

Appendix 13.4

Special Landscape Qualities of the Cairngorms National Park

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1. Introduction

- 1.1.1. This appendix considers the impacts of the proposed scheme on the Special Landscape Qualities (SLQs) of the Cairngorms National Park (CNP). The SLQs are set out in the Cairngorms National Park Commissioned Report No. 375 'The Special Qualities of the Cairngorms National Park' (SNH, 2010)ⁱ.
- 1.1.2. The consideration of the SLQs has been informed by the 'Cairngorms Landscape Toolkit' (CNPA, 2015)ⁱⁱ which is a resource to aid decision making. The Toolkit provides guidelines on the sensitivity of the SLQs and characteristics of the Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) within the CNP.
- 1.1.3. As the LCAs largely follow a series of visual envelopes and these are considered to be a suitable extent and scale to use as a context for the SLQ assessment. As part of the Landscape and Visual assessment (LVIA), a number of viewpoints were identified, and field work assessment for LVIA purposes taken at these locations. These viewpoints, in addition to drive-through of the area, have been used to inform this study.
- 1.1.4. Only the SLQs that are considered to be most relevant to the LCA have been included. SLQs that are distant from the LCA, but which may have an effect upon it, have also been included in the consideration.
- 1.1.5. The general SLQ of the CNP which are most relevant to the proposed scheme within the study area include:
- *Magnificent mountains towering over moorland, forest and strath;*
 - *Strong juxtaposition of contrasting landscapes;*
 - *A landscape of layers, from inhabited strath to remote, uninhabited upland;*
 - *The harmony of complicated curves;*
 - *Landscapes both cultural and natural;*
 - *Broad, farmed straths;*
 - *Renowned rivers;*
 - *Beautiful lochs;*
 - *Light and airy birch woods;*
 - *Long association with forestry;*
 - *Layers of receding ridge lines; and*
 - *Dramatic, historical routes.*
- 1.1.6. The general SLQs and the SLQs that best relate to each of the Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) are set out in the Cairngorms Landscape Character Assessment (2009)ⁱⁱⁱ. These are considered in Table 2.1.
- 1.1.7. SLQs have been grouped into representative (i.e. those considered for the purposes of this exercise to be representative of the key characteristics of the LCA) and more-than

representative (i.e. those considered for the purposes of this exercise to be representative of the more perceptual qualities concerning the landscape experience such as 'wildness', 'dark skies' or 'spirituality').

- 1.1.8. While fully appreciating that the SLQs are more concerned with the response of a person to place, assessment of the SLQs most obviously underpinned by the LCA (representative) have not been assessed separately due to risk of 'double counting'. This is due to the overlap between the LCA key characteristics, on which the SLQs have been based, already having been allocated a rating of significance.
- 1.1.9. The subjective nature of attempting to assess the experiential aspects of landscape i.e. the effect that the less tangible aspects of landscape has on people, is worth mentioning. It is considered, for the purposes of this exercise, that there is a risk involved in terms of allocating a rating to how people generally experience landscape. For example, this experience varies with the season, the weather, the visibility and the mood of the person at a specific moment in time amongst many other variables.
- 1.1.10. Therefore, both the representative and the more-than-representative SLQs, are considered (both as part of the LCA narrative and separately) in detail, and contribute to the rating of significance for the LCA (see Appendix 13.5: Landscape Character Assessment Impacts) but have not been assigned their own additional significance rating.
- 1.1.11. While the SLQs have not been given a rating of significance, the landscape mitigation proposals have been established to respond to the SLQs. This reflects the approach set out in Fitting Landscapes.

2. Impacts on the Special Qualities of the Cairngorms National Park

- 2.1.1. Relevant SLQs for each LCA have been identified and grouped into either representative or more-than representative qualities with mitigation proposals considered to conserve and enhance the SLQs associated with each LCA (see Table 2.1).
- 2.1.2. In summary, the overall integrity of the CNP would not be compromised by the proposed scheme, the dualling of an existing road, nor would there be significant adverse impact upon the SLQs of the CNP in relation to the relevant LCAs.
- 2.1.3. It is anticipated that a slight beneficial impact will be achieved at Slochd in relation to the removal of an area of mesh at Slochd Summit in association with the proposed rock cuts. The sense of drama integral to the SLQs at this location will be retained through the rock cut design (see Appendix 13.2: Rock Cuts).

Table 2.1: Identification of Significant Change to Special Landscape Qualities of Cairngorms National Park

SLQ underpinned by Key Characteristics of the LCA (representative)	SLQ with focus on root perceptual qualities (more-than representative)	Assessment incl. mitigation (codes from Ch.21: Schedule of Commitments)	Significant Change to SLQ
Badenoch: Loch Alvie to Inverdrue LCA			
<p>Narrative: The SLQs are best experienced in elevated open areas, although some open areas of the valley floor, such as the existing Aviemore South Junction and B9152 which are more open, also afford appreciation of these. The A9 is generally in cutting with verge/embankment planting generally limiting experience of the SLQs for road users – although the Cairngorm Massif is a focal point ahead for southbound drivers, and Craigellachie outcrop a focal point ahead for northbound drivers. Sense of enclosure, created by the topography and heavily wooded land cover, is in contrast to the large scale open mountain massif (although the massif is distant from the LCA) and creates a juxtaposition of contrasting landscapes experienced throughout the LCA. Existing infrastructure includes the A9, B9152, B9070 and HML.</p>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magnificent mountains towering over forest and strath; • Strong juxtaposition of contrasting landscapes; • Landscapes both cultural and natural; • Exceptional glacial landmarks (Torr Alvie and Ord Ban); • Broad farmed strath; • Renowned rivers; • Beautiful lochs; • Parkland and policy woodland; and • Focal cultural landmarks (Duke of Gordon's Monument, Loch Alvie Church); and • Snowscapes. • Large 'roche moutonnees' or rocky outcrops of Ord Ban and Torr Alvie; • Steep sided, densely wooded outcrop hills; • Irregularly shaped, steep sided hills; and • Diverse vegetation cover (naturalistic wetlands, policy woods, scrub cover, broadleaf and native pine woodland); • Policy influenced planting associated with the estates of Kinrara and Doune of Rothiemurchus; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence of wild land (Monadhliath Mountains and Cairngorm Massif) in terms of perception of being in proximity to 'wildness'; and • The wistfulness of abandoned settlements. 	<p>The proposed scheme will introduce additional man-made elements to the landscape of the strath south of Aviemore to include Aviemore South Junction, retaining walls visible from B9152, and new underpasses. These will necessitate some reduction in existing vegetation and new earthwork formation.</p> <p>Embedded Mitigation: Earthwork profiling to include steepening to reduce tree felling [P11-LV8]; Natural stone treatment to retaining walls visible from B9152 south of Aviemore [P11-LV11]; Mitigation: Mitigation planting to replace lost vegetation [P11-LV18 and P11-LV19].</p>	<p>No significant change to SLQ</p> <p>Due to the topography and heavy wooded cover the impacts on the representative SLQs of the area will be minimal.</p> <p>The SLQs would not be affected during the operational stage, beyond slight changes in views from Torr Alvie.</p> <p>However, there may be less appreciation of the SLQs due to the distractions associated with mechanical plant movement and temporary re-alignments/diversions</p>

SLQ underpinned by Key Characteristics of the LCA (representative)	SLQ with focus on root perceptual qualities (more-than representative)	Assessment incl. mitigation (codes from Ch.21: Schedule of Commitments)	Significant Change to SLQ
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural interest of built environment and estate curtilages; Clusters of farm buildings. 			during the construction phase.
<p>CMNSA: The SLQ that most closely relate to the CMNSA are the same as those set out in column 1 above. Therefore, these will not experience significant change.</p> <p>Kinrara GDL: the important characteristics of this GDL are the Duke of Gordon's Monument and the woodland on Torr Alvie which is considered (HES Inventory) to be of outstanding scenic value in the surrounding landscape. The proposed scheme will not impact upon Torr Alvie and the monument. Views from the monument are assessed in Appendix 14.1: Visual Receptor Assessment Results; there is no significant impact associated with this landscape feature.</p> <p>Doune of Rothiemurchus GDL: the important characteristics of the GDL which is considered (HES Inventory) are its scale of the designed landscape and its prominence in Strathspey from the Cairngorm hills, the A9 and the B970, which give it outstanding scenic value. The proposed scheme will not impact upon the GDL. There is no significant impact on this landscape feature.</p>			
<p>Strathspey: Inverdrue to Pityoulish LCA</p>			
<p>Narrative: Sense of enclosure created by the topography and heavily wooded land cover is in contrast to the mountain massif context. Due to the built environment of Aviemore town, and woodland/forestry cover, experience of the SLQs is limited to open pockets on the fringes of Aviemore. The SLQs that are most perceptible from Aviemore are the (often snow-capped) Cairngorm Massif (a feature in views for southbound A9 travellers and in the wider area generally), and the more localised birch woodland covered slopes of Craigellachie which demonstrate texture and colour and contrast with the dark pine forest. Elements of the A9 dualling are not generally perceptible from the Craigellachie NNR, though Granish Junction is perceptible. Existing infrastructure includes the A9, B9152, B9070 and HML.</p>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An imposing massif of strong dramatic character; Snowscapes; Broad farmed straths; Dominance of natural landforms; Light and airy birch woodlands; A landscape of many colours; Attractive and contrasting textures; Dark and venerable pine forest; Distinctive planned towns; and Vernacular buildings. Steep craggy wooded slopes of Craigellachie (NNR) and Pityoulish Hill; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influence of wild land (Monadhliath Mountains and Cairngorm Massif) in terms of perception of being in proximity to 'wildness'; 	<p>The proposed scheme visible from parts of this LCA will include Granish Junction and mainline widening resulting in some reduction in existing vegetation, new earthwork formation and a number of retaining walls. Part of Granish Junction will be lit. There will be a number of drainage features but the access tracks generally concern upgrading of existing tracks.</p> <p>Embedded Mitigation: Use of natural stone treatment on the Craigellachie and Milton NMU underpasses [P11-LV11].</p> <p>Mitigation:</p>	<p>No significant change to SLQ</p> <p>Due to the topography, wooded cover, and built environment of Aviemore, the impact of the A9 mainline on the representative SLQs of the wider area are minimal. With the establishment of landscape mitigation planting there would be no significant</p>

SLQ underpinned by Key Characteristics of the LCA (representative)	SLQ with focus on root perceptual qualities (more-than representative)	Assessment incl. mitigation (codes from Ch.21: Schedule of Commitments)	Significant Change to SLQ
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide meanders of the River Spey; • Extensive fertile flats and steep sided river terraces; • Improved fields; • Conifer woodland; • Birch-covered hummocks north of Aviemore; • The town of Aviemore; • B970, A9, HML. 		<p>The establishment of landscape mitigation planting [P11-LV18] will maintain localised landscape character.</p>	<p>change to the representative SLQs. Southbound widening minimises impact on the birch woodland of Craigellachie NNR.</p>
<p>CMNSA: The SLQ that most closely relate to the CMNSA are the dominance of natural landforms, light and airy birch woodlands and dark and venerable pine forest. Therefore, these will not experience significant change.</p>			
<p>Strathspey: Pityoulish to Boat of Garten LCA</p>			
<p>Narrative: From the A9, gaps in the dense conifer woodland occasionally offer views of undulating open farmland. From the A75 and B9153 the character is much more evident with undulating topography with birch woodland and in more open areas, the Cairngorm Massif is the focus of the landscape experience. Settlement pattern is clustered around lochs, most notably Avie Lochan and reflects earlier settlement pattern, or follows linear pattern facilitated by topography and road layout along B970. The Cairngorm Mountains form a backdrop to life on the floor of the Strath which is evident in unforested areas.</p>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magnificent mountains towering over forest and strath; • A landscape of layers, from inhabited strath, to remote, uninhabited upland; • Dark and venerable pine forests; • Attractive and contrasting textures; and • Beautiful lochs. • Undulating terrain; • Steep wooded slopes to the west and gentle slopes to Abernethy Forest eastwards; • Lochs & lochans; • Extensive commercially managed pine woodland and extensive conifer woodland fringed with birch; • Low lying raised moorland; • Improved fields; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence of wild land (Monadhliath Mountains and Cairngorm Massif) in terms of perception of being in proximity to 'wildness'; 	<p>The proposed scheme within this LCA will include Granish Junction and associated lighting. Lighting will be new to this location but confined to the underpass and associated link road/roundabout. Mainline widening will result in some reduction in existing vegetation and new earthwork formation. Assuming slope profiling and 'naturalistic' SUDS design, this should be minimalised. There will be a number of retaining walls incorporated in the design.</p> <p>The wider LCA will not be affected due to the heavy woodland cover.</p> <p>Embedded Mitigation: Slope gradient relaxed at Laggantygown to reflect local landscape [P11-LV8];</p>	<p>No significant change to SLQ</p> <p>Due to woodland cover, there are limited areas likely to have actual visibility of the proposed scheme. With the introduction of lighting, the junction will be more visible during hours of darkness from open elevated locations. With mitigation in place, there would not be a significant</p>

SLQ underpinned by Key Characteristics of the LCA (representative)	SLQ with focus on root perceptual qualities (more-than representative)	Assessment incl. mitigation (codes from Ch.21: Schedule of Commitments)	Significant Change to SLQ
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buildings clustered in small groups around Avielochan; A9, A95, B970, HML; A recreational focus. 		Naturalistic SuDS design [P11-LV9]; The height of lighting columns will not be apparent above the tree line and luminaires will be selected to avoid upward glare [P11-LV25]. Mitigation: Planting to replace lost vegetation {P11-LV18}.	impact upon the wider LCA.
No other landscape or landscape-related designations likely to be affected lie within this LCA.			
Strathspey: Dulnain Strath LCA			
Narrative: The A9 improvements are limited to the extreme western part of the Dulnain Strath LCA. The SLQs most evident include the strong juxtaposition between conifer plantation and woodland and the open elevated crossing of the Dulnain Strath. Development from the town of Carrbridge has extended west under the A9 and HML. The HML viaduct is a key feature in views both from the A9 and from the floor of the strath and from Bogroy.			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong juxtaposition of contrasting landscapes; A landscape of layers from inhabited straths to remote uninhabited uplands; and Focal cultural landmarks (HML viaduct). River Dulnain; Broad flat floodplain narrowing at A9 crossing; Commercial/managed pine woodlands; and Development of Carrbridge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No specific obvious root perceptual qualities. 	The new structure crossing the River Dulnain will introduce an additional large-scale element (bridge and retaining wall) into a landscape which contains the existing River Dulnain Crossing of the A9 and HML. There will be a reduction in tree cover. Mitigation: Mitigation planting to replace lost vegetation to either side of the crossing [P11-LV18].	No significant change to SLQ Given the location of major structures at this point of the river crossing, and mitigation there will be some localised change, but not to the juxtaposition of the landscape from woodland/upland to open strath or to the setting of Carrbridge.
No other landscape or landscape-related designations likely to be affected lie within this LCA.			
Slochd LCA			

SLQ underpinned by Key Characteristics of the LCA (representative)	SLQ with focus on root perceptual qualities (more-than representative)	Assessment incl. mitigation (codes from Ch.21: Schedule of Commitments)	Significant Change to SLQ
<p>Narrative: The drama created by the dominant landform of the gorge, which acts as a threshold between the upland landscape characteristics north of the CNP boundary forming a natural gateway to the Park, and the open landscape of receding ridge lines to the south are SLQs which is experienced by travellers on the A9, users of the NCN7 and General Wade's Military Road.</p>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong juxtaposition of contrasting landscapes; • Landscapes both cultural and natural; • Dominance of natural landforms; • Association with iconic animals; • Layers of receding ridgelines; • Dramatic historical routes; and • Focal cultural landscapes (Soldier's Head at Slochd). • Deep, steep sided gorge, a dramatic pass (previously widened to accommodate A9); • Western hills covered with conifer woodland; • Northern hills covered with heather moorland; • Regularly shaped 18th/19th Century fields; • Properties tucked below A9 in gorge; and • Drama upon entry to the National Park from the north through a narrow pass – contrast between enclosure of gorge and exposure of the basin. • Telecoms masts at Slochd. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local folklore concerned with the association with iconic animals i.e. the alleged location at Slochd of the 'den of the last wolf in Scotland' and Slochd Mhuic- the wild pig's den; 	<p>Changes due to the proposed scheme include the introduction of a new bridge alongside the existing one at Slochd Beag, changes to the rock cuts and slope profiles at Slochd Beag, Slochd Mor and Slochd Summit. The two underpasses at Slochd containing the NCR7 will be lit – it is expected that this will be PIR lighting within the structures. They will receive a treatment appropriate to their location at the 'gateway' to the CNP using natural stone on the splayed wing walls and entranceway.</p> <p>Embedded Mitigation:</p> <p>Rock cuts will be created in formations which are varied and reflect the structure of the rock [P11-LV8];</p> <p>Natural stone treatment will be incorporated to the underpasses at Slochd [P11-LV11]; and</p> <p>Luminaires will be selected to avoid upward glare [P11-LV25].</p> <p>Mitigation:</p> <p>Enhance natural regeneration of plant establishment in rock cut locations [P11-LV21]; and</p> <p>Planting to reflect local landscape character and to soften structures [P11-LV18].</p>	<p>The SLQ will undergo change at this location.</p> <p>The main change will be to the rock cuts. This is considered to provide an opportunity to enhance the existing rock cut at Slochd Summit and remove the existing mesh as well as improving the mesh cover on the iconic 'pinnacle' rock plug. All rock cuts will seek to retain or enhance the sense of drama currently a SLQ associated with Slochd.</p>

SLQ underpinned by Key Characteristics of the LCA (representative)	SLQ with focus on root perceptual qualities (more-than representative)	Assessment incl. mitigation (codes from Ch.21: Schedule of Commitments)	Significant Change to SLQ
<p>The relevant potential impact for the small part of this LCA located at the Slochd Summit is changes to the rock cuts. This is considered to provide an opportunity to enhance the existing rock cut at Slochd Summit and remove the existing mesh. All rock cuts will seek to retain or enhance the sense of drama.</p> <p>Drynachan, Lochindorb and Dava Moors SLA: The key characteristics of the SLA are high rolling moorland with gentle gradients; valued heather moorland; homogenous character; sense of speciousness and tranquillity reinforced by wide views and a sparse human presence; and isolated fragments of native pine-birch woodland emphasis the dominance of the horizontal dimension and generally unbroken skyline. The proposed scheme will not impact on these qualities due to the location and geographic extent of the SLA.</p>			
<p>Southern Uplands LCA</p>			
<p>As the SLQs have been defined for the CNP, and the Southern Uplands LCA lies outwith the CNP, SLQs are not available for the Southern Uplands LCA. The relevant potential impact for the small part of this LCA located at the Slochd Summit is changes to the rock cuts. This is considered to provide an opportunity to enhance the existing rock cut at Slochd Summit and remove the existing mesh. All rock cuts will seek to retain or enhance the sense of drama.</p>			

ⁱ Scottish Natural Heritage (2010). The Special Qualities of the Cairngorms National Park. Cairngorm National Park Commissioned Report No. 375.

ⁱⁱ Cairngorms National Park Authority (2015). Cairngorms Landscape Toolkit.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cairngorms National Park Authority (2009). Cairngorm Landscape Character Assessment.