

**BLACKHILLOCK BESS PROJECT
(BLACKHILLOCK FLEXPOWER LTD)**

**Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
(LVIA)**

Published Landscape Character Assessments (Extracts)

November 2024

Nature Scot – The Landscapes of Scotland, Descriptions 21-30 – Speyside to
Deeside and Donside

National Landscape Character Assessment; Landscape Character Type 288: Upland
Farmland

County of Moray and Nairn: NatureScot Review 101 – Moray and Nairn LCA;
Landscape Character Area 8: Uplands Farmland

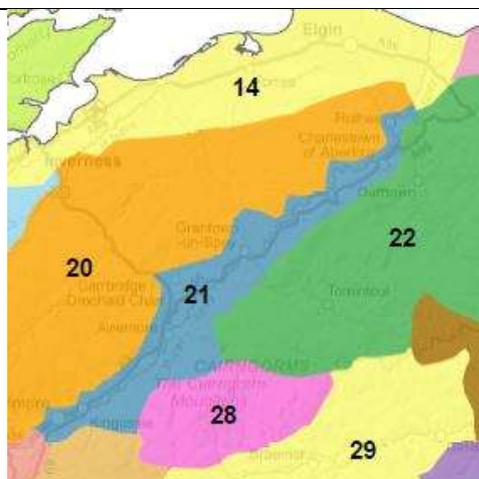
Moray Local Landscape Designation Review

Moray and Nairn Landscape Evolution and Influences (Landscape Character
Assessment)

Moray Wind Energy Capacity Study

Descriptions 21 - 30			
21	Speyside	22	Ladder and Cromdale Hills
23	Gordon and Garioch	24	Small Isles and Ardamurchan
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27	Drumochter	28	Cairngorm Massif
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21 Speyside



Description

This is a long, wide and varied strath containing wetlands, woodland, farmland, and settlements. Distinctive Caledonian pine and birch woods extend uphill, giving way to open moorland on the higher adjacent hills. The valley forms a major north-south transport corridor: road and rail routes, and busy settlements, contrast with the tranquillity of the river and hills. Prehistoric settlement remains are common, and some military structures such as Ruthven barracks, are still prominent. The architectural character is predominantly mid to late 18th century, as a result of improvements in agriculture and the opening of the railway from Perth to Aviemore in 1863. Distilleries form frequent landmarks amongst the settlements and steadings.

Key technical information sources

LCA: Cairngorms (Report No 75)
[Moray & Nairn small part]

NHF: North East Coast (12)

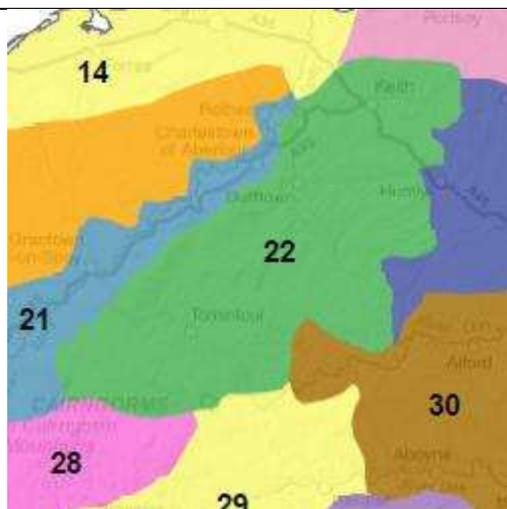
HLA: XX

Naismith -
Buildings of the Scottish Countryside pp 188-191,
191-195

Selected creative associations

Music
Haughs of Cromdale (traditional)

22 Ladder and Cromdale Hills



Description

This range of moorland hills forms simple skylines when viewed from the intervening glens. They seem large until compared to the Cairngorm Mountains immediately to the south. The uplands are heather-clad and managed for grouse. Now sparsely populated, the remains of shielings are scattered on the hills, demonstrating the importance of transhumance to past communities. The hills are mostly experienced from the east-west routes that cross them. The busiest roads and larger settlements, such as Keith, lie to the north of the area. Large distilleries and small whisky towns are located in the valleys, often at the confluence of the Spey with subsidiary burns.

Key technical information sources

LCA: Moray and Nairn
South and Central Aberdeenshire
Cairngorms

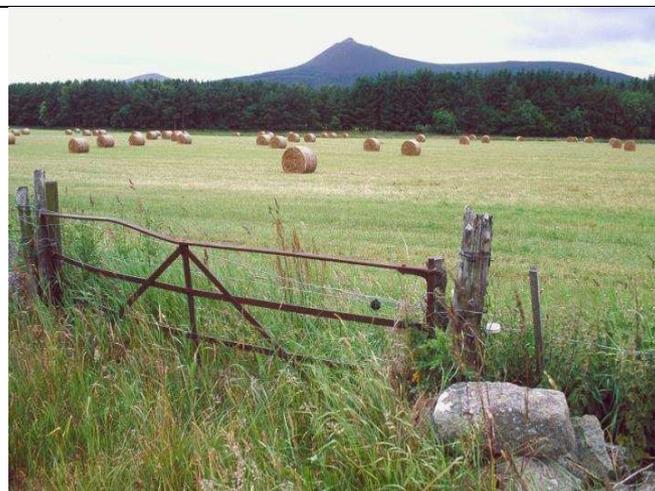
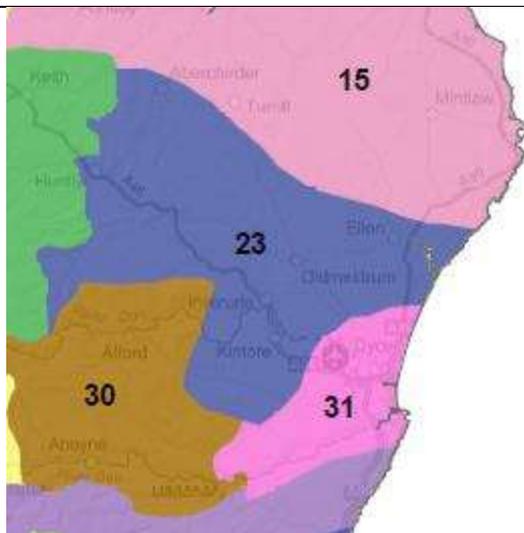
NHF: Cairngorms Massif (11)
North East Glens (12)

HLA: XX

Naismith -
Buildings of the Scottish Countryside pp 186-188,
191-195

Selected creative associations

23 Gordon and Garioch



Description

This area of gently undulating farmland extends to meet low moorland hills, amongst which Bennachie is a notable landmark. Rivers meander through the landscape, with small but expanding towns located at their bridging points. Other small settlements are scattered throughout, linked by a network of minor roads. These settlements were formerly the centre of cottage industries, particularly knitting and weaving. Prehistoric remains are particularly visible, with many standing stones and stone circles. There are many castles, several of which, for example Crathes and Craigevar, are very well known. Quarries, including the granite workings at Kemnay, large agricultural marts, and paper mills along the Don provide a contrast to the neat farmland landscape.

Key technical information sources

LCA: South and Central Aberdeenshire

NHF: North east Coastal Plain (9)
North East Glens (12)

HLA: XX

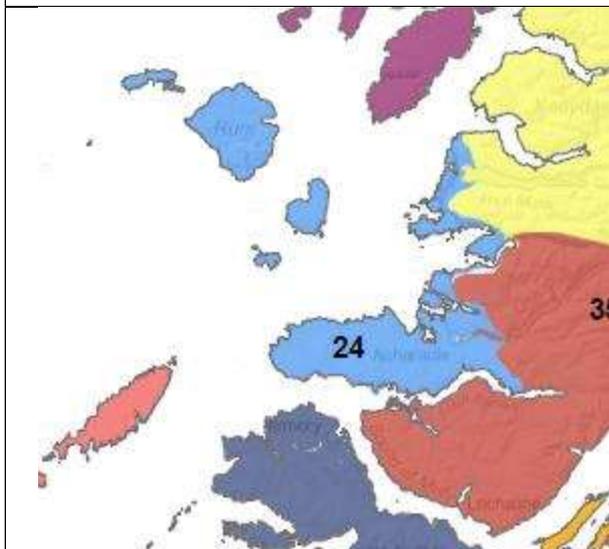
Naismith -
Buildings of the Scottish Countryside pp 186-188

Selected creative associations

Poetry

Harlaw (Sir Walter Scott)

24 Small Isles and Ardamurchan



Description

This is a diverse coastal area of high mountains, sandy beaches, steep rocky cliffs and headlands, characterised by iconic views across the sea. The outlines of the four diverse Small Isles dominate the western skyline. These islands are largely surrounded by the Ardnamurchan peninsula and the Morar coast. Settlement on Ardnamurchan is scattered along the one main road, known as the 'Road to the Isles', which runs southwards from the vibrant fishing and ferry port at Mallaig. Away from the main road there is a feeling of remoteness. Ardnamurchan Point is the most westerly point on the British mainland, while Kilchoan is the most westerly village. The isles are also rich in prehistoric remains with chambered cairns still visible in today's landscape.

Key technical information sources

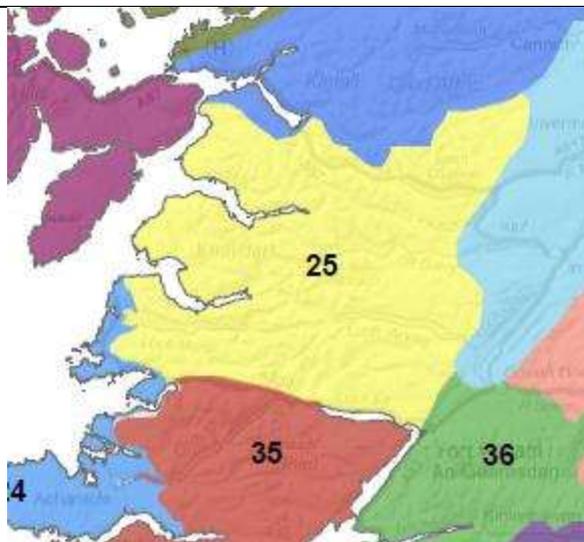
LCA: Lochaber
NHF: Western Seaboard (6)
[Western Highland (8) small part]
HLA: XX

Naismith -
Buildings of the Scottish Countryside pp 191-195,
200-

Selected creative associations

Paintings
In Ardamurchan (Sir William Gillies, c 1939 National Gallery of Scotland)

25 Morar and Knoydart



Description

This part of the West Highlands is known evocatively as the 'Rough Bounds'. The high and dramatic mountains of Knoydart are surrounded by sea and extensive moorland. Access to this isolated area is by a 'long walk in' across harsh, rugged terrain or a boat crossing, making this one of Scotland's most remote and wild areas. Settlement is limited to some remote dwellings scattered along the western coast. Signs of former settlement include 18th Century military remains, and spectacularly well-preserved Iron-age brochs in Glenelg.

Key technical information sources

LCA: Lochaber
Skye and Lochalsh

NHF: Western Highlands (8)
[Northern Highlands (7) part]

HLA: XX

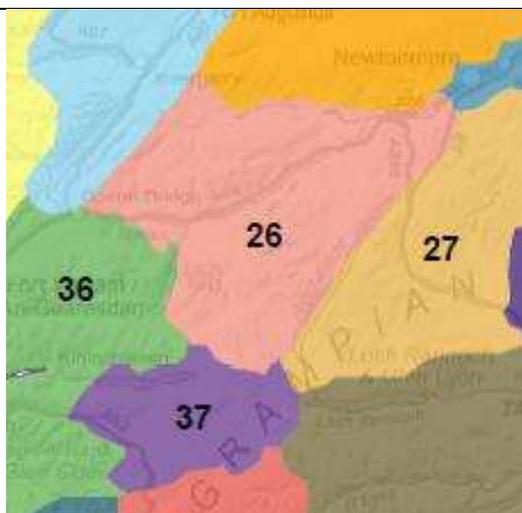
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Selected creative associations

Novels / writings

Ring of Bright Water (Gavin Maxwell)

26 Laggan and Ben Alder



Description

This is an upland area characterised by its varied high hills and the built heritage of sporting estates. Some of the hills have dramatic peaks, while others have smoothly steep slopes or are gouged by corries. The hills are divided by lower ground that often contains long lochs, some artificially deepened by hydro-electric schemes. Birch woodland and wood pasture on the valley floor and lower slopes give way to open moorland above. The few roads follow the break in slope above the valley floor, and there is a well-preserved stretch of 18th century military road through the Corrieyairack Pass. Settlement is limited to some dispersed steadings, cottages, and a few castles and lodges in the striking Scots Baronial style. The hydro-electric dam at Laggan echoes this architectural style.

Key technical information sources

LCA: Inverness, Cairngorms

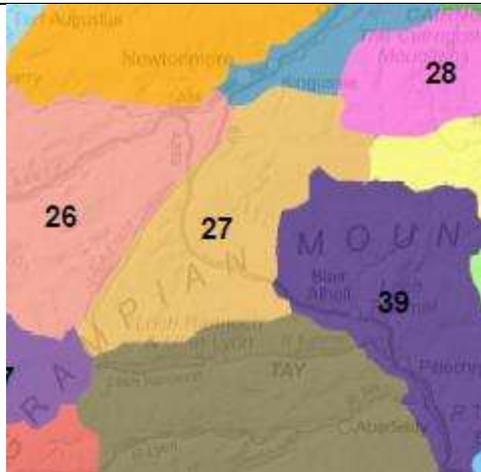
NHF: Central Highlands (10)
East Lochaber (13)

HLA: XX

Naismith -
Buildings of the Scottish Countryside pp 191-195

Selected creative associations

27 Drumochter



Description

This area forms the watershed between the River Spey and the Tay, Tummel and Garry. The surrounding hills tend to be smoothly sloping rather than craggy. The glens, lochs and headwaters between the hills include the Drumochter Pass, which channels major north-south road and rail routes. The predominant land cover is moorland and unimproved grassland, with some small areas of woodland planted near buildings. Settlement is notably sparse and the landscape feels remote. Dalwhinnie, a small village, and its distillery are the main built features. Otherwise, a few cottages and lodges on lower ground are the only buildings, although shielings in the hills indicate a past reliance on transhumance by a larger population.

Key technical information sources

LCA: Cairngorm, Tayside

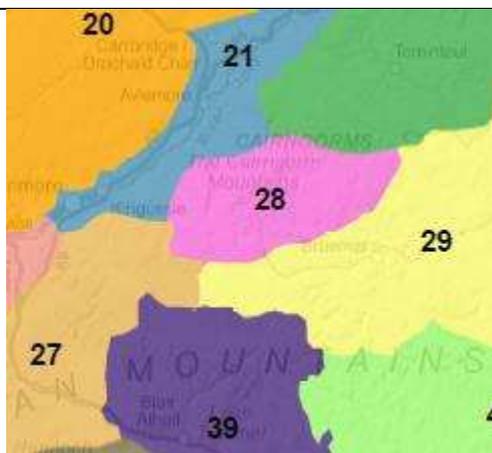
NHF: Cairngorm Massif

HLA: XX

Naismith -
Buildings of the Scottish Countryside pp 191-195

Selected creative associations

28 Cairngorm Massif



Description

This is a vast mountain plateau of massive granite mountains and extensive moorland. The landform is strikingly sculpted, being deeply dissected by corries and trough-like glens. The sheer size of the mountains, many of which are over 4,000 feet high, can be difficult to appreciate from a distance, but year-round snow patches reveal the height and sub-arctic climate of the area. There is no settlement and, apart from the roads and prominent ski infrastructure and car parks, the many paths, tracks and bothies used by visitors generally make little impact on the landscape. The sense of wildness is pervasive and exhilarating.

Key technical information sources

LCA: Cairngorms

NHF: Cairngorm Massif (11)

HLA: XX

Naismith -
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191-195

Selected creative associations

29 Upper Deeside



Description

The wide glen of the River Dee is imposing, even this far upstream. It is ringed by iconic mountains such as Lord Byron's 'dark Lochnagar'. Native Caledonian pine forest is the most distinctive land cover, with areas of heather moorland and some forestry plantations. Main roads follow the river, with occasional hill passes diverging to north and south. Castles, steadings and cottages, dating from the Victorian era, are grouped along the glen. Elegant 18th century planned villages, such as Ballater, are located at bridging points across the Dee. Royal Deeside with its regal associations and highland games, such as those at Braemar, contributes to the popularity of this area as a tourist destination.

Key technical information sources

LCA: Cairngorms

NHF: North East Glens
Cairngorms Massif

HLA: XX

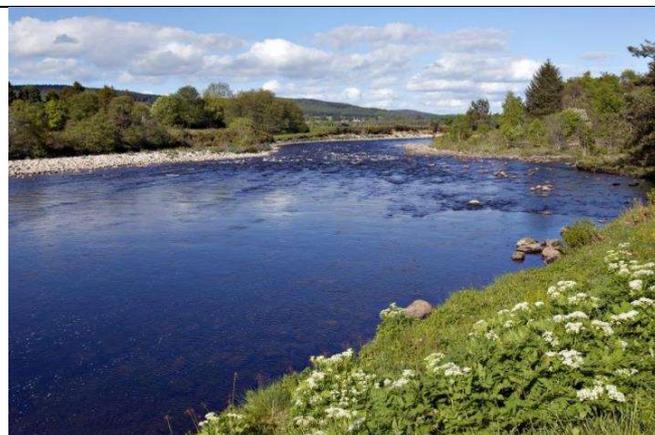
Naismith -
Buildings of the Scottish Countryside pp 186-188

Selected creative associations

Poetry

Lachin Y Gair (George Gordon, Lord Byron)

30 Deeside and Donside



Description

These grand glens and intervening hills link the north-eastern lowlands with the Highlands. The sparkling rivers are lined with estates, and farmland, woodland and forestry intermix to provide varied levels of enclosure and open-ness. Heather moorland on the rolling hills above the glens rises towards the mountains inland. The main transport routes follow the glen floor. Villages are often located where old stone bridges span the rivers. The enclosure of the glen sides frames views along the rivers, enhancing glimpses of the distant Cairngorm Mountains.

Key technical information sources

LCA: South and Central Aberdeenshire

NHF: North East Glens
Cairngorms Massif

HLA: XX

Naismith -
Buildings of the Scottish Countryside pp 186-188

Selected creative associations



Location and Context

*The Upland Farmland Landscape Character Type in Moray is represented by one area of mid-elevation, coastal uplands, to the north-east of the Spey. The character type is positioned between the *Low Forested Hills* to the north and *Upland Farmed Valleys* to the south-west. To the east, it transitions into the *Low Hills and Basins* and *Farmed and Wooded River Valley*. To the south, it merges into the *Farmed Moorland Edge*.*

Key Characteristics

- Broad shallow valleys.
- Large scale, open landscape with a simple vegetation pattern.
- Predominance of farming in valleys and the central basin.
- Backdrop to farmland provided by the *Low Forested Hills*, with steeper north and western sides and shallow southern and eastern slopes, covered with extensive conifer forests, and simple, undulating skyline.
- Broad, sweeping, rectilinear fields of the central farmland, interspersed with patches of smaller fields, peaty soils, marginal pastures and small plantations.
- Relatively well settled farmland area, with an even distribution of farms accessed by a network of rural roads.
- Small farmsteads often partially enclosed by isolated woodland pockets.
- Views from top areas to Cairngorms and higher moorland edges to south, and to east across Buchan plain.
- Limited visual diversity.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The landform of the *Upland Farmland* Landscape Character Type comprises the broad shallow short valleys, lower areas of the low, broad, gently undulating and widely spaced *Low Forested Hills*, which are the far northern and eastern margins of a large upland landmass descending from the Cairngorms. The bedrock of this land mass is exposed as cliffs at the nearby coastline. The area is probably at the eastern extent of the last glaciation, and the gentle rounded hills and valleys show little obvious sign of glacial activity.

Landcover

The farming area encompasses the broad shallow valleys largely lying to the north of the

River Isla, draining to the east via this river. Radiating out from this area, farming extends into the shallow valleys between the forested hills. Improved pasture is mixed with large areas of arable land, often in large scale, recently amalgamated, rectilinear fields. In some areas there is a patchwork of small rectangular and irregular fields of mainly pasture and rough grass, associated with older, smaller farms and small holdings. Relatively small pockets of native woodland exist, usually associated with settlement. On higher slopes, in pockets between forests, are small areas of heather moorland, and peaty soils and bog occur in poorer drained land. The less intensively used upper slopes retain relicts of late prehistoric, medieval and more recent settlement.

Settlement

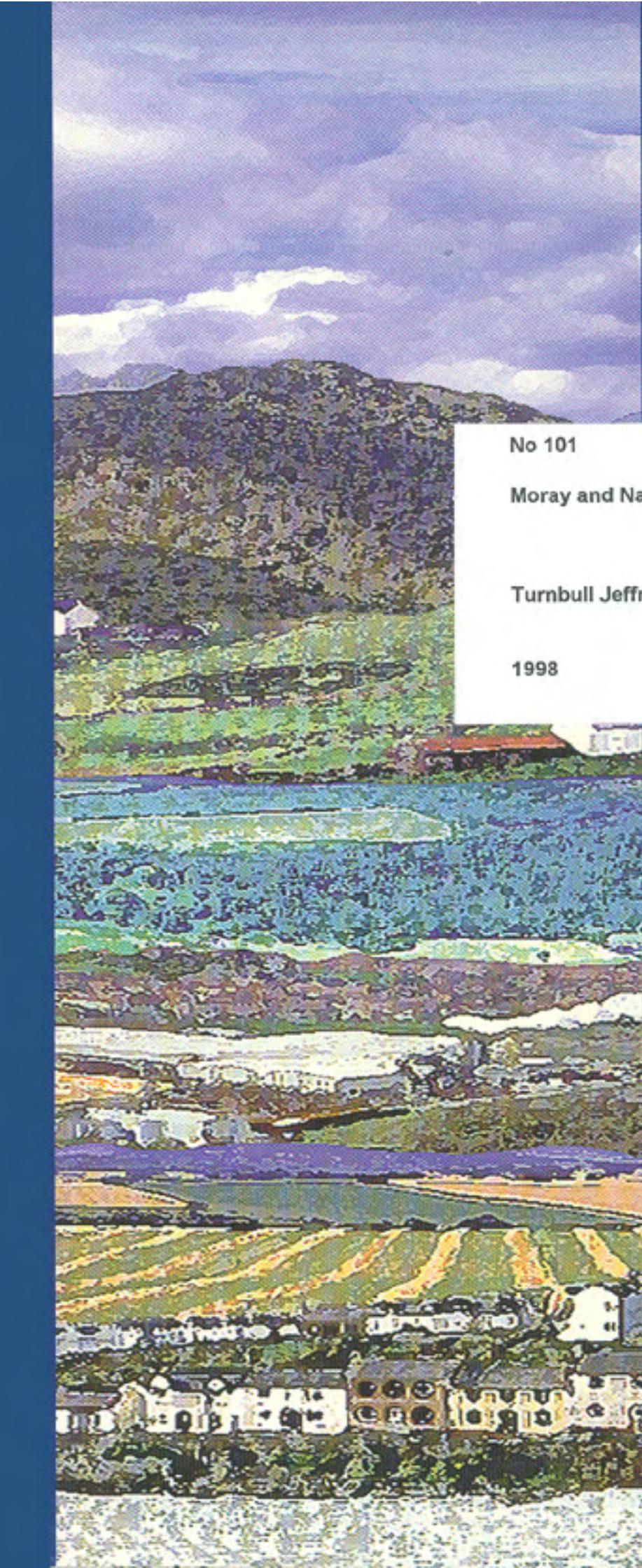
The area is accessible and reasonably well settled, with small scale, frequent farms scattered in the central area and valleys, often partially enclosed by woodland pockets. Mills and distilleries provide an occasional reminder of the rural economy of the area in the later 19th Century. A network of local and major roads is concentrated around Keith, the only town, and roads typically radiate outwards in all directions between hill tops. Keith retains its historic, intimate, planned core, distilleries and bonded warehouses. New development on the edge of the town is relatively prominent in this open landscape. Similar to the road network, pylon lines are concentrated within this area, focussing centrally on Blackhillock substation (currently expanding) the number of which can be regular features in views. Wind turbines, modern farm structures and houses are occasional but prominent features.

Perception

There are expansive views across open farmland. The eye is drawn to the large scale, undulating form of the skyline to the north, with its occasional conical summits, conifer-clad hill tops, and valley passes, and landmark hills in adjoining landscapes, including the Bin of Cullen, Knock Hill and Meikle Balloch, seen from settlement and roads. On the elevated western periphery of this area, there are far-reaching views from passes to the coastal plain to the east, as well as views to moorland edge and mountains to the south from higher areas.

This is one of 390 Landscape Character Types identified at a scale of 1:50 000 as part of a national programme of Landscape Character Assessment republished in 2019.

The area covered by this Landscape Character Type was originally included in the Moray and Nairn LCA (Turnbull Jeffrey Partnership), published 1998; and by Inner Moray Firth, Inverness and North-Western Moray Landscape Character Assessments Review (Deb Munro Environmental Consultant), published March 2015.



**SCOTTISH
NATURAL
HERITAGE**



No 101

Moray and Nairn landscape assessment

Turnbull Jeffrey Partnership

1998

SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE

R E V I E W

Upland Farmland

Upland Farmland

Location

This is a large area of land lying to the east of the Spey, between the Coastal Farmland and Open Uplands. It extends into the 'Knock Hill/Aberchirder' Character Area identified in the Banff and Buchan Landscape Assessment Report (Cobham Resource Consultants, 1997).

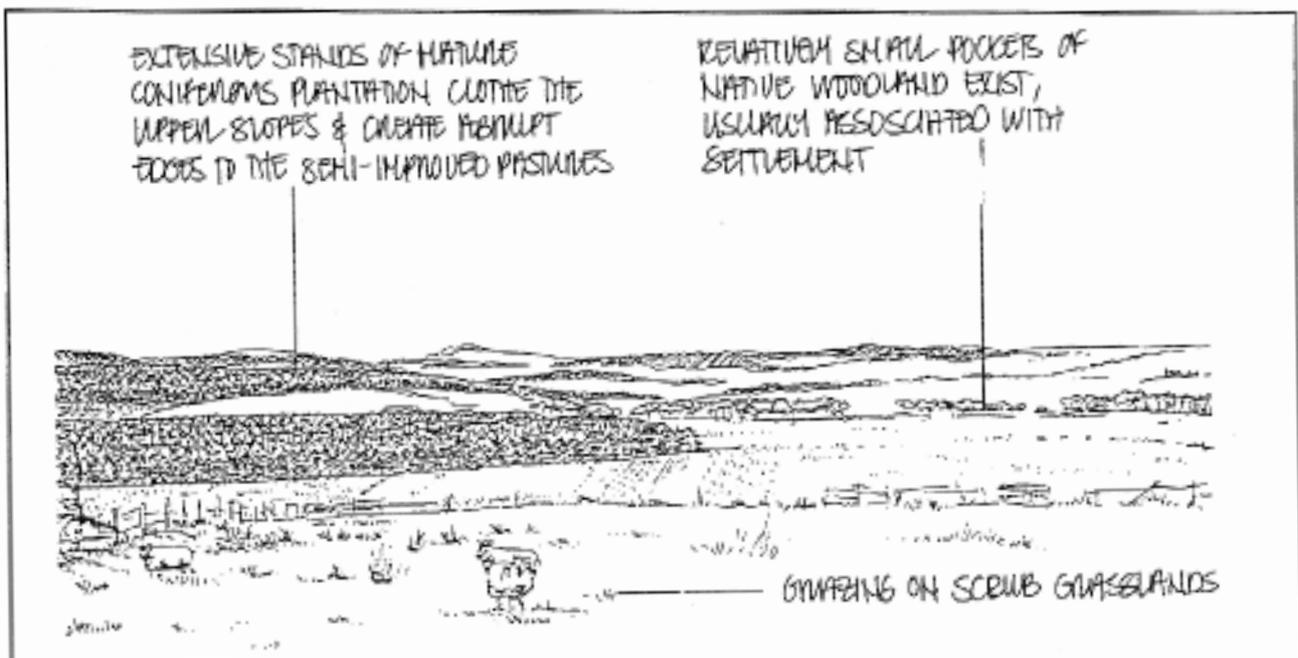


Overall Description

The landform of this Landscape Character Area comprises broad, gently undulating slopes rising in close proximity to the coast, cut by gently graded valleys to the higher lands of the Open Uplands, and punctuated by distinctive conical hills such as the Bin of Cullen and Knock Hill.

Although woodlands exist, these cover a smaller proportion of land than the Rolling Farmland and Forest Character Area, and are less integrated within the farmland, forming large scale coniferous plantations of uniform colour and height to the western edge of the Character Area, on the fringes of the Spey Valley. Smaller scale geometrically shaped young coniferous plantations are prominent on higher hill slopes, forming an abrupt edge to semi improved pastures and moorland. The few areas of native woodland that exist tend to be small isolated pockets associated with individual farmsteads.

Pasture interspersed with some arable land is the dominant land use within the broad valleys and this is where the dispersed settlement pattern of small farms is concentrated.



Upland Farmland



In this undulating and generally open farmed landscape of broad valleys and rounded hills, simple vegetation patterns prevail, with geometric plantations visually dominating upper slopes, while open fields are occasionally fringed by pockets of coarser grassland and heath.



The marginal appearance of the upper hill slopes and tops is reflected in isolated fields and derelict stone farmsteads, and an increasing proportion of coniferous plantations and heather moor. The less intensive use of the land for agriculture and forestry has resulted in the area still containing traces of later prehistoric, medieval and later settlement.



Small farmsteads, often partially enclosed by isolated woodland pockets, are characteristic of the landscape.

Upland Farmland

Upland Farmland

Designations/Policies

No designations or specific policies apply to the landscape of this area, although some SSSIs are located in the general vicinity of the Isla valley.

Key Issues

This is a predominantly agricultural landscape, although some large coniferous plantations are located on the higher ground and on the western fringes of the Character Area. Potential landscape change is therefore likely to be associated with the following:

- Rural development
- Future felling/restocking of forests
- Agricultural change
- Telecommunications
- Windfarm development

Sensitivity to Change

This is a large scale landscape with a simple vegetation pattern and mainly rural population. It is a landscape where visual diversity is somewhat limited and some forms of landscape change could offer opportunities for enhancement, although it would be important to conserve the positive features of the landscape such as the extensive views and general open character and landform of distinctive hills such as the Bin of Cullen and Knock Hill.

Guidelines

Rural Development

The landscape has a dispersed pattern of settlement of small farms with few clustered settlements. The dispersed nature of existing settlement is reduced as newer buildings are often placed in close proximity along the roadside. The size and shape of recent housing is often quite different to the older traditional buildings, as is the use of modern materials in their construction, which contrasts with the naturally weathered stone.

New housing development in the countryside should be sensitively located away from prominent ridges and hills and where it is placed next to the roadside, it should be in close proximity to existing trees and woodland, which would help tie the building to the landscape. Where derelict or abandoned buildings can be reused, this should be encouraged through design guidance, as outlined in the Moray Local Plan - 'Housing in the countryside' (Moray District Council, 1993), and through the targeting of financial incentives.

Upland Farmland

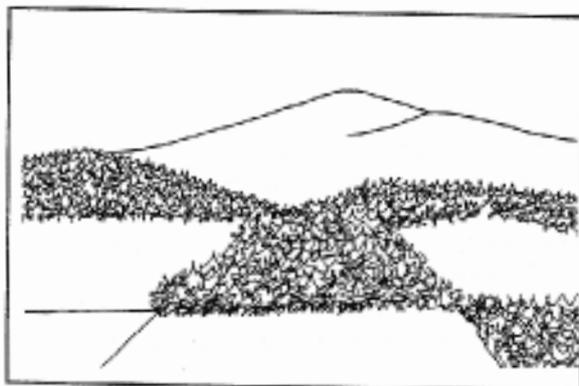
Future Felling/Restocking of Existing Forestry

Some felling and restocking has occurred within Forest Enterprise forests at Whiteash Hill Wood and the Wood of Ordiequish. Although there is no long-term design plan for these forests, it is likely that redesign of inappropriately shaped margins will concentrate on those close to public road corridors.

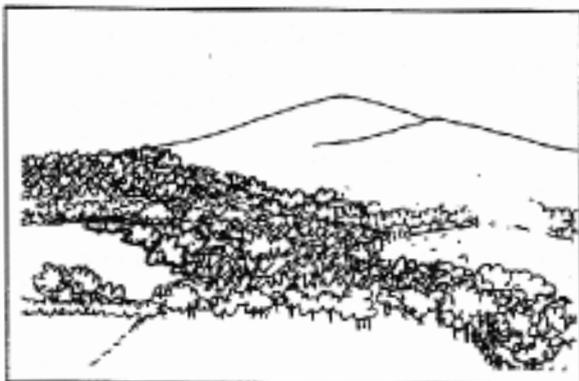
The presence of a substantial area of unstable lodge pole pine on the higher ground within these forests may be a constraint to sensitive felling in the future, and the amelioration of visual problems may need to take a long term view.

Many of the plantations, which tend to be located on the more marginal higher ground, are poorly scaled and shaped with geometric margins inappropriate to the rounded landforms of the area. The majority of these plantations are relatively young, planted between 10-30 years ago and have limited species and age diversity.

A strategy for the future felling and restocking of both FE and privately owned forests and plantations needs to be devised which has, as one of its principal objectives, the amelioration of the visual problems outlined above. Such a strategy could also serve as a vehicle for directing specific incentives towards the establishment of new woodlands within the area.



A strategy for the felling and restocking of both FE and privately owned forests and plantations of an appropriate scale and form/texture, should be devised and implemented to reduce the existing harshness of plantation when compared to the gently undulating landform.



Geometric blocks should be ameliorated by selective felling, extensions of the planted area, and the grading out of margins.

Upland Farmland

Agricultural Change

Changes to agricultural policy and market forces may encourage farmers in this area to consider diversification in the future. This may well include the establishment of woodlands, as land values in this area are generally less than in other more favourable agricultural areas in Moray. The establishment of sensitively designed new mixed species woodlands would provide opportunities for enhancing the landscape by introducing visual diversity and creating a strong enclosure pattern to visually contain and shelter farmland. A potential inhibiting factor may however be associated with the tenure and size of land holdings and in view of this it may be necessary to consider the targeting of incentives towards new planting within a more detailed strategy, as previously described.

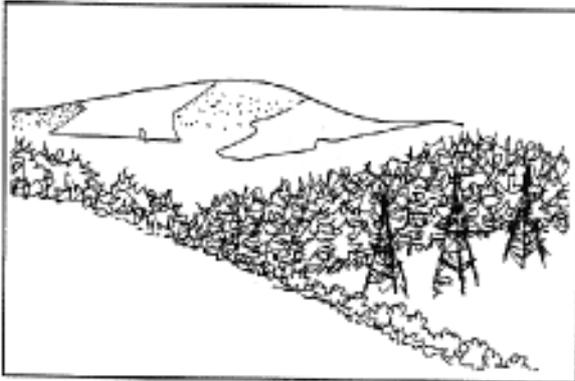
The scale of new woodlands needs to be carefully considered in relationship to their proposed location, particularly in view of the size of land holdings, as does the overall desired balance of open space to planting. It will be important to consider the conservation of heather moorland on upper hill slopes and tops which presently adds much visual interest to the landscape. The archaeological potential of the upland areas, which have been less modified by agriculture and forestry in the past, needs to be addressed as an integral part of the planning, design and establishment of new woodlands. Publications such as *Forests and Archaeology* (Forest Authority, 1995), and expert archaeological advice will be important in this respect.

Telecommunications

The growth in telecommunications forecasts an increase in the number of mast installations and supporting infrastructure, usually on high ground. The masts tend to be placed on hills within close proximity to the settlements and the roads which they are servicing in order to get the best possible reception. The prominent rocky hill summits surrounding the Moray Firth are unsuitable for forestry and, as such, their presence as focal points is emphasised when seen in contrast to the surrounding even, dark, forest texture. If telecommunications' constructions are sited on these prominent summits, the visual importance of, and significance attached to, the natural landform would be affected. Access roads for these installations can appear as hard, linear features, superimposed on the underlying natural form.

Masts and supporting infrastructure may be placed within this Landscape Character Area in locations where the landform would help to absorb the man-made features, rather than draw attention to them. The nature of the generally convex rounded slopes means that masts could be placed in an open position, but one where the upland backdrop reduces the vertical emphasis. This would give the necessary height whilst avoiding the need to be placed on important hill summits. Where the existing forest roads are unsuitable for servicing the telecommunication building, the flow of the landform contours may be used as a guide when placing new roads to achieve a sense of unity. However, new access road development could be avoided if helicopter access were a feasible option.

Upland Farmland



Masts should be located away from prominent locations, such as open hilltops and should, where possible, be set against a backdrop of hill and/or forest, which would reduce their visual impact.

Windfarm Development

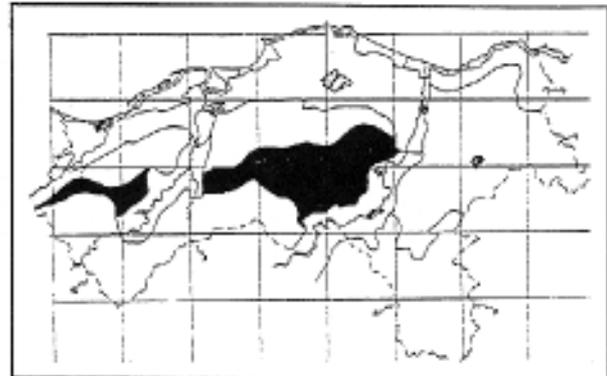
In visual terms there is scope for accommodating a limited amount of windfarm development in this area due to the simple character of the landscape elements such as landform, vegetation patterns and settlement, which would help reduce any feeling of 'clutter'. It will be important to consider the following aspects relating to the siting and layout design of such development:

- The avoidance of intrusion on the long views south east to the Buchan plain and south to Ben Rinnes from key viewpoints on roads and within settlements;
- Designing the layout of turbines to respond to the smooth curving hill tops and to the margins of existing forestry where present (see Guidelines for Upland Moorland and Forestry Character Area which follow); and
- Limiting the number of turbines in each development to a maximum of 30 and considering the cumulative effect of a number of individual developments, so as to reduce a potentially cluttered appearance occurring which may visually conflict with the simplicity of the landscape.

Upland Moorland and Forestry

Location

Two areas of Upland Moorland and Forestry have been identified within the study area, to the east and west of the Findhorn Valley, flanking the lower slopes of the Uplands and forming a transition zone between the open slopes of the higher land and Rolling Farmland and Forest in the south.

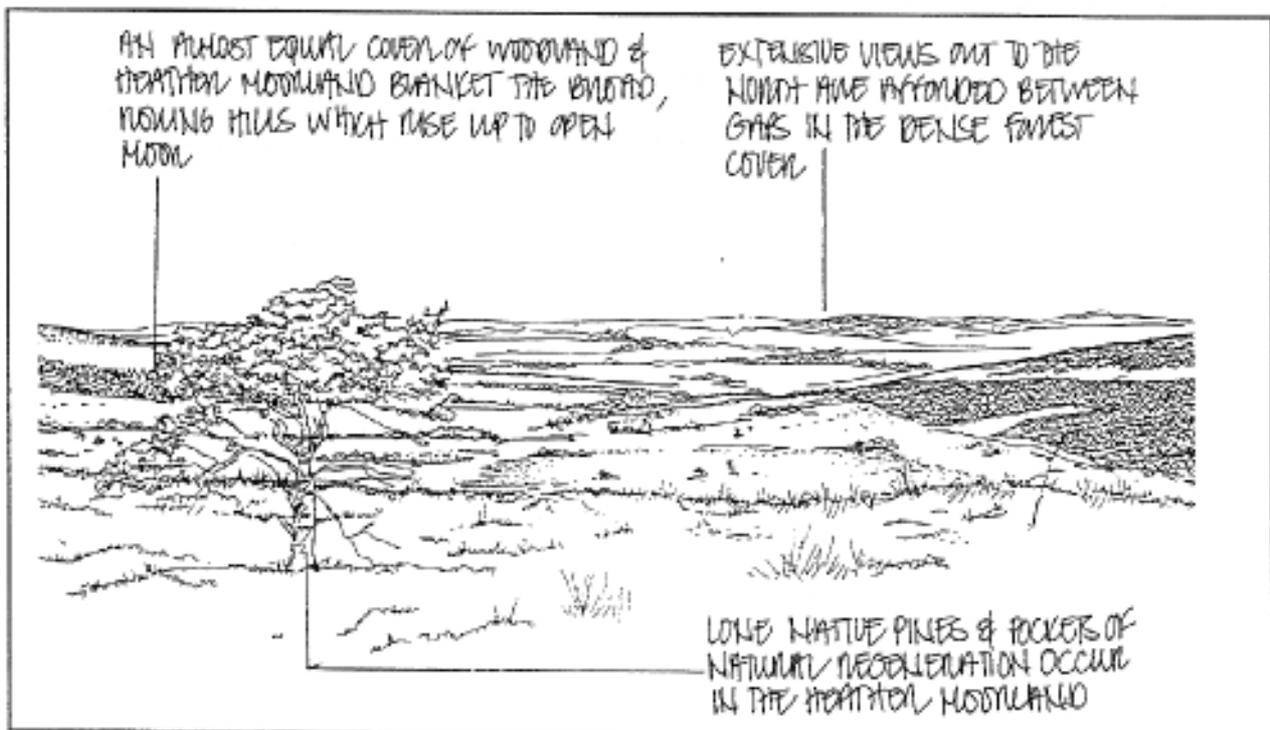


Overall Description

This Landscape Character Area comprises largely inaccessible areas of broad, rounded hills and upland plateaux bordering the Open Uplands in the south.

Although there are scattered areas of semi-improved pasture, some of which may have origins in the prehistoric period, vegetation cover is an almost equal balance of heather and grass moorland and large-scale coniferous plantations which form simple large-scale patterns in the landscape. Natural regeneration of native pine and birch in some areas has resulted in a softening of the edges between upland pasture, moor and commercial plantations, forming a transition zone, where the vegetation pattern is more open and diverse.

Settlement is sparse and tends to be scattered with small, isolated stone farm buildings located on the lower slopes, surrounded by irregular fields of semi-improved pasture, often enclosed by rough stone dykes.



Upland Moorland and Forestry



The rounded hill slopes and plateaux are covered with an equal mix of moorland and forestry. Many of the forests are not readily accessible, being planted on inaccessible plateaux areas.



Natural regeneration of native pine and some birch scrub creates a diverse forest margin, allowing heather and other tussocky ground flora to remain visible.



Scrub grassland and patches of invasive coarse grass, scrub and heath give a 'marginal' appearance to semi-improved pastures.

Upland Moorland and Forestry

Upland Moorland and Forestry

Designations/Policies

No designations or specific policies apply to this Landscape Character Area.

Key Issues

This area is sparsely populated with little pressure for new building. Potential changes which may impact on landscape character include:

- Restructuring/redesign of existing forestry
- New forest/woodland planting
- Windfarm development

Sensitivity to Change

Large tracts of this landscape, particularly the extensive plateau landforms of Dallas Moor, the upland area south of Cawdor and the Lossie headwaters, are not visible from public roads and settlements and are therefore not highly sensitive in a visual sense, although potentially sensitive in terms of nature conservation issues.

Landscape Guidelines

Restructuring/Redesign of Existing Forestry

Extensive coniferous plantations cover much of this Character Area. Many of these are first rotation forests which are coming up to first felling, for example the plantations on Dallas Moor. Although these forests are not visible from many areas, they are poorly shaped in relation to the landscape and are mainly comprised of even aged spruce. Future restructuring offers opportunities to ameliorate these visual problems, although is fraught with difficulty in that many of the plantations are under multiple private ownership. Where differing objectives are likely to apply to the way owners wish to plan felling and where ownership boundaries with a poor visual relationship to the landscape may show up as the crop is felled, visual problems may be exacerbated. Much of this forestry was planted for investment purposes and it is also possible that where unsatisfactory growth and therefore poor economic returns are experienced, owners may not wish to replant following felling.

Restructuring of existing plantations under multiple ownership is a problem which the Forestry Authority is currently considering. One of the positive aspects associated with such plantations located within the Upland Moorland and Forestry Landscape Character Area is their limited visibility and in consideration of this, a long term view should be taken of the restructuring process, with an appreciation that minimum environmental standards set by the Forestry Authority may not fully be achieved following first rotation felling.

Upland Moorland and Forestry

There is, however, scope to extend these plantations, using both coniferous and broadleaved species, to ameliorate geometric margins and introduce age and species diversity. Restocking spruce with irregularly spaced Scots pine and broadleaves should also be considered, particularly in some of the more visible areas against roads and on hill slopes. Should substantial areas of forestry not be restocked, consideration should be given to the sensitive reinstatement of vegetation in these areas. It will be important to consider multiple ownership plantations as a whole, in order to achieve long term environmental improvements.

Potential New Planting

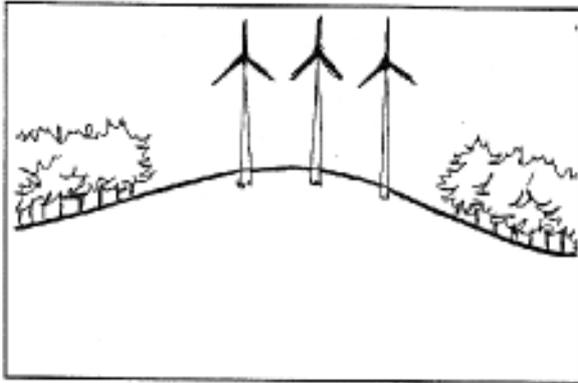
New planting in this Character Area should be principally directed towards the amelioration of existing plantations. The visual balance of open moorland to forestry should be assessed when considering Woodland Grant Scheme applications, taking a number of principal viewpoints. In general, remaining open space should be large scale in order to fit with the expansiveness of the landscape. Long views to the coast from elevated roads and prominent hill tops, for example the Knock of Braemory, should be kept open. It is important to consider archaeology in new planting schemes because of the potential reservoir of later prehistoric and historic settlement present in the area.

Windfarm Development

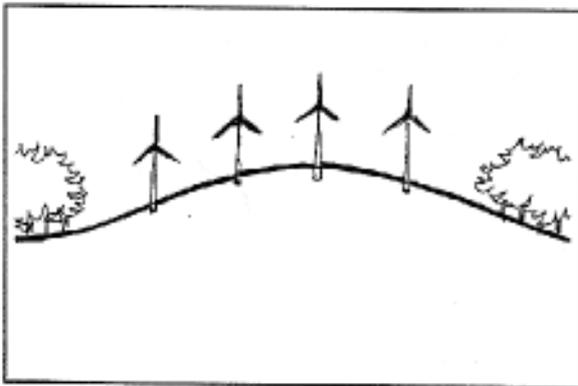
The potential for wind farm development is foreseen throughout a large part of this Character Area. This is mainly due to the exposed and windy nature of the upland landscapes, and the availability of existing forestry roads for access. The location of wind energy developments may cause visual confusion, in contrast to the lines, shapes and patterns introduced by the forestry, creating a visually 'cluttered' effect between the forest blocks and the natural landform.

On flatter plateau areas, there may be landform and land use cues which would aid the positioning of wind farms so that they respond, as far as possible, to landscape character. Where located adjacent to forest, it is important that wind turbines relate to the spatial definition of the forest edge, as this is likely to be a dominant feature in the experience of that landscape.

Upland Moorland and Forestry



The vertical height of the turbines is out of proportion with both the existing landform and the land use balance of forestry and open moorland.



The distribution and number of turbines relates more closely to the landform pattern and existing extent and nature of the forestry/ moorland.

The distribution and number of wind turbines should relate to the landform character rather than to forestry, as the relatively dynamic nature of the forest structure means that it is the strong, visual relationship of wind turbines to landform which would provide continuity.



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

MORAY & NAIRN LANDSCAPE EVOLUTION AND INFLUENCES



more stable parts of the coast. The wetlands and much of the Loch of Spynie which covered the coastal plain have disappeared due to 18th Century drainage and reclamation schemes, while the large open fields evident in this area are a result of modern agricultural practices. Further inland the larger settlements are as nucleated as they were in the medieval period, but the dispersed farmsteads which formerly existed on the higher ground have largely been abandoned. In their place are heather grouse moors and conifer forests.

Before 1750, the landscape is likely to have been dominated by farmsteads based within an open-field system with runrig wherever arable agriculture, mixed with the keeping of cattle, was possible. The woodlands would have been carefully managed where they still existed or after 1700 were planted anew by visionary landholders. Within this farmed and woodland environment were the buildings of the landed gentry and burgh magnates: castles, towerhouses, mansions and town houses, each with their own area of green space, whether it be parkland or ground.

Across the Laich and the bordering rolling hills a little of this pre-1750 pattern survives. The smaller farms of the hillsides, like those immediately south and west of Strath Nairn, north of Keith and across towards Marnoch, are presumed to be built upon the sites of their predecessors, inheriting the broad divisions between arable and grazing lands rather than the specific field boundaries. Certain features even date back to the 12th Century – the establishment and growth of small market towns, castles and their environs, and the church.

The pattern of land use changed dramatically after 1750. The open fields were gradually swept away and enclosed, often within very regular field boundaries, as around Gordonstoun and Altyre. The pattern of land use changed in other ways too. In the 19th Century people were moved to “more favourable” homes, either on the estate home-farm or in new villages. The lands immediately around country houses were extensively landscaped and changed. Some larger estates, such as Brodie, planted and altered a greater extent of the wider landscape, often to focus views from the core of the landscape towards distant natural landmarks.

A key contributor to 19th Century change was the arrival of the main railway lines to Elgin in the 1850s, and the southern Dava and Speyside routes in the 1860s. New towns grew around new “industrial” centres – particularly around the whisky distilleries, many of which were built alongside the new railways for ease of distribution. Small towns continued to function and, in certain instances, grew dramatically, taking advantage of easier communication and trade routes – as at Elgin and Keith.

Since the early 20th Century, new large-scale land-use changes such as military air bases, extensive afforestation, out-of-town business parks, wind farms, expansion of towns and sporadic housing development in rural areas have begun to change the rural character of the area. Since the 1970s, the ongoing closure and redevelopment of smaller farms has resulted in large new houses or groups of houses starting to change the character of areas that were once the preserve of traditional farmsteads. Nevertheless, Moray and Nairn is still relatively dependent on farming and fishing, supporting a rural economy as it would have done over 4,000 years ago. But the intensity with which this way of life is maintained today is very different to that of the late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age.



Lossiemouth ©Eleanor Carlisle

Very few deep sea boats run from the area now. Most of the fishing in the area is shellfish-based and inshore, prawns, scallops and lobster feature highly, as does squid.

Aquaculture has not become established in this area. Inland there is considerable line fishing for trout and salmon but that is addressed under the Tourism and Recreation section.

Energy generation and utilities

Like much of Scotland, renewable energy projects have become more prevalent in the last couple of decades and this seems likely to continue.

A demonstration offshore site is operational in the Moray Firth and two offshore wind farms adjacent to this are likely to be built in the next few years. Linked to this there will probably be substations and overhead wires, and pylons linked to a submarine connection between Caithness and Moray, focussing on Keith.

There are already more than 25 wind farms within this area. These include large developments at Dava Moor and a considerable number of single or small groups of small- to medium-sized turbines, especially in the foothills inland, for instance near Rothes.

There is also a biomass- fired combined heat and power (CHP) plant built at Rothes which uses a combination of whisky distillery by-products and wood chips, generating enough energy to supply around 9000 homes as well as heat. There has been recent interest in solar farming

in the area and permission has been granted for 20MW solar farm near Urquhart to take advantage of the good sunlight level in the area.

Mineral extraction – coastal and inland stone

Hopeman Sandstone has been extracted in areas such as Quarrelwood for centuries to be used in building, and this continues in a limited level to this day. Clashach sandstone has some recognition in the building trade and is used in restoration and new-build projects, across Scotland and internationally. There is also some sand, aggregates, cobbles and limestone extraction. Historically, small scale iron extraction occurred across the area but this was never at a level that would be profitable after the industrial revolution and most had declined before then.

In recent years mineral extraction has increased in Moray, averaging approximately 330,000 tonnes per year. This is projected to continue over the next decade with three new quarries approved and another under consideration. The demand for minerals is resulting from major infrastructure projects, such as the A96 dualling and settlement expansion.

At one point Lecht Mine was largest manganese mine in Scotland. It was opened in the 1730's, initially as an iron ore mine then reopened as a manganese mine. However it was not competitive against imported manganese and closed before the 1900's.

Transport

In Moray and Nairn the key transport links are the A96, the trunk road that goes between Inverness and Aberdeen, and the railway which follows a similar route. There are limited A roads in the area, most connecting the towns along the coast with towns further inland. These roads still follow historic routes down the river valleys with bridging points across the rivers, this can make them vulnerable to the effects of flooding and many of the bridges have been replaced repeatedly. Other key routes include the coastal route, and the A98 through Buckie and Portsoy. Traditionally these road have gone through the centre of the towns along them and in some instances, like Elgin and Nairn, this is still the case. In others such as Fochabers and Forres bypasses have been built allowing heavy freight to avoid the towns. At present, there is limited dual carriageway and the main roads can emphasise a feeling of rurality due to their winding nature; there is, however, a plan to upgrade the entire length of the A96 to dual carriageway by 2030 with bypasses built where practical as part of this.

Outwith the main A roads the B and C roads are very narrow, in some parts single track and accessing the upland areas can be slow and dangerous in the winter. The area is linked to two international airports (Aberdeen and Inverness) by the A96 and the railway which has improved its accessibility to visitors, although it is still limited for goods transport.

Tourism and Recreation

Tourism is an important industry in Nairn and Moray. It became a popular area in the 19th Century when its proximity to the Highlands increased the number and use of game estates. The introduction of the railway to the area increased its popularity with the upper-middle classes as well as the landed gentry and resulted in the development of some of the coastal towns as popular resorts due to the good climate. Today, the historical and natural heritage of

the area is a key attraction with the castles and religious monuments attracting visitors as well as both marine and land based outdoor recreation opportunities. Wildlife watching is popular, especially around Spey Bay; and long distance paths, cycling and canoeing are all promoted down the Spey and other rivers. In recent years the whisky industry has been used to promote the area. The Whisky Trail links distilleries and inland towns in a scenic fashion and is currently heavily promoted in local tourist information centres. Game and course fishing (salmon and declining quantities of trout) utilise much of the upland areas of the district. In the upper parts of the rivers, fishing huts and permanent access points on the bank, as well as the associated estate maintenance, can give a more cultivated character to the banks, while tracks increase accessibility. Golf courses are a frequently-seen feature along the coast of Moray and Nairn, particularly in the links areas adjacent to its historic resorts.

Settlement

The settlement pattern of Moray and Nairn is dominated by the three 'industries' of fishing, mills for grinding and power, and distilleries. A number of these are planned settlements. The main towns such as Elgin, Nairn, Keith and Forres developed into market towns and flourished with the expansion of the railway system, improvements in agriculture and the growth of tourism. The towns of the area have expanded significantly in recent years, often accommodating substantial areas of new housing and, more recently, industry on their fringes.

Planned Settlements

Many of the towns and villages within Moray and Nairn were originally planned by enterprising landowners mainly during the 18th Century, and included some of the fishing villages as well as inland villages. They were designed to be laid out to a traditional pattern of parallel streets and connecting roads. The inland planned villages included New Keith, which was established about 1750 by the Earl of Findlater, and the new Fochabers, which was created in 1776 by the Duke of Gordon by removing the inhabitants of the old village from his castle policies. Like many of the planned settlements in Moray, Fochabers straddles a main road and is laid out as an east-west parallelogram. As with all planned towns, the heart of the settlement is the square which is usually dominated by a church. Other planned villages were established even further inland. Charlestown of Aberlour was created in 1812 and Dufftown in 1817 – both of which became prosperous distillery villages. The new town of Cullen, laid out in the 1820s to a grid pattern, and which sits on the higher land above the seaport, is one of the best and most openly designed of the planned towns in the area. The larger settlement of Forres is of particular architectural interest, being established as an ancient Royal Burgh and laid out to a traditional medieval pattern, with the high street broadening out into a triangular market place and dominated by the 1844 Mercat Cross. The well-preserved and compact core and prominence of spires and monuments of these settlements makes an important contribution to the landscape of Moray and Nairn.

The structure and buildings of these planned settlements are generally well preserved due to the use of stone to construct housing. This contrasts with the traditional clay, turf and timber dwellings which have mostly disappeared from the landscape. Although well-designed, and often including small industry and harbours for employment, the move of inhabitants to these settlements was not entirely benign and depopulation from the area, especially the rural districts, increased as people relocated to the industrial Central Belt and further afield.

MORAY WIND ENERGY LANDSCAPE CAPACITY STUDY

Updated and Revised Final Main Report – Post Consultation

May 2017

Carol Anderson Landscape Associates

13 UPLAND FARMLAND (8)

13.1 Introduction

The *Upland Farmland* occurs in a single area within Moray. This landscape comprises extensive gently undulating farmland centred on the shallow valleys of the Isla and its tributaries as well as sparsely settled, predominantly forested broad plateaux and more pronounced hills. The more extensive areas of settled farmland have been retained as landscape character type 8: *Upland Farmland* with a sub-division defined as 8a: *Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland*.

13.1.1 Operational/consented wind farms

Operational single turbines at Balnamoon and Myreton Crossroads (70-80m high) and four turbines on the south-west facing slopes of Lurg Hill (89-92m high) are located in relative proximity to each other in this landscape character type. A number of single and small groups of small turbines are located close to Mulben. The Edintore wind farm, which is currently under construction, also lies within this landscape character type.

The operational Hill of Towie wind farm, located in the adjacent *Upland Forested Hills* (9) is clearly visible from this character type. The consented Aultmore wind farm located in the *Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland* (8a) will lie close to the *Upland Farmland*.

13.2 Description and summary of sensitivity

The *Upland Farmland* landscape character type encompasses the broad shallow valleys largely lying to the north of the River Isla. This landscape has a simple land cover of open farmland with large fields of pasture predominantly enclosed by post and wire fences. There is an even distribution of farms across this extensive area, accessed by a close network of minor roads. This landscape is edged by the densely forested broad upland plateaux and more pronounced hill tops of the *Broad Forested Hills within the Upland Farmland* (8a) which forms a low dark backdrop to more settled and open farmland. Bin of Cullen, Meikle Balloch and Knock Hill form distinctive 'landmark' features from the *Upland Farmland*. While some key characteristics of this landscape could relate to larger development typologies, the presence of an even dispersal of small farms and houses and the potential for cumulative effects with large turbines sited both in this landscape and adjoining landscapes increases sensitivity.

There would be a **High** sensitivity to turbines >50m high. Sensitivity would be **High-medium** for the small-medium typology (turbines 35-50m high) and **Medium-low** for the small typology (turbines 20-35m high).

13.2.1 Potential cumulative issues

The operational single but large turbines sited on Lurg Hill and close to Grange Crossroads are widely visible across most of this landscape character type. Operational and consented wind farms at Hill of Towie and Aultmore have/will have an additional strong influence on views. Key cumulative landscape and visual issues include:

- Multiple single turbines associated with the majority of land holdings across this well-settled landscape would result in significant visual clutter and confusion and would detract from the character of this landscape. Turbines >35m will create this effect more quickly than smaller turbines.
- Large turbines visible on every hill top/forested plateau within the adjacent *Broad Forest Hills within Upland Farmland (8a)* would be likely to have a dominant and overwhelming effect on this character type and have cumulative effects with turbines located in this character type.
- Potential sequential cumulative visual effects on views from the A95 through Moray and into Aberdeenshire where a number of operational wind farms and small groups of tall turbines are sited (the screening provided by ridges and hills on the Aberdeenshire/Moray border limits inter-visibility).
- An absence of rationale which could occur between consented wind farms clearly associated with the simpler, more expansive *Broad Forested Hills and within Upland Farmland (8a)* and the same size of turbines sited in this character type – this occurs already in the Grange Crossroads area.
- Variations in the type and size of any single or small group of turbines proposed within this landscape.

13.2.2 Constraints

- The presence of small features such as farms and houses and enclosed fields and woodlands which provided ready scale references.
- Cumulative effects with larger turbines in the adjacent *Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland (8a)*
- The openness of this landscape which allows extensive views.
- Views of the distinctive landmark hills in this and adjoining landscapes which include the Bin of Cullen, Meikle Balloch and Knock Hill.
- Potential cumulative landscape and visual effects associated with multiple developments of the large, medium and small-medium typologies where they could exacerbate visual clutter around Keith and in the north-east of this character type where existing large turbines and transmission lines are present.

13.2.3 Opportunities

- The simple, gently undulating landform and overall medium scale of this landscape which could best relate to the size of smaller typologies.

13.3 Guidance for development

No scope has been identified for wind turbines over 50m high in this landscape.

There is some limited scope for the small-medium typology (turbines 35-50m) to be accommodated in this character type. Turbines of this size should be located on broad, more gently undulating slopes, avoiding impact on the landmark hills. The potential for cumulative effects to arise with operational wind farms, single turbines and transmission lines is likely to severely restrict opportunities for this typology. The regular distribution of settlement across this landscape also offers a potential constraint given the

significant cumulative effects that could arise if a number of farms/land holdings featured a turbine of this size.

There are increased opportunities to site the small typology (turbines 20-35m) in this landscape in order to minimise potential cumulative effects with operational/consented larger turbines sited in this landscape and the adjacent *Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland* (8a). Multiple turbines of this height could also be accommodated more successfully in terms of reducing visual clutter and dominance across this open and well-settled landscape. Turbines should be sited on gentler slopes above fields and on slight ridges and terraces which often occur below woodlands. They should avoid being sited close to operational/consented wind farms and large turbines.

Detailed guidance on the siting of smaller turbines is set out in Appendix D.



Although landform is broad and gently rolling, the presence of a regular pattern of farms, small woodlands and other settlement reduces landscape scale.



Existing tall single and small groups of wind turbines form prominent features within the northern parts of this landscape.



Knock Hill forms a landmark in views from both this landscape and from neighbouring Aberdeenshire.



Smaller wind turbines are generally associated with farms