

Appendix 13.3

Landscape Objectives

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1 Introduction

1.1 General

1.1.1 The Proposed Scheme presents landscape opportunities to contribute to the environmental value of the existing A9 road corridor in order to deliver a high quality integrated, biodiverse, adaptable and sustainable transport corridor.

1.2 Fitting Landscapes

1.2.1 At the broadest level, these landscape opportunities have been identified with a view to meeting the four key aims of Fitting Landscapes: Securing more Sustainable Landscapes policy (Transport Scotland, 2014), which are to:

- ensure high quality of design and place
- enhance and protect natural heritage
- use resources wisely
- build in adaptability to change

1.2.2 The vision of the Fitting Landscapes policy is to:
“promote the more sustainable design, implementation, maintenance and management of the transport estate and ensure that the landscapes that are created and managed are of a high quality, well integrated, biodiverse and adaptable, and deliver a meaningful contribution to national sustainability targets”.

1.2.3 In addition to meeting the above four key aims, the policy requires Landscape Objectives to be set to inform the planning, design, implementation and management of new transport infrastructure.

1.2.4 Project-specific Landscape Objectives have been developed in accordance with the policy to help achieve the above four key aims. The process of setting the objectives has been informed through engagement with statutory consultees; review of findings from the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process including the Strategic Environmental Design Principles, and collaborative design working of the landscape architects with engineers and other technical and design disciplines such as ecology, cultural heritage, noise, hydrology, land use, community and private assets and architecture.

1.2.5 The A9 Dualling Programme Environmental Design Guide - Landscape Character Area Guidance (CH2MHill for Transport Scotland, 2015) is an internal document developed to support consistency across the various A9 dualling projects. The Design Guide includes ‘key landscape objectives’ for each of the Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) within which the Proposed Scheme is located. Along with the A9 Dualling Programme SEA Strategic Environmental Design Principles, these have been used to inform the project-specific Landscape Objectives.

2 Landscape Character Objectives

2.1 General

2.1.1 A Strategic Landscape Review was undertaken, and through this process, objectives were identified for each of the CNPA Landscape Character Areas. These objectives were assessed against the scheme options at DMRB Stage 2. Within this appendix, these objectives are assessed against the DMRB Stage 3 Proposed Scheme. **Drawing 13.3 in Volume 3** shows the LCA's to which the text refers.

2.1.2 The scale of the landscape is vast, and the Proposed Scheme is small in comparison. Although all effects will be contained within the existing infrastructure corridor, they will be direct effects, but due to the open nature of the study area, wider indirect impacts are likely to affect local landscape character area and visual amenity. The 'A9 Dualling SEA Strategic Landscape Review' 2014, has set out guidance for each LCA. The assessment below reviews the potential effects on the key features of this character area and how the Proposed Scheme responds to the key objectives established for this area.

2.2 Glen Truim LCA

2.2.1 The section of Glen Truim LCA which is covered in the P9 study area is from ch. 40,000 – approximately ch. 40,600. This section has dense mixed woodland along the roadside, with rising topography to the east creating an enclosed feel. The proposals will mainly affect the eastern side of the road, where embankments will be created approximately 125m along this entire stretch. Smaller embankments will be created at two points along the west side of the A9, however they will not stretch as far as the adjacent NCN7 route.

Assessment against LCA Key landscape objectives

2.2.2 The proposed scheme is assessed below against LCA objectives established via the Dualling Programme Strategic Landscape Review.

Utilise the limited palette of existing trees and retain mixed woodland character.

2.2.3 Pine and birch plantation would fit in with the existing tree palette.

Retain mixed woodland character

2.2.4 The section of this LCA which is covered in the Proposed Scheme study area is relatively small, but has some mixed tree cover adjacent to the east of the proposed mainline which will be affected by the embankments.

Reinforce pinch-point character with planting where possible.

2.2.5 Widening of the road may reduce the pinch-point character; however, planting on the proposed embankments will reinforce this.

Retain and enhance views of the hillsides such as Cruben Beag

2.2.6 The section of this LCA which is covered in the Proposed Scheme study area is relatively small. Therefore, any changes towards hillside views will be minor. On the west side of the mainline the proposals will consist of small embankments which are unlikely to affect views towards Cruben Beag.

2.3 Badenoch: Upper Strath LCA

- 2.3.1 This LCA lies between chainages 40,600 and 45,000. To the south the A9 is surrounded by dense coniferous and birch trees giving a well wooded and enclosed character. The surrounding terrain is rolling with some exposed rock in parts. The proposals affect both sides of the mainline with new SuDS basins and two road junctions. Earthworks will take place mainly on the east side of the mainline with associated tree loss.

Assessment against Key Landscape Objectives

- 2.3.2 The proposed scheme is assessed below against LCA objectives established via the Dualling Programme Strategic Landscape Review.

Utilise the limited palette of existing trees near the road to reinforce the sense of enclosure.

- 2.3.3 The existing trees will be affected by the proposed scheme in several locations, notably at the proposed junctions. Birch woodland will be lost for the construction of the Ralia junction at approx. ch. 41,600, and mixed woodland will be lost for the construction of the Newtonmore junction at approx. ch. 43,400. Tree planting which is lost as part of the proposed scheme will be replaced in suitable areas and will reinforce the sense of enclosure.

Improve screening by mimicking hummocky terrain.

- 2.3.4 Planting on the proposed embankments to the east of the mainline will reinforce the enclosed terrain and reinforce screening from the road.

Retain and enhance semi natural birch dominated woodland character. Reinforce transition between enclosed character with planting where possible.

- 2.3.5 Several areas of woodland will be lost along the east side of the mainline, as well as a large area of birch woodland which will be lost for the construction of the Ralia junction. Existing areas with tree planting that are to be removed as part of the scheme will be mitigated with replacement planting.

Consider opening views of the key landscape features within this section where practicable.

- 2.3.6 The existing mainline is relatively enclosed with limited views. However, there are some views to the west beyond the trees lining the road of upland mountains including Creag Dhubh (approx. ch. 42,400). Views to these mountains should be maintained where possible.

2.4 Badenoch: Newtonmore to Kingussie LCA

- 2.4.1 This LCA begins at approximate ch. 45,000 and extends to approximate ch. 50,200. The south of the LCA is enclosed by birch woodland and opens at approximate ch. 45,600 to a more exposed, rolling terrain. The LCA will be affected by new SuDS basins and a combination of large and small-scale earthworks.

Assessment against Key Landscape Objectives

- 2.4.2 The proposed scheme is assessed below against LCA objectives established via the Dualling Programme Strategic Landscape Review.

Ensure any new alignment fits with the dramatic local landscape form between road and embankment

- 2.4.3 The proposed scheme involves widening of the existing A9 to the east. The proposed road follows the sweeping curves of the existing road and therefore fits with the local landscape reasonably well.

Utilise the limited palette of existing trees near the road to reinforce the sense of enclosure looking to create a semi-natural woodland where practicable. Improve screening by mimicking hummocky terrain. Retain and enhance semi natural birch dominated woodland character.

- 2.4.4 The south and north of the LCA have some enclosure due to mixed tree cover and hummocky terrain. Planting of pine and birch trees species would fit in with the existing tree palette.

Open views of the key landscape features where practicable

- 2.4.5 The middle section of the LCA (approx. ch. 45,800 to 46,400) is open in character and views to mountain ranges to the east and west are visible and should be maintained where possible.

2.5 Badenoch: Insh Marshes LCA

- 2.5.1 This LCA begins at approximate ch. 49,200 and covers the remainder of the Proposed Scheme to the north. The LCA It expands on the east side of the mainline. 'Within this LCA, the southern part of the new (southbound) A9 carriageway will be constructed to the east of the existing road; from chainage 51,600, the new (northbound) carriageway will be located either to the west side of the existing carriageway or roughly centred on it. The section around Ruthven Barracks, the Insh Marshes SSSI and Spey Bridge (from approximately chainage 49,200 to chainage 50,000) is a key section of the proposals which involves the construction of new embankments, SuDS basins and an Enhanced Lay-by overlooking Ruthven Barracks and Insh Marshes.

Assessment against Key Landscape Objectives

- 2.5.2 The proposed scheme is assessed below against LCA objectives established via the Dualling Programme Strategic Landscape Review.

Ensure any new alignment fits with the dramatic local landscape form within the context of the River Spey floodplain

- 2.5.3 The proposed scheme involves widening of the existing A9 to the west. The proposed road follows the sweeping curves of the existing road and therefore fits with the local landscape reasonably well.

Minimising of infrastructure

- 2.5.4 The earthworks to the east of the road which fall in the LCA consist of small sections of cutting and are small scale compared to elsewhere in the proposed scheme. Four new SuDS basins are proposed as well as the expansion of the Spey Crossing. Permanent SuDS features, the Spey Crossing and earthworks will be designed with suitable planting mitigation to ensure that they tie in to the surrounding landform as naturally as possible.

Integrate any new tree planting with existing tree belts, the modification and enhancement of the existing tree belts with broadleaf planting should be considered

- 2.5.5 Integrating new tree planting with existing tree belts will maintain the predominantly open character of the landscape and enhance existing tree belts.

Enjoyment of the spectacular views should be facilitated

- 2.5.6 The proposed scheme includes Enhanced Lay-by's that will further enable the enjoyment of key views. The proposed Insh Marshes Southbound Lay-by (ch. 55,850) is positioned to allow users to

enjoy extensive views eastwards over the River Spey floodplain. The Ruthven Southbound Lay-By (approx. ch. 49,400) will facilitate views over Ruthven Barracks.

3 Landscape Objectives for Project 9

3.1 Landscape Character Objectives

3.1.1 Based on the above assessment, the Landscape Objectives for the Proposed Scheme are as follows. Reference to specific LLCAs is made where relevant.

- Design the alignment of proposed infrastructure and SuDS features to fit the dramatic landscape
- Minimise infrastructure and integrate appropriate screening to conceal views of the A9, particularly from Newtonmore, Kingussie and Lynchat
- Introduce new tree planting to mitigate effects of infrastructure and compensate for tree loss
- Encourage enjoyment of the spectacular views, particularly over Insh Marshes and Creag Dhubh
- Retain and enhance access to and appreciation of the landscape and cultural heritage assets

4 Application of Landscape Objectives

4.1 General

4.1.1 The Landscape Objectives are intended to guide the planning, design, implementation and management of the Proposed Scheme. It is recognised that they will not always be fully achievable. A range of factors need to be taken into account, including engineering feasibility; road safety; effects on landowners; and constrained locations where effects on multiple environmental sensitivities need to be balanced and the optimum solution may be a compromise.

4.1.2 Details on how the Landscape Objectives set out in Section 3 above would be tailored to the receiving landscape are outlined below:

Design the alignment of proposed infrastructure and SuDS features to fit the dramatic landscape

- project-wide, through tracking the horizontal and vertical alignment close to the existing route that successfully fits with the landscape
- project-wide, through profiling slopes to avoid uniform and excessively steep gradients where possible, and to grade the tops and toes of slopes to integrate with adjacent ground by rounding/ slackening of cutting slopes to ‘feather’ into the adjoining landform, whilst taking advantage of the screening they provide
- through areas of cut, planting wet/dry heath to retain characteristic areas of exposure; allow additional natural regeneration of plants among areas of cut

- through careful consideration of planting and screening to merge earthworks with the surrounding landscape
- through considering the aesthetic design of the safety parapet, barrier, terracing and retaining walls throughout the Proposed Scheme, by use of natural stone facing, subject to Transport Scotland (TRBO) approval and appropriate placement of native planting
- through designing SuDS features to merge into the surrounding landform with shapes that reflect local natural landscape characteristics, such as ox-bow lakes; profiling slopes to be non-uniform and with slackened gradients; incorporating natural rockwork into outfall design; and planting to mimic adjacent bog or heath
- through following landform-sensitive earthwork and embankment design principles project-wide, merging new slopes with existing landform and infrastructure with gentle, non-angular gradients in all LLCA's
- through integration of underbridges and access roads with surrounding to minimise their effects
- through modelling earthworks around the Spey Crossing and access roads to appear natural and fitting

Minimise infrastructure and integrate appropriate screening to conceal views of the A9 from Newtonmore, Kingussie and Lynchat

- through keeping the dualling of the A9 on-line and within a narrow corridor that contains other existing infrastructure including the HML railway, thus minimising wider cumulative effects
- through use of underbridges and avoidance of over bridges and junctions where possible
- through constraining the footprint of the Proposed Scheme restricting extent of infrastructure and minimising wider effects
- through the rationalisation of road signs to a necessary minimum and removal of street furniture clutter
- through planting embankments to screen views of the A9 from Newtonmore and Kingussie, or of A9 from core paths, whilst maintaining the open aspect to the west
- through minimising the effects on the HML railway with planting to new earthworks to respond to each LLCA as appropriate
- through sensitive design of a Type A Lay-by at Ruthven and Insh Marshes southbound and replacement of Ruthven northbound Type A extended Lay-bys, using a palette of materials consistent and complementary to the landscape, without 'hiding' new structures and features, allowing viewing and access to the countryside on safe, 'Access for All' compliant paths and other facilities and features that will be subject to Transport Scotland (TRBO) approval
- through reinforcing open character by appropriate consideration of placement of proposed native planting in relation to views from the road and LLCA characteristics

Introduce new tree planting to mitigate effects of infrastructure and compensate for tree loss

- through additional mitigation planting to replace that lost to the earthworks and integration of them into the landscape, including native seeding, scrub and trees
- through use of new screening planting, particularly on the east (southbound) side, to screen the A9
- through use of new screening to mitigate the impact of infrastructure throughout the Proposed Scheme particularly near settlements and designated heritage sites, where appropriate
- through reinstating regenerating and mature woodland to both sides of the A9 that fall within the Proposed Scheme to maintain the existing character and visual containment
- through augmenting existing planted barrier/ woodland edge with native woodland species and shrubs where edge planting is removed, exposing unsightly lower bare branches of the inner trees to re-establish the natural woodland edge and minimise risk of wind throw
- through including native broadleaf trees to diversify tree species

Encourage enjoyment of the spectacular views, particularly over Insh Marshes and Creag Dhubh

- by providing opportunities to facilitate access to scenic views where practicable project-wide, such as at Type A Lay-bys, and access to parking areas and paths via junctions at Ralia and Kingussie
- through reinforcing open character through appropriate consideration of placement of proposed native planting
- through enabling enjoyment of the landscape and views of Insh Marshes and wider strath by providing Lay-by's at suitable viewing locations

Retain and enhance access to and appreciation of the landscape and cultural heritage assets

- through access via links to the NCN7 from suitable Lay-by locations to enable better enjoyment of the spectacular views and by improved NMU connections through the junction at Ralia and Kingussie supporting recreational access into the wider area
- through areas of existing NMU provision that are to be reinstated or upgraded through rationalised underpass crossings, increasing safety for NMUs and retaining access from the A9 into the surrounding area
- through retaining cultural heritage assets and their setting in the landscape, where possible, through carefully considered design, including for effects on the non-designated landscape gardens of Balavil and the settings of SAMs at Ruthven Barracks and Raitt's Cave (ref **HLT5 Chapter 15 Cultural Heritage, Volume 1**); including integration visual screening bunds into the existing landscape

