

4 *COASTAL STRIP LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE*

4.1 *DESCRIPTION OF LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE*

The **Coastal Strip** landscape character type contains three character areas. It adheres to a narrow band along the whole of the coast between Whinnyfold in the north and Montrose in the south. The three character areas within it are distinguished by their different shorelines and lithology.



North of Aberdeen the coast is essentially sandy, merging gradually into a farmed hinterland. South of Aberdeen, the coast is rocky with an abrupt cliffline, but including a wide sandy fringe south of Inverbervie. The shoreline governs the settlement patterns and the persistent landscape pressures throughout this vulnerable landscape character type.

The influence of the sea is pervasive, affecting views, coastal landuses and landforms. South of Stonehaven rocky headlands and coves derive from alternating bands of igneous and sedimentary rocks while further north, up to Aberdeen, dramatic cliffs, stacks and arches have been carved from the Dalradian metasediments. North of Aberdeen, between the mouths of the rivers Don and Ythan, a 16 kilometre long crescent of beach and sand dunes has grown up in front of the ancient cliffline of the post glacial raised beach. A cliffline returns north of Collieston where a band of hard quartzite and schist extends to the coast.

4.3 *KINCARDINE CLIFFS*

AREA 2

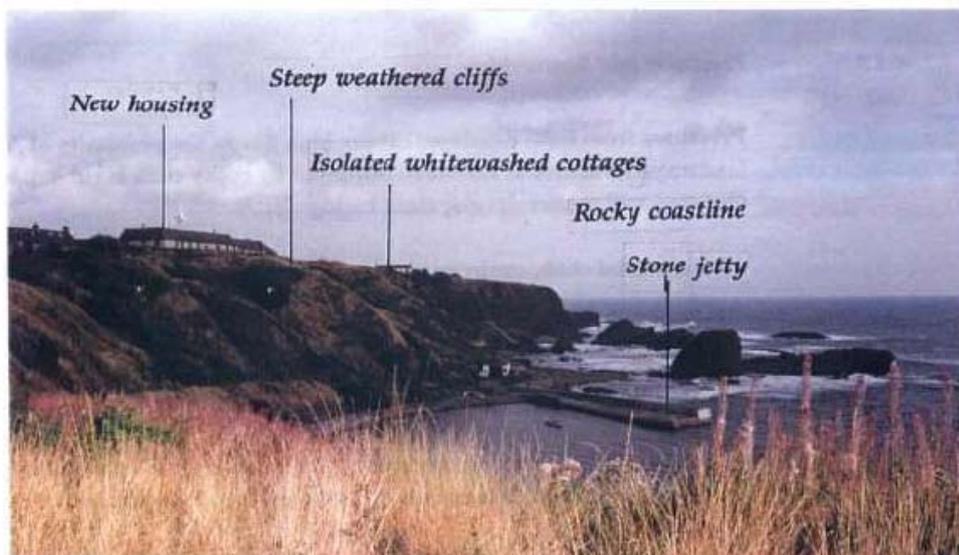
4.3.1 *Landscape Description*

Kincardine Cliffs (Area 2) describes about 30km of coastline between Aberdeen and Inverbervie. It is an essentially rocky coastline although the lithology changes dramatically at Stonehaven, where the hard schists that extend from *the Mounth* (Area 18) are replaced by the Old Red Sandstone of Strathmore.



This transition marks the Highland Boundary Fault, although at the coast the distinct boundary which is seen further west, is almost imperceptible. Despite this, its character is a persistent one of mostly steep rugged slopes and cliffs merging quickly into the farmed hinterland of *Garvock and Glenbervie* (Area 9) and *Kincardine Plateau* (Area 13). Raised beaches are a common feature and villages sit often within a narrow wave cut platform between the old and the new shorelines. Sea cliffs are most characteristic in the northern part of the area, for instance at Crawton. Further south, the softer rocks present a gentler edge, often grass covered and frequently eroded, exhibiting land-slip.

It is a densely inhabited area, particularly north of Stonehaven where the foothills of the Grampians extend almost to the sea, forcing the main road and settlements into a narrow corridor of land. Old fishing villages such as Findon, Muchalls and Catterline occur within sheltered coves or perched on cliff tops and typically include small, white-washed or pebble dashed cottages. Modern expansion often extends back from these old villages into the farmland, including substantial areas of new housing; for example at Portlethen and around Stonehaven. Stonehaven retains a distinct core which descends to the sea.



Sea views are fundamental to the character of *Kincardine Cliffs* (Area 2) providing an immense sense of scale when viewed from cliff tops. Cold hard winds often add to a sense of exposure that derives from these lofty views, rippling the grass or throwing rain and seaspray over the cliff top. The character of the shoreline is equally dependent on the sea, sometimes lashed by wind and waves, sometimes tranquil within a sheltered bay.

4.3.2 *Key Characteristics*

- Steep, weathered coastal cliffs with stacks and arches especially between Stonehaven and Aberdeen.
- Cliff erosion prevalent in some areas, particularly on sandstone cliffs south of Stonehaven.
- Raised beach platforms can give deep stepped profile to the coastline.
- Grass and scrub covered slopes on shallower cliffs; bare rock on steep slopes.
- Farmland extends to edge of cliffs.
- Major communications corridor behind the cliffs, notably the A90 and east coast railway.
- Settlements cluster on cliff tops; older villages and harbours nestle at cliff base accessed by steep roads down to the sea.
- Extensive new development at edge of coastal towns.
- Expansive views out to sea provide vast sense of scale.
- Weather is fundamental to character; coast is often windswept or lashed by rain and spray; resulting sense of exposure is great.

4.3.3 *Pressures and Sensitivities*

Pressures from built development are high due to the proximity of Aberdeen; the landscape structure of farmland bordered by rocky cliffs is robust, but exposed cliff tops will render development highly visible.

- The coastal cliffs, stacks and arches are sensitive to nearby built development which may affect their setting.
- The open and exposed character of the landscape on cliffs is sensitive to changes in land use and scale of development.
- The major force for landscape change is from new built development outwith or extending existing settlements, the latter risking coalescence of existing coastal communities.

- Pressures of development within small stone harbours could lead to loss of their intimate character.
- Exposure to wind along cliff tops may attract windfarm development.
- Long seaward views will encourage caravan and camp sites.

4.4.4

Specific Guidance

Aim: To enhance the traditional clustered settlement patterns and vernacular building style.

- New development on the coast which is clustered in form and limited in extent will reflect traditional patterns and will be acceptable in principle; linear development along communication routes may lead to amorphous strip development, lacking sense of identity.
- Isolated houses and small developments which reflect traditional architectural styles and finishes, such as whitewashed walls, will be more appropriate within the cliffline landscape.
- Small fishing villages on and below sculpted cliffs are features of the landscape and conservation of their character and setting is important; new development which is separated from these villages will help to preserve their identity and that of the harbour settings.

Aim: To conserve and enhance the open space character of the cliff edge.

- Historical features, such as clifftop castles, churches and archaeological remains, benefit from an open setting that emphasises their exposure and enhances views; development near to such features will detract from this.
- The maintenance of drystone dyke field boundaries will enhance landscape structure.
- The rural character of the clifftops may be conserved by restricting the use of urbanising elements such as street lighting and signage outside the main settlements.
- In this exposed landscape, extensive use of shelterbelts around development will appear out of place and may emphasise built development; clumped groups of native species will be more appropriate.
- Windfarms along the coastal edge will be highly visible and may be at variance with the character of small clustered settlements; in more open and undeveloped stretches, they will introduce a prominent, artificial feature, but may also enhance the windswept aspect of the landscape.

5 ***AGRICULTURAL HEARTLANDS*** ***LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE***

5.1 ***DESCRIPTION OF LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE***

The **Agricultural Heartlands** landscape character type contains ten landscape character areas. The predominant landscape of the study area is an agricultural one of generally intensive mixed farming on large fertile fields. Essentially it therefore represents a quite recent landscape character type whose character relies less on historic features and landuse practices than other landscapes.



There are three main centres of such farming within the study area. The coastal lowlands form the most extensive area which, despite their diverse lithology, have been eroded into an undulating plateau between Formartine in the north and the coastal slopes south of the River Dee. The second area fringes the northern edge of the wide rift valley of Strathmore, extending between the River North Esk and Stonehaven. The third comprises a belt of generally flat lowland that curves between Huntly and Oldmeldrum through Inch between surrounding high ridges of **Moorland Plateaux**.

The **Agricultural Heartland** areas differ in detail in terms of their relief, the types of farming they accommodate and the density and patterns of settlement. But they are distinguished as a single landscape character type by their patchwork of mixed agriculture and scattered woodland and by their numerous towns and villages, linked by a network of main roads and lanes. Crop patterns create a scene of ever-changing colours and textures and powerful skies accentuate the energy of this dynamic landscape character type. Variations in relief are particularly important in distinguishing different character areas for, as well as determining landscape character directly, they influence patterns of fields, woods and settlement. At one extreme are the smooth rolling hills of the *Northern Rolling Lowlands* (Area 4) to the north, and the *Garvock and Glenbervie* (Area 9) in Strathmore. At the other are the expansive flat lowlands that include the *Howe of the Mearns* (Area 8) in Strathmore and the *Howe of Alford* (Area 7) on the eastern edge of the Grampians. Variations between these include the gently undulating coastal lowlands of the *Formartine Lowlands* (Area 11) and the flat *Insch Basin* (Area 5) with its local intrusions of hills and ridges.

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Pressures on these areas are similar. They are already the most densely populated areas, and continued development of houses, both in the urban fringe and in the countryside, will continue to present further pressures along with the associated infrastructure of road improvements, industrial estates, schools and shops. Their agricultural productivity generally precludes large scale forestry projects but small scale plantations will continue to add to an already diverse landcover.

5.7 GARVOCK AND GLENBERVIE

AREA 9

5.7.1 Landscape Description

Garvock and Glenbervie (Area 9) landscape character area include an extensive area of rolling farmland which encompasses not only Garvock Hill in the south west of the area, but the farmland around Glenbervie at the edge of Highland Boundary Fault.



Garvock and Glenbervie (Area 9) are similar in form to the *Northern Rolling Lowlands* (Area 4), although they differ in their lithology: the former being formed from lavas. Their covering of fluvio-glacial deposits derives from Strathmore and the soils are characteristically pink, like those in the *Howe of The Mearns* (Area 8), lending a warmth to the landscape. The character of the area stems essentially from its relief: a series of sweeping, rolling hills that present distant views and draw the eye up and down the terrain. Huge skies and billowing clouds can enhance this character reflecting the scale and shapes of the landform beneath. From the east, views into the *Mearns* and across to Strathfinella Hill and the *Kincardine Plateau* (Area 13) are dramatic and emphasise the scale and majesty of this area of landscape.

The bold geometric field pattern is similar to that of the *Northern Rolling Lowlands* (Area 4); fields are poorly defined by field boundaries, but crop patterns emphasise the characteristic patchwork; some gappy hedges occur. The few coniferous plantations are generally small and, although they may be prominent on top of hills, their influence on landscape character is slight. They are often located in areas of semi-natural grassland or scrub. Conversely broadleaf (often sycamore) woods and shelterbelts are widespread and enhance the landscape pattern; the deep cut of Bervie Water in particular is emphasised by a meandering line of trees.



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This is a well settled landscape with numerous small villages located along the Bervie. There is a dense pattern of farmsteads, often emphasised by their enclosing shelter of trees. In some areas, individual new dwellings have encroached upon the landscape. Distant views of the transport corridor at the base of the ridges are highlighted by moving specks of colour or glints of light, but the A90 itself is well integrated with the landform.

5.7.2 *Key Characteristics*

- Large scale landscape with open rolling ridges.
- Large fields of arable land and pasture and red soils, presenting a tapestry of colours.
- Scarcity of hedges and dykes.
- Radio masts prominent on high points.
- Scattered settlement pattern with varied architectural styles including large stately homes in variety of materials, traditional cottages made of local red sandstone, and modern suburban style development.
- Evidence of built development pressure, particularly around existing settlements on major communication routes such as Lochside outside St Cyrus.
- Quite numerous archaeological remains, including recumbent stone circles and carved stone balls.
- Long distance views across *Howe of the Mearns* (Area 8) to *The Mounth* (Area 18).

5.7.3 *Pressures and Sensitivities*

Pressure from intensive farming, neglect of fields boundaries and new built development are prevalent. The landscape is able to absorb some development within its rolling relief and large scale, but visibility can also be high.

- The large scale rolling hills are sensitive to elements which may disrupt their smooth forms and visual flow, particularly on ridges and hilltops.
- The pronounced agricultural pattern is sensitive to changes in land use and management which may alter its ordered appearance.
- Woods add structure to the landscape but are susceptible to neglect and depletion.
- Ad hoc development pressures are high due to proximity to Aberdeen and high scenic qualities.
- Widespread archaeological remains are susceptible to damage.

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- Long, uninterrupted views are sensitive to intrusive elements which may disrupt the flow or the scale of landscape features.
- Exposed upland ridges may attract windfarm development.
- Mineral workings create local pressure and insensitive siting will be particularly prominent.

5.7.4

Specific Guidance

Aim: To enhance the large scale, simple and bold landscape pattern.

- Large scale landscape pattern would benefit from increased woodland structure, and its smooth rolling landform can accommodate forestry which is appropriate to the scale of the landscape.
- Plantation shapes which reflect the existing field pattern will reinforce the pronounced landscape structure, although isolated hill top plantations may intrude into the skyline.
- Roads and pylons may be intrusive but are accommodated better when following the smooth patterns of landform and natural breaks of slope; linear features which break up curves in the landform will create visual disharmony.
- Distinct field boundaries emphasise the landscape structure; improvement to drystone dykes and hedges will be beneficial.
- Piecemeal, small scale development or patchy, small woods, may distract the eye from the large scale and simple landscape pattern; woodland shelter can be used to visually link buildings and isolated stands.

Aim: To integrate new built development into the landscape.

- New houses may be integrated more successfully if they are associated with existing or expanded shelterbelts and woodland blocks; the secluded, informal landscape of the Bervie Valley could easily be compromised by development even though it is well wooded.
- Development may be accommodated by careful siting within the shelter of the rolling landform; ridgeline development will be very prominent, and may disrupt the landscape pattern.
- Windfarms will be highly visible and in more open and undeveloped stretches they will introduce a prominent, artificial feature, but may also enhance the windswept aspect of the landscape.

5.11 KINCARDINE PLATEAU

AREA 13

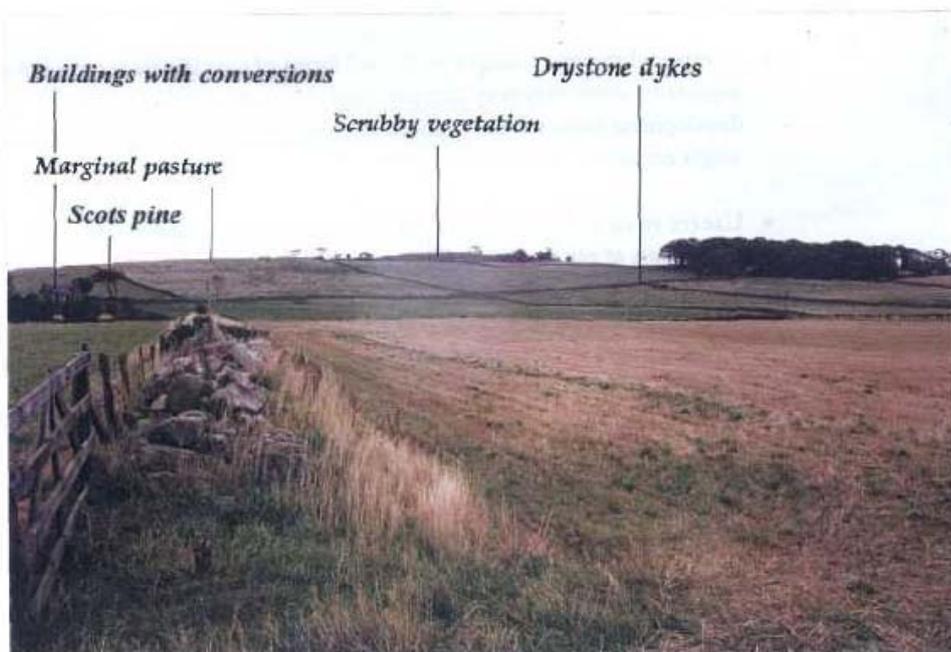


5.11.1 Landscape Description

The *Kincardine Plateau* (Area 13) includes a wedge of land to the south west of Aberdeen which forms the agricultural foothills of *The Mounth* (Area 18).

The area's gently rolling relief is underlain by schists which descend gradually from the moors to the coastal cliffs around Portlethen and Newtonhill giving a transition from an upland to intensive agricultural character. In this regard the area has similarities with **Farmed Moorland Edge** but its open character, widespread arable farmland along its eastern edge and occurrence of significant development pressures have led to the inclusion of this area in the **Agricultural Heartland** type. Its sloping relief presents many opportunities for long distance views and the sea has a strong influence on the character of the area.

This transition from upland to coastal edge results in a diverse landcover and complex landscape pattern that lacks a unified and coherent pattern. Some areas with field dykes enclosing pasture and clumps of forestry have a clear structure, but there are frequent signs of neglect such as encroaching gorse scrub, weed infestation, regenerating birch, tumbledown dykes, discarded farm machinery, pockets of boggy rush and gappy shelterbelts. While these might add visual interest, they are rarely profuse enough to establish a strong landscape theme or pocket of distinctive character.



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Settlement pressure is apparent and scattered bungalows, houses and modern farm buildings are more prevalent than vernacular structures. Grey stone is also often encountered as a modern building material and a number of old cottages and farm buildings have been restored. Equestrian centres are quite common in this area, encompassing areas of low intensity farmland.

5.11.2 *Key Characteristics*

- Undulating landform falling gently towards coast.
- Pasture and marginal farmland with rocky outcrops and scrubby patches of derelict pasture or unimproved marshy land with rush infestation.
- Exposed mounds and hills with windblown trees and sculptured stands of Scots pine.
- Regenerating birch scrub on pockets of moss.
- Derelict pastures with encroaching gorse and weeds, giving disorderly character.
- Gradual transition between strong moorland character to west and coastal character to east.
- Strong development pressures evident: modern houses mixed with extensions and converted traditional stone farmsteads.

5.11.3 *Pressures and Sensitivities*

Landscape change stems from the neglect and dereliction of field boundaries and the increasing pressure for new built development close to Aberdeen and the Dee Valley.

- Farmland is susceptible to neglect, with encroachment of gorse and weeds and dereliction of farm buildings and drystone dykes.
- The setting and integrity of archaeological remains are sensitive to damage.
- Vernacular buildings are prone to neglect; traditional stone farm houses are sensitive to extensions and conversions which may alter their character.
- Ad hoc new housing development may result in an uncoordinated mix of styles.
- Exposed locations may attract windfarm developments.

5.11.4 *Specific Guidance*

Aim: To enhance the diversity of landuses and textures.

- The landscape shows signs of neglect with encroachment by weeds and scrub; targeted grants for habitat improvement and stone dyke restoration could encourage a more coherent and unified approach in order to enhance landscape diversity.
- The reduced grazing pressure on selected areas will result in the regeneration of gorse, birch and Scots pine.
- Wind-blown Scots pine stand out as sculptural elements in the landscape; management of these will help to conserve a key feature in the landscape.

Aim: To accommodate new built development without detriment to the open landscape character.

- Traditional farmhouses which accommodate modest extensions are better integrated than those whose excessive extensions alter the character of the original building.
- Landscape planting with native species can provide a more natural setting for built development and help to integrate it with the landscape.
- Ornamental hedgerows, ranch style or suburban fencing and concrete cappings are out of character in this landscape; more desirable options include drystone dykes and native hedging.

7 **MOORLAND PLATEAUX LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE**

7.1 **DESCRIPTION OF LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE**

The **Moorland Plateaux** landscape character type contains two landscape character areas. It includes landscapes whose similarity stems from their essentially 'Highland' character of heather clad, wind swept moors, mountainous exposure and, often, a thick mantle of coniferous plantation.



They form eastward extensions of the Grampians but display a complex lithology, ranging from the slate of Gartly Moor and Hill of Tillymorgan, to the schists of the Correen Hills and the granites of the Hill of Fare and Bennachie. Their topography is variable; most commonly it encompasses rolling ridges of both gentle and severe relief. Streams cleave deep gorges between the hills disrupting the smooth flow of the terrain. Occasional rocky outcrops highlight the mountainous character of these areas.

The **Moorland Plateaux** are typically covered by either heather moorland or coniferous woodland which forms vast cloaks over the hills and ridges; plantation woodland is totally dominant in some areas and will become so in others where new plantings have enveloped the summits and extend down to the green edge of the farmland. In these areas, the detail of the landform is obscured and the landscape exhibits a pattern of smooth folds, simple shapes and subdued tones and shades. Heather moor still prevails in some areas, notably *The Mounth* (Area 18). This archetypal woodland/heather cover of the **Moorland Plateaux** is principally related to altitude and at lower levels moorland grass, bracken and sparse birch and rowan mottle the slopes. Alternatively, green fields of pasture or rough grassland ascend to the base of the forests or moors creating a distinct boundary. These are almost always uninhabited areas, but on the lower slopes and adjacent to the **Farmed Moorland Edge**, upland farms occur.

The weather is fundamental in affecting the character of these areas. Under clear skies and strong light the hills are illuminated revealing tones of green, blue and purple which uplift and invigorate the scene; conversely dark skies and low clouds frequently shroud these hills stifling their colours and emphasising the bleakness of these exposed areas.

7.3 THE MOUNTH

AREA 18

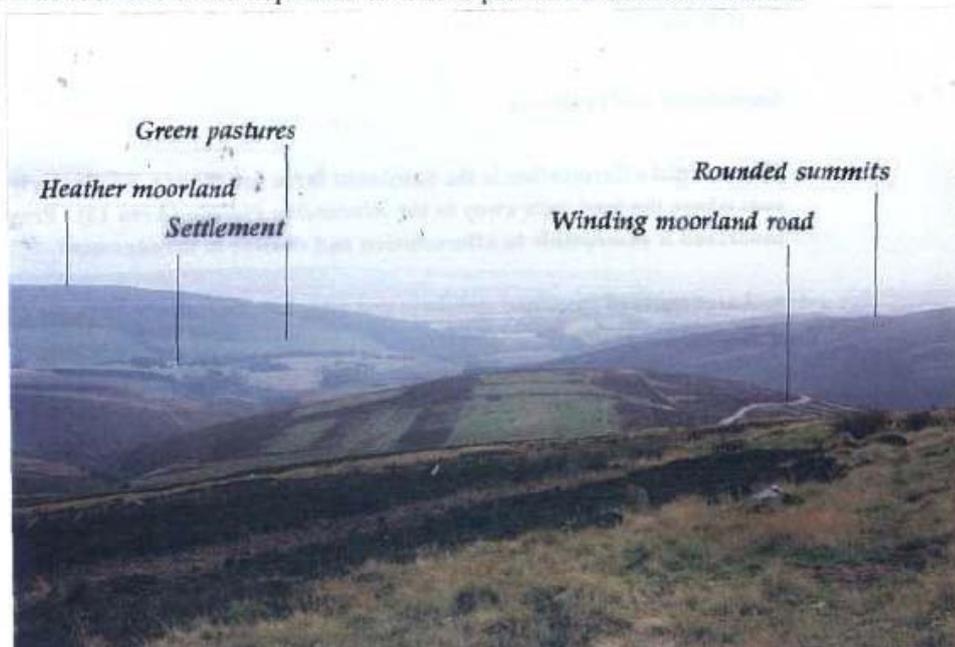
7.3.1 Landscape Description

This forms the greatest single expanse of **Moorland Plateaux** in the study area, where the foothills of the Grampians extend almost to the coast at Stonehaven. It is underlain mainly by granite, although its southern edge, which marks the line of the Highland Boundary Fault, is quartz-mica-schist with intrusions of slate.



Its location emphasises the relief of this unbroken ridge which looms over the flat farmland of *Howe of the Mearns* (Area 8) to its south. Its eastern foothills, which tumble down to the coast, are less dramatic and form a more gradual transition with surrounding farmland.

Lower slopes are forested, but the plateau itself is covered by a pelt of heather moorland which extends westwards into the Cairngorms revealing a strong, rolling relief whose ridges recede into the distance across interlocking horizons. This smooth landform is dissected by shallow carved gullies which are often lined by mossy clumps of birch and rowan. The plateau is an exposed and wild landscape, but rarely inhospitable enough to escape human influence. Patches of unenclosed green pasture extend up from the valleys; and coniferous woods cover the lower ridges at its edge. Small clustered farms shelter on the lower slopes enclosed within a broadleaf shelterbelt and sometimes are illuminated by their whitewashed walls. Distant views of the neat farmed landscape in Strathmore emphasise the isolation of the area.



The plateau foothills contain a more diverse mix of farmland and grazed moors. Here the typical cover of heather and forest gives way to a patchwork of heather, bracken, gorse, scrubby birch and pine wood and pasture with meandering lines of tumbledown stone dykes and neat fences. Hence the landscape assumes a smaller scale and more intricate character.

There is an almost complete absence of habitation on the upland ridges and the area is crossed by only two roads. There are a number of other little used long distance footpaths.

7.3.2 *Key Characteristics*

- Smooth rolling landform and rounded summits.
- Substantial highland outcrop forming prominent undulating ridge that dominates views south of Aberdeen.
- Extensive central and western ridges of heather moorland and grasses.
- Heavily forested edges particularly in the north and east and within Glen Dye.
- Encroaching patchwork of green pasture on some fringe slopes associated with isolated villages and hamlets.
- Derelict grey stone cottages are occasional features amidst open moorland, but almost all are uninhabited.
- Numerous old routeways which are now used as footpaths for walkers.
- Wild and exposed character with commanding views into tranquil farmed lowland of *Howe of the Mearns* (Area 8).

7.3.3 *Sensitivities and Pressures*

Commercial afforestation is the dominant force for change, particularly to the east where the land falls away to the *Kincardine Plateau* (Area 13). Prevailing moorland is susceptible to afforestation and decline in management

- Large tracts of moorland remain in this area, but afforestation presents a strong force for change
- Small scale, intricate landscapes with a mix of birch, gorse and bracken provide local interest within the upland, and are also susceptible to afforestation.
- Open areas to the north, south and east command exceptional views over the landscape which are lost or reduced within coniferous forest.
- Visitor pressure in the form of hill walking and car parking contributes to human impact and erosion of the landscape.

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- Afforestation and neglect result in reduced landscape diversity.
- Exposed ridgelines are likely to encourage development of windfarms and communication masts.

7.3.4 *Specific Guidance*

Aim: To retain the exposed landscape character and enhance the smooth rolling landform.

- Management of grazing pressure and controlled muirburn will maintain a predominance of heather, supporting distinctive wildlife, providing immediate visual interest and framing long distance views.
- Windfarms, communication masts and pylons will be highly intrusive across the skyline and detract from the remote feel of upland ridges.
- Large open areas of upland, such as occur in this landscape, are rare in eastern Aberdeenshire; preservation and maintenance of moorland swathes will preserve a valuable landscape asset.

Aim: To increase diversity of landcover.

- Extensive monocultures present uniform backdrop to views from lowland areas; increased species mix will enhance visual diversity and interest.
- Increased proportions of open space/moorland within forest blocks will also create visual interest and appear more natural.
- Small patches of conifer are generally inappropriate, being out of character with the large scale of the upland forms.

Aim: To enhance a diverse edge to the landscape .

- A semi-natural mix of successional vegetation, such as birch and rowan, will provide an attractive transition between landscape character areas, although this is susceptible to afforestation or overgrazing.
- Drystone dykes also add local interest and structure to the landscape and incentives for the management of these will benefit the landscape.

Aim: To promote sustainable public access.

- Signed footpaths, viewpoints and information boards will promote public access and reduce pressure on wider moorland.
- Small car parks and visitor facilities built of local stones and timber will fit well in the landscape; urbanising elements such as lighting, excessive signs and ornamental planting should be avoided.

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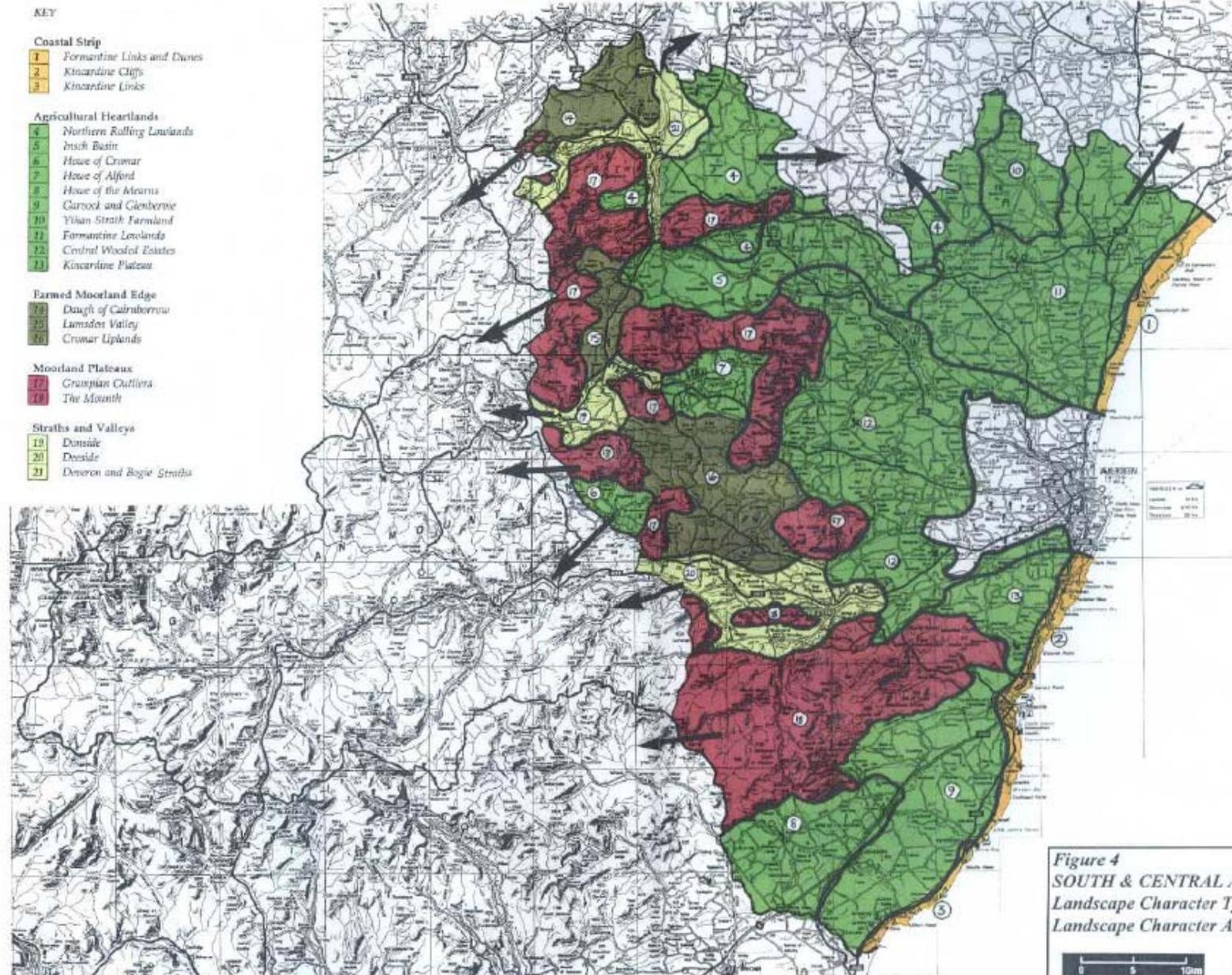


Figure 4
SOUTH & CENTRAL ABERDEENSHIRE:
Landscape Character Types and
Landscape Character Areas

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