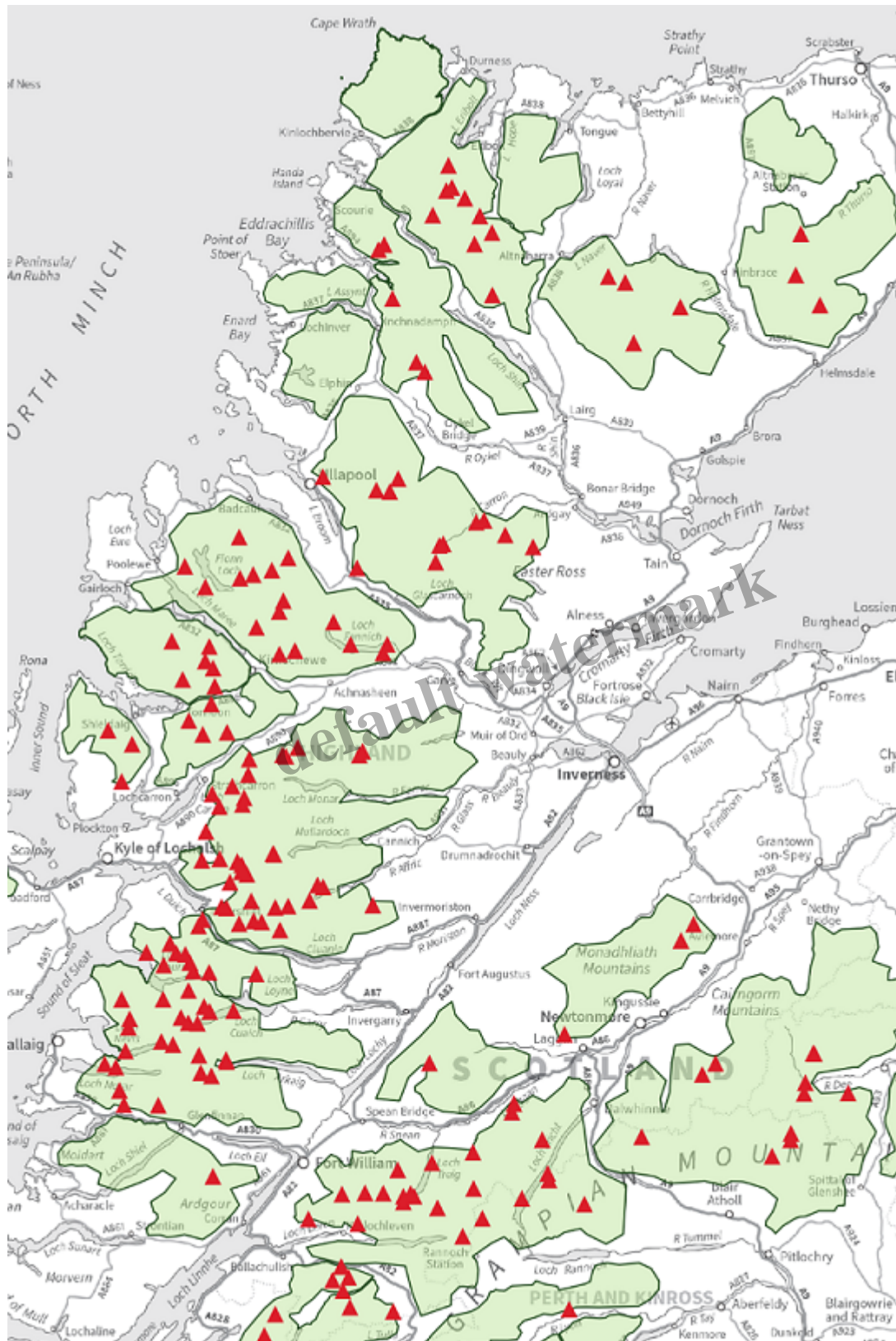


## Unacceptable telecommunications masts (7) – the impact on wild land in Scotland

### Description

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Nominal sites in the initial radio plan approved by Ofcom in 2021.

It took five FOI requests, but this week I finally managed to get Grid References for the masts the UK Government plans to build for the Shared Rural Network [srn.org.uk](https://www.srn.org.uk). These are plotted above on the

Wild Land areas designated by NatureScot [nature.scot/doc/wild-land](https://www.nature.scot/doc/wild-land)

Wild Land is of course uninhabited, with no public roads or premises. This makes it hard to see how these publicly-funded masts “will improve the lives of millions of people in rural parts of Scotland, giving them the connections they need to work, access services and keep in touch – both at home and on the go”

Never in the history of phone masts have **so many** served **so few** – at **such cost**. The financial cost is around £1M per mast. But the real cost is the insult to the wildness of these areas; this comes not just from the masts but also generators, tracks, and refuelling vehicles.

Wild Land is generally protected from development by Scotland's National Planning Framework (NPF4), adopted by the Scottish Parliament. One might expect a bit of give and take on the margins, but the SRN is a nationwide head-on challenge to this philosophy. All Wild Land is threatened, because it is wild.

While telecommunications masts are classed as permitted developments, which don't require full planning permission in Wild Land Areas – a loophole in planning law – the access roads necessary to maintain them are classed as full developments so the legal protection offered by NPF4 still applies.

The SRN was doubtless well-intentioned; but it has led itself astray by expressing its mission as the elimination of NotSpots. In Scotland, most 4G NotSpots are in Wild Land.

Wild Land does not ‘suffer’ from NotSpots, any more than it suffers from a lack of roads. This is a feature of Wild Land, which Scotland recognises, values, and has a responsibility to preserve. Ofcom has a duty to improve connectivity to the disadvantaged rural communities around (but not in) these wild areas. Most such areas are current “partial not spots” places where there is some coverage. This is where public money is needed, and where benefits will outweigh the costs, however you measure cost.

I hope the map I have drawn helps everyone to understand what is at stake, and inform their views.

As Burns said ‘Facts are chiels that winna ding’. Sadly, I fear there are some who would prefer to suppress this information. Proponents of SRN should be proud of their plan, but not so proud that they do not want to listen.

The SRN plan dates from 2021, but has never been published. As I have mentioned, it took five FOI requests to obtain it. Ofcom declined first because it ‘*would adversely affect national security*’ ([see here](#)) [Ed, just like the funicular ([see here](#))!] and later said the information would be ‘*potentially misleading to the public at large*’ ([see here](#)).

The SRN is now claiming:

*“The list of proposed locations shared by Nature Scot is out of date and does not reflect the current SRN plan. Almost all proposed locations listed have either been removed from the plan or moved location. As sites enter the planning process they will be available on the relevant LPA's planning portal.”*

Indeed so; the actual sites, as they dribble out in planning applications, are often moved by a few km

and the number of sites now proposed appears to be 274 compared the 320 nominal ones. But the sites now proposed remain in Wild Land, and have to remain there because of the contractual requirement in the SRN programme to reduce the **area** of NotSpots. Looking at the sites one-by-one as applications are lodged means you the public, planning departments and politicians cannot see the overall picture.

### Category

1. Other parts Scotland

### Tags

1. Freedom of Information
2. Governance
3. landscape
4. masts
5. planning
6. Scottish Government
7. wild land

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