

# Appendix 13.4

## Cairngorms National Park Special Landscape Qualities Assessment

## Contents

<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Assessment of Impacts on the Special Landscape Qualities of the Cairngorms National Park</b>	<b>2</b>

## Tables

Table 2-1: CNPA SLQ Assessment for Project 9	3
--	---

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This appendix provides an assessment of the effects of the Proposed Scheme upon the Special Landscape Qualities (SLQs) of the Cairngorms National Park (CNP) and has informed the development of appropriate mitigation proposals during Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment at DMRB Stage 3.
- 1.1.2 The SLQs are set out in Cairngorms National Park Commissioned Report No. 375 'The Special Qualities of the Cairngorms National Park' (Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), 2010) and are presented as a list of *'the characteristics that, individually or combined, give rise to an area's outstanding scenery'*. Specifically, the SLQs are about the experience of the landscape and the response that a landscape tends to evoke in people.
- 1.1.3 The assessment has been informed by the *'Cairngorms Landscape Toolkit'* (Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA), 2015), which is a resource to help developers assess the sensitivity of landscape character to development, and contains guidance, descriptions and maps of the characteristics and sensitivity of each of the SLQs within defined CNP Landscape Character Areas (LCAs).
- 1.1.4 The assessment has focused principally on the SLQs relevant to each Local Landscape Character Area (LLCA) that would be impacted upon by the Proposed Scheme. While introducing a more detailed assessment, the LLCAs largely correspond with the LCAs identified in the Cairngorms Landscape Character Assessment and comprise, as illustrated by **Drawing 13.3** and **Drawing 13.4** of **Volume 3** of this report. The LLCs's are:
- Loch Etteridge
  - Ralia
  - Newtonmore
  - Cairn/ Nuide
  - Kingussie
  - Lynchat and Balavil Woodland
  - Insh Marshes
  - Dunachtonmore
  - Upper Strath
  - Insh Marshes Woodland
- 1.1.5 The Proposed Scheme lies entirely within the CNP. The SLQs that may be affected by the Proposed Scheme are highlighted in **bold** below.

#### General Qualities

- **Magnificent mountains towering over moorland, forest and strath**
- **Vastness of space, scale and height**
- **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**

#### Trees, Woods and Forests

- **Dark and venerable pine forest**
- **Light and airy birch woods**
- **Parkland and policy woodlands**
- Long association with forestry

#### Moorlands

- **Extensive moorland, linking the farmland, woodland and the high tops**
- A patchwork of muirburn

#### The Mountains and Plateaux

- The unifying presence of the central mountains
- An imposing massif of strong dramatic character
- The unique plateaux of vast scale, distinctive landforms and exposed, boulder strewn high ground
- **The surrounding hills**
- The drama of deep corries
- **Exceptional glacial landforms**
- **Snowscapes**

#### Wildlife and Nature

- **Dominance of natural landforms**
- **Extensive tracts of natural vegetation**
- **Association with iconic animals**
- Wild land
- **Wildness**

#### Glens and Straths

- Steep glens and high passes
- **Broad, farmed straths**
- **Renowned rivers**
- **Beautiful lochs**

#### Visual and Sensory Qualities

- **Layers of receding ridge lines**
- **Grand panoramas and framed views**
- **A landscape of many colours**
- **Dark skies**
- **Attractive and contrasting textures**
- The dominance of natural sounds

#### Culture and History

- **Distinctive planned towns**
- **Vernacular stone buildings**
- **Dramatic, historical routes**
- The wistfulness of abandoned settlements
- **Focal cultural landmarks of castles, distilleries and bridges**
- The Royal Connection

#### Recreation

- **A landscape of opportunities**
- **Spirituality**

1.1.6 It is rarely the case that only one SLQ is experienced or that one SLQ dominates all others, and so relevant SLQs that tend to be experienced together have been grouped together, for the purposes of the assessment.

1.1.7 Within those LLCAs that would not be directly impacted by the Proposed Scheme, relevant SLQs still form a part in its experience and perception. For example, the “*Magnificent mountains towering over forest and strath*”; despite the mountain ridges being some distance from the Proposed Scheme, they may still ‘dominate’ distant views, and accordingly these SLQs have also been considered.

## 2 Assessment of Impacts on the Special Landscape Qualities of the Cairngorms National Park

2.1.1 For the assessment, the SLQs identified above (in bold) have been assessed in **Table 2.1** against the Proposed Scheme. Within each SLQs item, the LCAs and LLCAs that demonstrate these qualities have been identified. Locations where the landscape characteristics underpinning these SLQs have been identified and assessed, mitigation measures which are proposed are outlined, and an assessment has been made as to whether these effects would present a risk to the defining qualities of the SLQs.

Table 2-1: CNPA SLQ Assessment for Project 9

Relevant and related SLQs	SLQ narrative – locations, underpinning landscape characteristics and their experience	Effects of the new A9 on these SLQs and potential to mitigate	Is there a risk of loss or damage to SLQs?
<b>General Qualities</b>			
Magnificent mountains towering over moorland, forest and strath	The mountains of the Monadhliath and Cairngorms rise up to east and west of the study area, forming a backdrop on the horizon. Creag Dhubh is one of Scotland’s most impressive roadside crags. The slopes form a well-defined closure to the Badenoch: Upper Strath LCA and Ralia LLCA.	The views of the hills and mountains towering over the landscape will not be affected by the proposals.	No –the proposals are very small compared the scale of the landscape
Vastness of space, scale and height	The vastness of the landscape is particularly apparent in Cairn/Nuide LLCA where there is an open and undulating character. The views of Insh Marshes are also expansive due to the flat nature. This is of particular relevance to LCAs Badenoch: Newtonmore to Kingussie, Badenoch: Insh Marshes and LCAs Cairn/ Nuide and Insh Marshes.	The experience of the scale and grandeur of the hills will not be affected by the proposals.	No
Strong juxtaposition of contrasting landscapes	The landscape immediately south of Ralia LLCA is relatively uniform (outside of the study area); however, within the study area contains a range of characteristics that contrast strongly. A complex mosaic of regenerating woodland, forestry, open moorland, river valley and townships and marshland in the strath floor are juxtaposed with heather moorland of the adjoining slopes. This is of relevance to all LCAs and LLCAs.	The line of the road on the junction of these currently emphasises the juxtaposition. The dualling may dilute the transition slightly. However, careful design of the roadside planting should enable the juxtaposition to be reinforced.	No
A landscape of layers, from inhabited strath to remote, uninhabited upland	The Proposed Scheme is set within a settled landscape that includes Newtonmore, Kingussie, and to a lesser extent, Lynchat, and scattered farmsteads along with Balavil Mains, the ruins of Ruthven Barracks. These towns, villages and buildings provide a settled appearance to much of the route in the project area, linked by the A9, minor roads, the River Spey and the Highland Main Line (HML) railway. All are set within a broad landscape of rolling hills that give way to marsh and pasture, and to the surrounding mountains beyond (particularly Creag Dhubh). This is of relevance to all LCAs and LLCAs.	The dualling will not impact on the perception of the landscape layers. Interpretation could increase awareness of the continuous use of this route through time.	No
‘The harmony of complicated curves’	The rolling hill slopes, hummocky terrains and meandering river create curves within the landscape. This is of relevance to all LCAs and LLCAs.	The existing road curves gently through this section, following the path of the Spey River and route of the HML railway. The dualling will mirror these curves, which fit well with the landscape.	No
Landscapes both cultural and natural	The towns of Newtonmore and Kingussie and monuments and commercial industry (including Ruthven Barracks and Highland Wildlife Park) create a cultural landscape at various points along the route. This is of relevance to all the LCAs and LLCAs.	The Proposed Scheme will reinforce the cultural element due to greater presence of infrastructure, but this will be minimal in comparison the domination of natural wild landscapes. Proposed lay-bys will encourage the continued enjoyment of the surrounding landscape.	No

Relevant and related SLQs	SLQ narrative – locations, underpinning landscape characteristics and their experience	Effects of the new A9 on these SLQs and potential to mitigate	Is there a risk of loss or damage to SLQs?
<b>The Mountains and Plateaux</b>			
The surrounding hills	The mountains of the Monadhliath and Cairngorms rise up to east and west of the study area, forming a backdrop on the horizon, including the impressive Creag. The slopes form a well-defined closure to the Badenoch: Upper Strath LCA and Ralia LLCA.	The surrounding hills will not be affected by the proposals.	No
Exceptional glacial landform	The whole Proposed Scheme area lies within a heavily glaciated landscape, formed by high crags bordering the broad strath floor. Moraines and drumlins form undulating hillocks and the erosion of the broader landform has resulted in the presence of rolling ridges and terraces throughout the area,	The glacial features will not be directly affected by the dualling. It is likely that new views of the glacial features will be opened up.	No
Snowscapes	There is often snow lying on the surrounding hills, particularly Creag Dhubh, which impose dramatically on the views from within the Spey valley. It accentuates the harsh wildness of the landscape. This is of particular relevance to Badenoch: Upper Strath LCA, and the Ralia and Cairn/ Nuide LLCAs.	The snowscapes will not be affected by the proposals.	No
<b>Moorlands</b>			
Extensive moorland, linking the farmland, woodland and the high tops	The Drumochter Pass LCA is almost entirely moorland. The wide areas of heather and distant views of hill tops are characteristic of this landscape. This is of relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA.	The loss of land to the dualling is almost infinitely small compared to the vastness of the extensive surrounding moorland.	No
<b>Glens and Straths</b>			
Broad, farmed straths	The Proposed Scheme is set within the broadening River Spey strath, which opens out from the Newtonmore LLCA, through Cairn/ Nuide, Kingussie and Insh Marshes, Lynchat and Balavil LLCA, although the latter rises up to the north west,	The relationship of the road to the landscape and specifically the 'host' and contiguous LCAs/ LLCAs will not be affected by this section of dualling in the broad sense. The realignment and extension of River Spey crossing will locally cause effects within Insh Marsh LLCA, although these will be off-set against the existing road and structure, reducing their impacts in relative terms.	No
Renowned rivers	The River Truim meets the River Spey in Ralia LLCA. Both rivers have a meandering form and attractive qualities. The River Spey runs throughout Project 9 and lies to the west of the A9 until it crosses to be on the eastern side in the Insh Marshes LLCA. This is of relevance to the whole extent of Project 9.	The dualling will not affect the loch directly, however ensuring that travellers can admire the view is complicated by the proposal to create a junction in this location. It is proposed that a viewing area is constructed as part of the northbound layby immediately to the north of the junction.	No
Beautiful lochs	There are several lochans within Project 9, including Lochan an Tairbh which is of regional importance. This is of relevance to Badenoch: Newtonmore to Kingussie and Badenoch: Insh Marshes LCAs.	The Proposed Scheme will cause little or no effect on the existing lochans.	No

Relevant and related SLQs	SLQ narrative – locations, underpinning landscape characteristics and their experience	Effects of the new A9 on these SLQs and potential to mitigate	Is there a risk of loss or damage to SLQs?
<b>Wildlife and Nature</b>			
Dominance of natural forms	<p>This area typifies the CNP special quality – where “natural landforms dominate the scene with any human modification incidental...”</p> <p>The Insh Marshes LLCA which comprises extensive wetland, marsh and occasional pools, reeds, wetland vegetation and occasional shrub, with expanses of semi natural woodland around the edges.</p> <p>Rolling moorland and rounded hills are in general key features of the Project 9 landscape. This is of particular relevance to the Badenoch: Newtonmore to Kingussie and Badenoch: Insh Marshes LCAs and Cairn/Nuide, Insh Marshes, Lynchat and Balavil Woodland, Insh Marshes Woodland and Upper Strath LLCAs.</p>	<p>The dualling is “incidental” to the existing landscape character</p> <p>However, on a small scale, there is a risk of introducing, landforms that are not natural in appearance through the creation of geometrically engineered embankments and cuttings.</p> <p>It is important that the earthworks associated with the road are naturalistic in form and blend into the landscape wherever possible.</p>	No
Extensive tracts of natural vegetation	<p>The extensive heather and Molinia in this area is maintained by grazing and burning and there is an argument that the landscape character should evolve to be more natural and diverse with increased woodland.</p> <p>This is of relevance to the whole extent of Project 9.</p>	<p>The vegetation loss associated with the dualling will be quite extensive in Ralia, Lynchat and Balavil and Dunachtonmore LLCA’s.</p> <p>The design of the new roadside vegetation largely replaces the existing vegetation on a like for like basis.</p> <p>An opportunity does exist to enhance the existing character and increase the area of scrub/ woodland in selective locations.</p>	No
<b>Trees, Woods and Forests</b>			
Light and airy birch woods	<p>There are several pockets of birch woodland throughout Project 9. Dense birch woodland is particularly prominent in the landscape surrounding Ralia Café.</p> <p>This is of relevance to Badenoch: Upper Strath and Badenoch: Newtonmore to Kingussie LCAs.</p>	<p>The design of the new road-side vegetation largely replaces the existing vegetation on a like for like basis.</p> <p>An opportunity does exist to replace the area of woodland in selective locations.</p>	No
Parkland and policy woodlands	<p>There are several areas of ancient woodland within the study area, with long established woodland to the west of Kingussie.</p> <p>Balavil Woodland is an area of dense, coniferous trees. The adjacent woodland (Cragbui Wood) is sparser in character and is the largest area of ancient woodland in Project 9.</p> <p>The Woods of Glentruim in Loch Etteridge LLCA is the dominant area of woodland in the southern section if Project 9.</p> <p>This is of relevance to Loch Etteridge, Lynchat and Balavil Woodland and Insh Marshes Woodland LLCAs.</p>	<p>Balavil Mains will be an area of particular focus because the new road alignment will result in potentially substantial effects due to removal of earthworks and screen roadside trees.</p> <p>The design of the new roadside earthworks and vegetation largely replaces the existing vegetation on a like for like basis.</p> <p>An opportunity does exist to replicate the existing landform and character and replace the area of woodland in selective locations.</p>	No

Relevant and related SLQs	SLQ narrative – locations, underpinning landscape characteristics and their experience	Effects of the new A9 on these SLQs and potential to mitigate	Is there a risk of loss or damage to SLQs?
Association with iconic animals	<p>Golden eagle, osprey, red grouse, wildcat, red deer and salmon are potentially present in this section.</p> <p>This is of relevance to the whole extent of Project 9 and all LCAs and LLCAs.</p>	<p>Limited impact on the key species.</p> <p>Golden eagle: this is a qualifying species of Cairngorms SPA/ Cairngorms Massif SPA, but not in in this area, so no direct disturbance and unlikely to affect feeding behaviour/ prey species.</p> <p>Osprey: as above for golden eagle, not likely to cause direct disturbance or affect feeding behaviour/ prey species.</p> <p>Red grouse: area around Project 9 contains numerous grouse butts, so A9 construction could cause minor local disturbance.</p> <p>Wildcat: unlikely to cause significant disturbance/ loss of habitat as suitable habitat is limited in this section.</p> <p>Red deer: possibility of minor impact on deer, if not provided for, the works could simply increase barriers to migration across the route – however, with suitable design mitigation, there could be improved permeability.</p> <p>Salmon: likely to be limited impact overall, key issues are protection of spawning/ juvenile habitats, noise control during up/ downstream migration periods, and construction/ operational water quality controls at the Spey Crossing.</p>	No
Wildness	<p>The Proposed Scheme is outside the two SNH areas of Wild Land which border Project 9. The study area has, however, a very wild character in places and can feel remote even though the land is actively managed. For example, the steep sided rocky embankments in the central section of the Badenoch: Newtonmore to Kingussie LCA provoke a feeling of wildness.</p> <p>This is of relevance to all LCAs except Newtonmore and Kingussie which are built up in character.</p>	<p>The design of the new road-side earthworks largely regrade slopes to replicate the appearance of the existing ones, and to extend existing vegetation to either compensate or replace that lost to the scheme on a like for like basis.</p> <p>An opportunity does exist to replicate the existing landform and character and replace the area of woodland in selective locations, recreating or maintain the current sense of wildness.</p>	No



Relevant and related SLQs	SLQ narrative – locations, underpinning landscape characteristics and their experience	Effects of the new A9 on these SLQs and potential to mitigate	Is there a risk of loss or damage to SLQs?
<b>Visual and Sensory Qualities</b>			
Layers of receding ridge lines	The surrounding hills provide an impression of ever-receding ridges extending beyond the horizon, particularly to the south within Ralia and Cairn/ Nuide LLCAs.	The Proposed Scheme will cause little or no effect on the existing vistas of receding ridgelines.	No
Grand panoramas and framed views	The main views from the road in this section are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creag Dhubh</li> <li>• Insh Marshes</li> <li>• Ruthven Barracks</li> </ul>	These views will not be negatively affected by the dualling proposals. It is intended that enjoyment of the scenery should be facilitated and the views protected wherever possible.	No
A landscape of many colours	The seasonal variation and diversity of colours is a key feature, particularly from dry heath and heather. This should be celebrated and enhanced. This is of relevance to all LCAs and LLCAs.	The local palette of colours should not be affected by the dualling. Roadside vegetation will match that of the wider landscape throughout the Proposed Scheme. Whilst some highly visible safety features will be installed as part of the dualling, these will replace those that are part of the existing road.	No
Dark skies	The absence of habitation and street lights in this section allows the night sky to be appreciated. This is of relevance to the extent of Project 9 and all LCAs and LLCAs, although perhaps less so in Newtonmore and Kingussie due to their built-up nature.	The Proposed Scheme does not include lighting that would compromise the dark skies policies.	No
Attractive and contrasting textures	The landscape experience of traveling along the A9 from south to north has regular contrasts in texture. The enclosure of Loch Etteridge LLCA contrasts with the open, rolling nature of Cairn/Nuide LLCA. Insh Marshes provides another texture, further adding to the variety along the route. This is of relevance to the extent of Project 9 and all LCAs and LLCAs.	It is not anticipated that the dualling here will affect the range of landscape textures.	No
<b>Culture and History</b>			
Vernacular stone buildings	There are some attractive vernacular stone buildings in the towns and villages within Project 9, notably Newtonmore, Kingussie and Lynchat. This is of particular relevance to Newtonmore, Kingussie and Badenoch: Insh Marshes LCA and Newtonmore, Kingussie and Lynchat and Balavil Woodland LLCAs.	It is not anticipated that the dualling here will affect any vernacular stone buildings.	No
Dramatic, historical routes	The A9 follows the railway line, diverging slightly around Newtonmore and Kingussie. The 18 <sup>th</sup> Century General Wade’s Military Road is present along the A9, crossing it in places. This is of particular relevance to all LCAs and LLCAs.	It is not anticipated that the dualling here will affect historical routes; linking paths constructed at a select number of lay-bys may enhance appreciation of and access to the GWMR.	No
Focal cultural landmarks of castles, distilleries and bridges	Ruthven Barracks is a key feature and the landscape offers clear views due to the flat surrounding land. The River Spey Bridge is also a key landmark. This is of particular relevance to the Badenoch: Insh Marshes LCA and Insh Marshes LLCA.	There will be a direct impact on the Spey Bridge and an indirect impact on Ruthven Barracks. New lay-bys will better facilitate views of Ruthven Barracks from the road.	No

Relevant and related SLQs	SLQ narrative – locations, underpinning landscape characteristics and their experience	Effects of the new A9 on these SLQs and potential to mitigate	Is there a risk of loss or damage to SLQs?
<b>Recreation</b>			
A landscape of opportunities	The moorland here is an attractive hill walking destination and provides opportunities for the traditional sporting pursuits of deer-stalking and grouse shooting.	<p>The road widening will have little direct impact on recreational opportunities.</p> <p>It is proposed that stopping places will be positioned to facilitate access to key hill walking routes and link to NMU routes generally.</p> <p>The “simple enjoyment of scenery” will be facilitated by the creation of new safe stopping places.</p>	No
Spirituality	<p>The Special Quality associates spirituality with peace, escape and solitude. It is clear that this landscape can elicit strong emotional responses. The expansive open views can create feelings of exposure and vulnerability. This is particularly relevant to all LCAs, though to a lesser extent in Newtonmore, Kingussie and Badenoch: Upper Strath due to their more built-up nature.</p>	<p>The road allows access to, and escape from, this dramatic sublime landscape and permits an engagement with the landscape.</p> <p>The Proposed Scheme is very unlikely to impact on those areas of the park that currently facilitate peace, escape and solitude.</p> <p>The Proposed Scheme, whilst disruptive in the short term, will facilitate easier travelling.</p> <p>By taking away the worries and tensions associated with travelling the current road with limited overtaking opportunities, the dualling will allow a greater receptiveness to the qualities of the landscape and so potentially produce an increased emotional response. However, it is uncertain whether this would have a direct relevance to an individuals' spiritual experience.</p>	No