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assessment**

Caroline Stanton

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landscape character assessment



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Preface

This report forms part of the National Programme of Landscape Character Assessment, which is being carried out by Scottish Natural Heritage, in partnership with local authorities and other agencies.

The National Programme aims to improve our knowledge and understanding of the contribution that landscape makes to the natural heritage of Scotland.

This study was commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage and provides a detailed assessment of the landscape of Caithness & Sutherland. It considers the likely pressures and opportunities for change in the landscape, assesses the sensitivity of the landscape to change and includes guidelines indicating how landscape character may be conserved, enhanced or restructured as appropriate.

The report will be of interest to all those concerned with land management and landscape change. More specifically, it is intended to provide the landscape context for SNH staff responding to planning and land use related casework. SNH also hopes that the information it contains will be of use to Highland Council in the production of its local and structure plans.

The views contained within this report represent those of the consultant - Caroline Stanton - and do not necessarily reflect the policies and views of the sponsors.

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CAITHNESS AND SUTHERLAND LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Caithness and Sutherland covers the north of the Scottish Highlands, encompassing an area of 7600 km² with a population of almost 40,000.

The following questions examine the aim and contents of the Caithness and Sutherland landscape character assessment.

Why is this study taking place?

To provide information on the character of the landscape, as part of a national programme run by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

...and why in Caithness and Sutherland?

To enable a greater understanding of the Caithness and Sutherland landscape, particularly its range and type of landscape character, and the nature of changes which may affect it both now and in the future.

Who has produced this study?

This study has been produced by a partnership between Scottish Natural Heritage, Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise and Highland Council, reporting to a Steering Group which also included representatives from the Forestry Authority.

What information does the study offer?

It describes the key landscape characteristics within Caithness and Sutherland, and highlights the key issues which should be considered when assessing the potential effects of development or change on these. Guidance is provided at a strategic level.

What information does the study not provide?

This study does not state where, or in what form, development and landscape change should take place. It does not give detailed design guidance, either site specific or in relation to a particular type of development.

To whom is the information directed?

The information provided by this study will help SNH and other agency staff to advise on the strategic and local implications of development and change within Caithness and Sutherland. It will also aid SNH and other organisations to develop landscape related policies and will be important to the Highland Council in updating the Local Plans within Caithness and Sutherland.

What does this enable?

By highlighting the key landscape issues, this study will help landscape change and development to directly relate to the intrinsic qualities of Caithness and Sutherland which make it so special

USE OF THIS REPORT

What are landscape character types?

They are areas of consistent and recognisable landscape character, with a distinct composition of interrelated physical and cultural characteristics, and of those characteristics which affect our experience of the landscape.

Are some character types superior to others?

No. The classification of landscape character types is not value laden, nor is it based on any existing landscape designations. It is merely determined by what the character of a landscape is, and the processes acting within it.

How are the landscape character types distributed?

The distribution of landscape character types varies greatly; some types are extensive in area but only occur in a few locations, whilst others are small in area but exist in many locations.

What happens at the boundary of different character types?

The boundary lines drawn on the map of landscape character types are indicative only, representing the broad extent of these areas. The actual juxtaposition of character types is rarely so sharp as to form a discernible line on the ground, even when coinciding with a distinct edge such as the coastline. In reality, there is usually a transition zone between adjacent landscape character types, with a gradual change in the relative dominance of characteristics being evident from one to another; a number of outliers can also occur across this region. The boundaries between landscape character types which are dominated by experiential characteristics are particularly indistinct; this is because these characteristics, such as views, sounds and smells pass freely between different areas.

So how is landscape character considered in boundary areas?

When studying any landscape or development proposal, but especially when along or adjacent to a boundary, the characteristics of all the neighbouring landscape character types must be respected.

The description of landscape character

A broad description of landscape character within Caithness and Sutherland is given within chapter 3 of this document. Only the key landscape characteristics which are distinctive to each character type are discussed within chapter 4 - "landscape character types". Within this section, there is a description of:

- the key landscape characteristics
- the key forces for change acting upon these landscape characteristics
- design guidance related to the potential impact of the forces for change on the key landscape characteristics

Although the key characteristics of a landscape and its forces for change are largely described as separate subjects within this document, they are generally interrelated in forming each distinct landscape character type.

Why different landscape characteristics exist

An explanation of why landscape characteristics exist is provided within the description of landscape character types where this is necessary for a clear understanding, or where this is particularly relevant to future change. If a greater level of information is required, however, this may be contained within the appendices of this report, or covered by a publication listed in the bibliography.

Landscape character subtypes

Some of the landscape character types described within this chapter possess subtypes. These share the same common characteristics as the main type, but are typically distinguished by a variation in the relative dominance of these.

Design principles used to assess landscape characteristics

Appendix i summarises some of the principles of design which are used to assess landscape character. It also explains some of the vocabulary used to describe landscape character, and will be of particular use to those unfamiliar with this kind of assessment.

Map of landscape character types

This indicates the location of the various landscape character types at 1:200,000 scale, and should be studied in conjunction with the descriptions of these. It is located at the back of this report.

This report can act as a general guide for considering the landscape issues of a site proposal, a land use strategy or a local landscape programme. However, it only includes the broadest level of information, and will need supplementing with more detailed assessment for a specific place or development.

The following questions highlight the issues which need to be addressed when extracting information from this report. The first example suggests where the relevant guidance may be found.

Example 1: development proposal

- Questions: **1 What are the implications of the development on the overall character and appreciation of the Caithness and Sutherland landscape?**
- 2 What are the cumulative effects of this development, and others of the same type, within Caithness and Sutherland?**

Refer to: *Chapter 3 - the general description of the entire Caithness and Sutherland landscape. Find out whether this form of development is mentioned as being particularly key to the landscape character of Caithness and Sutherland, or whether the region possesses landscape characteristics which are likely to be affected by this form of development.*

- Question: **3 What landscape character type is the development located within?**

Refer to: *The map of landscape character types, located at the back of this report. Refer to the key to find out the name of the character type in which the proposal is located.*

- Question: **4 What are the key landscape characteristics within this character type?**

Refer to: *Chapter 4 - the description of landscape character types. Refer to page 23 at the beginning of chapter 4 which lists where the description of the character type is located within the document.*

The key landscape characteristics are outlined within the first section of the landscape character type description, highlighted in bold and italics.

- Question: **5 What are the relative dominance and relationships of the key characteristics within the particular site of this proposal?**

Refer to: *Chapter 4. Within the descriptions of landscape character types, the most typical landscape characteristics are discussed at the beginning of the first section - "key characteristics". This section then gradually proceeds to mention those landscape characteristics which are not quite so dominant or are key in only certain areas of the landscape character type.*

- Question: **6 What are the main landscape issues of the development highlighted within the design guidance section?**

Refer to: *Chapter 4, the second section of the landscape character type - "key forces for change and design guidance". The design guidance within this section is discussed in two sections. First, there is general guidance which highlights the key landscape issues of all forms of landscape development or change within the particular landscape character type; for example how any new built structure would have an impact on the characteristic open space of the landscape. Secondly, guidance in relation to specific forms of*

development is discussed, for example new housing, agriculture, road building or new aerals, depending on what are the key forms of landscape change in that character type.

When considering the potential impact of a proposed development, the general guidance is always considered, this information being supplemented by more specific guidance on the particular type of development if this is provided. In addition to considering the forces for change and design guidance section, it is advisable to refer back to the key landscape characteristics at the beginning of the character type description to see if the particular development proposals might affect any of these not otherwise mentioned.

Questions: 7 What are the other surrounding landscape character types? What are the key landscape issues of the proposed development on these?

Refer to: *The map of landscape character types and chapter 4 - the description of landscape character types. In addition to considering the particular character type in which the proposed development is located in, you need to consider those which occur in neighbouring areas. Apply information as for questions 3-6 for these character types.*

Questions: 8 In conclusion, what is the potential impact of this type of development on the landscape character of this place?

Refer to: *Information gained from the above process. This will highlight the key issues of locating the proposed development within a certain area of landscape character type, i.e. what may be the potential impact of the development on the key landscape characteristics.*

To determine the potential impact of development within a particular place, more specific information on the character of the location and that of the specific design of development is required to supplement the strategic information contained within this report.

Questions: 9 Is it likely that this kind of development will threaten the intrinsic character of the landscape?

Refer to: *The information gained from the above process. By assessing all the various potential landscape impacts, the application of professional judgement should be able to conclude whether the cumulative impact of these would change the intrinsic character of the landscape.*

Question: 10 Can the location, design and management of the development relate to the distinct characteristics of this landscape? How might this be done?

Refer to: Chapter 4 - the description of landscape character types. The impact of any development will be greatly influenced by its design and specific location. This will tend to appear most appropriate where directly related to the key characteristics of the landscape character type so that its presence seems rational, for example buildings located within sheltered locations along a water supply.

Although guidance on all the different scenarios for possible developments and locations can not be covered by this report, in some cases general guidance for siting and design are offered within the design guidance section of chapter 4; for example for aquaculture in the crocan landscape character type on page 73, it is suggested that: "The location of buoys and rafts within this landscape will appear most appropriate where their siting and arrangement directly relates to the line and spatial containment of the nearest shoreline". This means that for a specific fishfarm raft proposal, by assessing which way an inlet runs, and by locating the buoys to lie parallel and near to the edge of this may be a starting point for the design of such a development, although this will need to be assessed in greater detail in relation to the specific location and design.

Example 2: land use strategy

Questions to be addressed:

- 1 Does the land use being considered form a key characteristic of Caithness and Sutherland as a whole?
- Chapter 3
- 2 What is the potential cumulative impact of change of this land use on the character of the district?
- Chapter 3
- 3 In which landscape character type does this land use form a key characteristic or force for change?
- Chapter 4
- 4 What are the potential implications of this land use change on the key characteristics within these character types?
- Chapter 4

Example 3: local landscape programme

Questions to be addressed:

- 1 For what, why, and how is the landscape character within this area experienced and valued?**
- Chapters 3 & 4, followed by local assessment
- 2 What are the main threats to this, and what opportunities are there to enhance or remedy this?**
- Chapters 3 & 4, followed by local assessment
- 3 Can these issues be targeted within strategic planning proposals?**
- Chapters 3 & 4
- 4 What landscape character types occur within, and surrounding, this area?**
- Chapter 4 and map
- 5 What are the main forces for change acting upon the key landscape characteristics within this area? Can local guidance be given to promote the appropriate development or enhancement of these?**
- Chapter 4, and local assessment

THE CAITHNESS AND SUTHERLAND LANDSCAPE

This chapter describes the Caithness and Sutherland landscape, providing an introduction to the entire region, and a base from which landscape character types will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

On first encounter, the Caithness and Sutherland landscape seems quite simple in comparison to the complex mountainous regions further south which are so often depicted as the stereotypical Highland scene. Thus it is often overlooked by visitors to Scotland, and within literature and the media. What these miss, is the very quality which makes the Caithness and Sutherland landscape so special; that is the extremely subtle way in which very different landscapes gradually combine and blend together over great distances, within wide open spaces and under vast skies. This character of Caithness and Sutherland is only truly revealed as you travel across its entirety, becoming aware that you pass through many different landscapes, yet the point at which you leave one to enter the next is not noticeably marked.

Throughout Caithness and Sutherland, there is a strong sense of space. The region is vast - reaching to the north edge of mainland UK, and containing only a small population concentrated in certain areas. This northern situation strongly affects the distinct character of the region, most obviously illustrated through its culture and the unique climate and light conditions.

Rather than the region neatly dividing into distinct areas, different landscape types are identifiable at a variety of levels. These are most strongly marked by the contrasts between inland and coastal areas, that of the north, west and eastern parts, the variation between the scale of landscapes, and whether they are inhabited or remote lands. These qualities are broadly described within the following chapter as: 'immense space', 'the land to sea edge' and 'people and place'. The past and present character of the landscape is tied to the future within the final section, 'continual change'.

immense space

Land, sea and sky! All of these offer a boundless provision of open space within Caithness and Sutherland, emphasised by the region's



"Caithness and Sutherland are, in a way not easily made plain, a meeting of the two great elements of sea and land".

Neil Gunn





"...you walk out upon Caithness, and at once experience an austerity in the flat clean wind-swept lands that affects the mind almost with a sense of shock. There is something more in it than contrast. It is a movement of the spirit that finds in the austerity, because strength is there also, a final serenity. I know of no other landscape in Scotland that achieves this harmony, that, in the very moment of purging the mind of its dramatic grandeur, leaves it free and ennobled".

Neil Gunn



"Contrary to popular belief, boglands are not dreary places: a close examination reveals a wealth of colour and mixture of distinctive scents. The Sphagnum bog mosses themselves each have a vivid colour, some are deep wine-red, others are brilliant orange or gingery brown, while yet other have brilliant greens mixed with delicate salmon-pinks. They combine to form a scene as intricate and colourful as a Persian rug".

From "Boglands", by Scottish Natural Heritage



"Great mountains loom on the horizon like leviathans rising out of a frozen sea, their names a litany of some of the most spectacular climbing to be had in Scotland".

Christopher Cairns,
The Scotsman

extremely low population density in most parts. This creates a strong sense of remoteness throughout much of the region.

At its broadest level, the Caithness and Sutherland landform seems fairly simple - different landscapes separated as they are by large areas of open ground which enables the relative differences between landforms to be clearly seen and compared.

The openness of much of Caithness and Sutherland offers very distant views of the landscape, these in turn enabling the immense open space to be appreciated. Sometimes, land and sea seem to gradually extend up into the sky without any noticeable boundary, although in other places, distant hills appear to recline along the horizon like a stage backcloth.

The open spaces offer a sense of extreme exhilaration and personal freedom. There is an impression that one is only an inconsequential part of the immense surrounding landscape - a feeling which can be both intimidating and exciting, and accentuated by the difficulty to discern orientation in some places. This means that where landmarks do exist, their impact is invariably significant, despite their variety of scale, ranging from that of a loch, to a large estate house, settlement, or the vast towering mass of the isolated mountains.

The simple, wide expanse of the Sutherland and West Caithness interior mainly corresponds to a fairly even eroded and weathered surface of Moine schists. This underlies vast expanses of peatland which form the largest area of blanket bog in Europe. The peatlands appear almost like open seas of rough vegetation lying beneath wide and changing skies. They may be quite deceptive - monotonous on first sight, but with a wealth of detail and a variety of experience revealed on closer examination. This is provided by, for example, the sight of vibrant-coloured mosses, the smell and spongy feeling of walking on deep peat, and the sound of bird calls ringing through the silence and dragonfly wings faintly humming during warm, sunny days.

Within the large tracts of open land, a number of hill and mountains rise up in surprise - startling in their contrast to the fairly flat surroundings. These hills and mountains have very special landmark qualities, as their profiles tend to be distinctive and individual. The difficulty in reaching them across the vast surrounding peatlands, and in discerning their size due to an absence of known scale indicators, also gives them a sense of mystery which is emphasised when they are seen from a distance as faint, unusual shapes upon an otherwise flat horizon.

"The hills of Sutherland are special. Here you will not find row upon row of mountain ranges separated by deep glens as you will further south, for here the landscape is open and the hills rise up out of the low foothills and moorland like sleeping dinosaurs. And although they might not be as big as their southern neighbours, you can be sure that their very isolation gives them a sense of majesty all of their own..."

Tom Strong

The patchwork fields of Caithness
Are spread for all to see,
Many are its colours
And patterns fair and free.

Green and yellow shows the corn
Dark green the pastures new.
They reach to the distant skyline
In the early morning dew.

Rivers and streams like golden thread
Shine in the morning sun.
This way it will be forever,
till the stars leave one by one.

Now all is still and silent,
As we gaze on this landscape fair,
Knowing that only the hand of God
Could fashion a scene so rare.

Isobel Salmons



In the west, the Assynt mountains dominate the skyline. These are made up of outcrops of Torridonian sandstone and caps of Cambrian quartzite ascending high above a platform of older Lewisian gneiss. The gentle inclination of strata and numerous joints and faults within these mountain rocks has resulted in the formation of some impressive buttresses, vertical faces and ridges, often making their profiles vary in appearance quite considerably from one side to another.

Within the interior of Sutherland, a number of 'elegant' peaks with smooth convex curves reach up into the sky out of the moorland. These also represent the outcrop of harder rocks, such as pelitic schists or syenite, and include the 'Queen of the Scottish Mountains' - Ben Loyal.

A few hills also appear as dominant foci in Caithness, typically comprising outcrops of harder conglomerates within part of a basin of Old Red Sandstone. Although these hills are much lower than their western counterparts, they are greatly valued for their landmark qualities and for providing prime vantage points from which to view the surrounding landscape. From the hill tops, the complex landscape pattern of Caithness is unravelled below, most obviously marked by a patchwork of different coloured and textured fields, and the sharp edges of flagstone fences. The Caithness hills are frequently crowned with historic or pre-historic features, which adds to their distinctive quality and conveys a great sense of the past within the present.

The wide expanse of the Caithness and Sutherland landscape is occasionally divided by straths. From a distance, these often appear as emerald ribbons running through the region, typically containing wide, meandering rivers following along the path of softer or eroded rocks. The straths have a distant history of occupation, targeted for their ease of access, provision of water, favourable agricultural land and shelter, and past peoples have left behind a range of features from burial cairns and brochs, to large estate and croft houses. All of these features incite a great sense of historical interest and intrigue within the landscape; however, despite many settlements still being inhabited within the mouths of the straths near the coast, few people now live within the upper reaches of these areas, having suffered the worst of 'The Clearances' during the last couple of centuries.

Patches of woodland run through many of the straths, typically representing the remnants of a once much more extensive coverage. Where these woodlands remain, they provide local shelter and create a diversity of habitat which ranges from areas of towering, columnar trunks around estate buildings, to birch woodlands, where the intricate composition of small, 'dancing' leaves, white papery bark, and lush



"I think of Sutherland as 'the Antique Land', bleak, brooding and sombre when lashed by Atlantic rain, but nowhere is more inspiring when the quartz summits sparkle like snow in the mid-day sun, or take on the pink of alpenglow as it sets. This moody land of moorland and limestone green, dotted with lochans, is connoisseur's country".

Tom Weir



"It is not that the quality of this light is magical or glamorous, tenuous or thin. There are few places in Scotland where level light from the sinking sun can come across such a great area; ...I have seen it of a paler gold than *amontillado*. The mind does not debate: it gets caught up into that timelessness where beauty is no longer majestic or grand but something more intimate..."

Neil Gaiman

mossy undercover creates an interesting experience of light and colour.

A number of coniferous plantations also extend through parts of Caithness and Sutherland. Contrary to their broadleaf counterparts, these typically form dense stands which have marked vertical edges, and a shape, colour and line which often seems regimented. From a distance, however, large plantations may appear to merge into the sweeping horizons of the open moorland, especially where trees are thinned during restructuring so that the underlying character of the landscape peeps through.

The open spaces within Caithness and Sutherland provide a variety of experience in different season and weather conditions, as the lack of shelter means that they are subject to all that 'the elements' can throw at them. This dramatically varies from blustery conditions when the rain or snow whips around, and there seems to be no sheltered escape, to times when the clarity of blue skies and bright light seems to cast a spell over a whole area; at these times the full extent of the landscape is truly unveiled, appearing almost unbelievable and magical by possessing an image of tranquillity within such exposure.

The importance played by climate on the experience of the Caithness and Sutherland landscape is also closely tied to the dominant presence of the sky within views, and the strong clarity of light within the region - particularly within Caithness. The unique light quality is related to the northern latitude and is especially acute within coastal areas where an intense brightness results from light reflecting off the sea's surface and off the sands. This clear light particularly highlights vertical features, due to the strong sharpness of shadow it creates, and seems to emphasise the bright hues in the colours of this landscape.

The west of Sutherland is subject to a series of Atlantic depressions, the uplifting of moist air over the landform causing high levels of relief rainfall. This means that the hills and mountains are often clothed by a dense cover of dark blue, grey and purple cloud, reflecting the constantly changing mood of the western seaboard. The west is also subject to the moderating influence of the North Atlantic Drift travelling up the coast, and these wet and mild conditions are partly responsible for the extensive coverage of blanket bog in these parts, dominated by a cover of wet, spongy *Sphagnum* mosses.

To the north and east of the region, particularly in Caithness, weather systems can be seen to rush past, around and over the landscape, showing a dramatic display of dark, stormy skies, spotlighting beams of sun, bright blue sky and racing clouds. The extreme clarity and activity of this exhibition often dominates the appearance of the



landscape lying below, the character of which seems to be in continual change as a consequence.

Seasons also influence the changing scene of this landscape. This is principally conditioned by the small number of daylight hours in winter, whilst there is almost continual light in the north at the summer solstice. Winter brings bitterly cold temperatures and frequent covers of snow, whilst spring is gladly welcomed; although arriving much later than within most of the UK, its rapid increase of day length and first flushes of vegetation and bird activity seem to almost happen overnight. Summer is usually busy, with cropping still taking place on some farmland and crofts, and a large influx of visitors arriving in the region. The autumn is typically distinguished by the sound of bellowing stags and the display of rich colours throughout the moorland spaces, as the lowering angle of light highlights the deep orange and russet hues of the bog cotton (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) and deer grass (*Scirpus cespitosus*). This period marks the approach of winter - the sign for many people and birds to migrate on to warmer climates.

the land/sea edge

As the sea surrounds the Caithness and Sutherland region on three sides, the scale of the land seems only a minor part of a wider picture. The distinct coastal light, horizontal emphasis and sense of space strongly penetrates inland, as the character of the sea, land and sky interchange and influence each other. However, the coast does define a clear edge between the land and sea, and often seems quite reassuring by indicating orientation within an otherwise vast open environment.



The coast possesses some common characteristics, most obviously the presence of an edge between both land and sea environments, and the experience of this in the action and sound of waves hitting the shore, the smell of the sea, the sticky sensation of sea spray, and the feel of sand and pebbles underfoot. The intricate detail of features which combine to create the coastal experience of Caithness and Sutherland seem amazing in their extreme contrast to such vast and open surroundings, especially as there seems to be such little graduation in-between. It is quite startling to be surrounded by such space and immense exposure, and yet be attracted to the presence of minute features such as shells and their shape, colour and smoothness to the touch, and the character of seaweed, typically distinctive by its slippiness, vibrant colour, pattern and smell. Beach litter accumulates in certain locations, which attracts not only visual attention, but also beach combing; although this tends to be of

interest, the presence of coastal litter suggests a negative image of human neglect within the environment which generally lies uncomfortably with most people.

The local character of the Caithness and Sutherland coast is typically determined by the nature of both the land and sea; for example, influenced by the age, hardness and dip of the rock, and the vigour and nature of sea currents. Some of these characteristics are more obvious than others, for example cross currents may be indicated by long shore drift leading to the accumulation of sand up against obstructions, and the bedding of rocks may be displayed upon exposed cliff faces. However, there are so many different factors which affect the character of the coast, and these combine in so many ways, that it is very difficult to describe all the various scenarios. These range from enormous, towering cliffs to wide, sandy bays and raised beach platforms, and from extensive dunes and links, to rocky, interlocking coasts with a scattering of islands.

"...the rugged coast of Sutherland, with its villages and crofting communities clinging to cliff-tops above exquisite bays of golden sands and turquoise waters - incongruous jewels of Caribbean colour seen through sleet squalls and gun-metal grey skies of a Scottish winter".

Christopher Cairns, The Scotsman

The character of the coast is also influenced by human activity and land use, as it tends to form the focus for habitation and movement in Caithness and Sutherland, and appears very different in various seasons and weather conditions. The shoreline may be dominated by the activity and noise of crashing waves and sea spray hitting rocks during blustery winds, whilst it can appear extremely calm and tranquil in still conditions, when there is only a faint sound of waves rhythmically lapping upon the shore, and the occasional call of sea birds.

The character of the land/sea edge also differs between the west, north and eastern coasts. These two elements tend to be closely interlocked on the west, on account of the undulating character of the landform; this creates a multitude of different spaces of varying scale, from exposed promontories which reach out into the open sea, to long, steep-sided loch shores and semi-enclosed, sheltered bays. The pattern of these various forms, although often appearing rational from the air or when looking at maps, tends to appear random as one travels through the landscape, so that they are encountered with surprise.

Broadleaf woodland stretches along some parts of the west Sutherland coast, also extending like fingers into a number of narrow, inland glens. Most of this woodland comprises mature birch trees with pockets of aspen, rowan, alder and willow. These seem fused to their rough, sloped and rocky ground surface, and walking through these woodlands, one is typically faced by a screen of bent and gnarled tree trunks and branches, until finally reaching the location of a clearing or watercourse. These coastal woodlands tend to be particularly valued within Caithness and Sutherland for the sense of



security and shelter that they provide within an otherwise open and exposed region. They also offer an intricacy of scale and detail, and a diversity of vegetation which contrasts to the typical composition of the Caithness and Sutherland landscape, which is generally more simple and vast. In the midst of this, the shape, texture and brightness of the tree trunks and branches, in addition to the small, swinging leaves, create an interesting and continually changing display of colour, pattern and light.

"...it is a composite... the sea-cliffs that form its coast. In a sense, these cliffs are more typical of Caithness than all else for they have entered so much - and so violently - into the life of its people. As sheer rock-scenery, too, they are often magnificent, while the flatness of the coastlands permits of tremendous perspectives".

Neil Gunn



The northern coast of Caithness and Sutherland, in contrast to the west, tends to be noted for its high cliffs which tower up above rough seas. Upon the edge of these cliffs, distant and elevated views extend far across the sea, and there tends to be an exhilarating experience of exposure. These places are often dominated by the noise and feeling of gusty winds, the sound and sight of waves crashing far below, and spray being thrown high into the air. Sea birds tend to congregate upon these cliff edges, and are most noticeable nesting on the crags and gliding upon the thermals and wind currents rising above the cliffs, their presence highlighted by the piercing sound of their cries.

The tremendous height of the sea cliffs along the northern edge of Caithness and Sutherland (the highest on the British mainland, reaching 920 feet near Cape Wrath) often obscures views of the actual sea edge below. However, this concealment only seems to heighten the sense of arrival when the shoreline is finally revealed, typically where a strath or glen intercepts the coastal edge. Beaches are often located within these inlets, and these frequently appear magical, almost like an oasis within the harsh, exposed surrounding landscape.

The beaches along the north Caithness and Sutherland coast seem to occur at remarkably regular intervals, so that as you travel along this coast, you come to expect them as part of a distinct rhythm. In this way, they act as key landmarks, although their similarity means that unless a stretch of the coastline is known particularly well, it is often quite a challenge to predict where one beach is situated in relation to others.

The beaches within Caithness and Sutherland typically act as a focus for human activity and settlement, especially where there are surrounding areas of well-drained, sandy soil, ideal for agriculture. They also entice visitors by the dazzling attraction of their bright sands - startling in even the dreariest of weather - and tend to offer a sheltered and warm microclimate, surrounded as they are by a curtain of cliffs creating sun traps.

The settlements along the north coast of Sutherland typically have a combined crofting and harbour tradition, now evolved into a mixed assortment of agricultural land, residences and local facilities. The dispersal of these elements along the coast is often highlighted by the brightness of the sea light, their disorder often encouraging further sprawl of elements in-between. The coastal settlements attract large numbers of visitors to the region during summer, often acting as a base from which to explore the surrounding remoter landscape. This means that, in addition to crofting activity, these places are often very busy during the summer months, creating a hub of colour, noise and activity, remarkable in contrast to the quietness of winter.



Along the length of Sutherland's east coast, there is a fairly dense population compared to the rest of the region, favoured for its fairly dry and sheltered climate, relative ease of access, good agricultural land and the location of a number of natural harbours. Most of these elements are concentrated upon the level shelf which runs along much of this eastern edge, created by a coastal plain of Mesozoic sedimentary rocks, separated from the neighbouring hills by a marked fault line. This platform also extends into a number of raised beaches which formed as a result of land rebounding from the weight of glaciers following the Ice Age. This east coast has a long tradition of inhabitation, which has resulted in it possessing a number of historic features, ranging from Neolithic cairns, to Iron Age brochs and medieval castles; these create dominant focal points and landmarks throughout the landscape, and imply a strong sense of historical time along the eastern seaboard.



The eastern coast of Sutherland tends to be associated with long stretches of sand, dunes, links and raised beaches, and the occurrence of these subtly transgresses as one travels along this edge. At its southern end, it is bounded by the Dornoch Firth, the most northerly of the series of firths which penetrate the east Scottish coast. This contains a narrow stretch of sea which is sandwiched between opposite land masses - its tidal flats providing a habitat which is particularly favoured by wading birds.



The long beaches and links which run along many stretches of the east coast of Sutherland, and in a few places in Caithness, have been a particular focus for recreation during the last couple of centuries, as in many parts of east Scotland. They are especially valued for their provision of golf courses and long lengths of open sands, the vastness of which can accommodate many people without seeming remotely busy. This tradition of tourism, once mainly concentrated within a number of large hotels and guest houses, has tended to gradually shift towards the more dispersed caravan park, camp site and B&B provision of today, the scattered location and services for which impose their own distinct character along the length of the east



coast. Indeed, as the coast of this region has been, and remains to be, strongly influenced by people, both past and present, the character of this landscape is set to continue changing far into the future.

people and place



"These counties of Caithness and Sutherland may be said to have a pre-history of enthralling conjecture. Those interested in the archaeological aspect of things may here dream and dispute to their heart's content".

Neil Gunn



People and their activity in the landscape is generally seen as very welcome within Caithness and Sutherland, somehow creating a reassurance by indicating human presence with an otherwise vast and often harsh physical environment.

The peripheral location of Caithness and Sutherland on the very northern edge of mainland UK has meant that subsistence has generally involved a constant battle against the odds. This has demanded and resulted in an extreme determination by the population to exploit and utilise whatever opportunities exist, in an attempt to resist depopulation which continues to this day.

Evidence of past populations within Caithness and Sutherland appear throughout the region, although features are probably most obvious and accessible within the agricultural lands of Caithness and the wide straths of Sutherland. The oldest of structural relics were formed by the hunter-gathers of this region over 6000 years ago, comprising old mounds of discarded seashells. These are far less noticeable, however, than the large burial cairns which were left by the Neolithic people some two thousand years later. These top many of the small hills which rise up within Caithness and Sutherland, the typical exposure and sense of remoteness within these locations allowing an acute appreciation of past features.

Large defensive structures such as brochs, forts and duns, lay testimony to an increased pressure on land during the Iron Age, dating back to around 800 BC. The robustness of these structures mean that many have stood the test of time, still revealing their spectacular construction, and appearing to exert a powerful presence within the landscape setting.

The earliest known reference to Picts dates back to around 300 AD, this term referring to what is thought to have been an agglomeration of several different peoples of varying origin, culture and language. Evidence of the Picts within Caithness and Sutherland can be found within some place names (such as with the PIT prefix, which referred to a share or portion of land in forest clearings, e.g. Pittentrail, Pitgrudy and Pitfour). A number of symbol stones also exist, the markings upon these possessing strong symbolism and great artistic appeal, so

that they continue to be reproduced in a variety of contemporary works of art.

Evidence of the Gael occupation of the Caithness and Sutherland landscape (around 800 to 900 AD) is less obvious than that of the Vikings who arrived later; the impact of these Norse speaking people is still found in the place names of the region (with endings such as -ster or -wick), particularly in Caithness. Viking origins are also suggested by some as being a major factor influencing the distinct character of the people in the far north east, particularly in their single-mindedness and dynamism.



A number of large castles are seen standing within the Caithness and Sutherland landscape, representing the past division of lands between clans which was associated with much feuding, bloodshed and political wrangling between the early 1200s and 1700s. The creation of the first Earl of Sutherland in 1235 marked the beginning of this period which saw land being offered to the local people in return for allegiance to the clan chief.



From around 1600 this system gradually began to break down, the Battle of Culloden in 1745 marking the climax of this course, after which the clans were disarmed and the land from rebel estates forfeited. Clan chiefs had no further need for local people to fight on their behalf, and so they began to develop a relationship more akin to that of landlord and tenant, requiring the payment of rent. As much of the land within Caithness and Sutherland could only support marginal subsistence, a demand for rent was often the last straw; food resources were also very scarce at this time, as a result of repeated crop failures and the demands of an expanding population. The cumulative effect of this was famine, most notably between 1780-1782 and 1802-1804.

"And the first reaction may well be one of surprise that a land so barren and wild could ever have harboured townships of people. How did they manage to live? ...Until finally he may wonder if the 'clearances' would not have happened sometime anyway".

Neil Gunn

The immense poverty encouraged large numbers of people to move away, not only to the coastal lands, but also abroad. Although this migration was encouraged by some landlords, others attempted to keep people on their land, for example by providing them with imported grain and by offering them estate work such as tree planting and dyke building. This was in an effort to retain a strong and ready workforce in case new economic opportunities arose. Regrettably, however, these attempts were mostly in vain.

The arrival of many immigrants in coastal areas fortunately coincided with advances in fishing around the turn of the 19th century, especially in the herring industry, so that these areas were often able to accommodate an immediate influx of incomers without too much strain. This period saw the rapid expansion of many harbours,



For deep in the heart of those hills
there is kept
The memory of those who suffered
and wept
Who left us a heritage fair to behold
But of croftlands and people let
legends unfold.

Then let us remember their love of
this land
Their absence forever in memory shall
stand
And those who remain, shall vow in
their sorrow
This never, but never, shall happen
tomorrow.

*Extract from 'Strathnaver' by Isabel
Salmon*



particularly Pulteneytown, or Wick as it is now called, and to a lesser extent, Helmsdale, Dunbeath and Lochinver.

Agricultural despair continued through the beginning of the 19th century, the landscape declining in both management and production. This meant, however, that the 'agricultural improvers' who arrived in Caithness and East Sutherland at this time were typically greeted with open arms, as they were seen to offer a way of escape. These individuals were brimming with grand ideas of 'progress', citing contemporary economic theories which were frequently derived from the newly formed Highland and Agricultural Society. The application of these methods demanded an end to the traditional runrig farming system - instead, promoting the enclosure of fields and the introduction of rotational systems. This frequently required movement of the scattered rural population into new holdings, many of which were concentrated, creating villages. At this time people were encouraged to leave their crofts on the promise of a more prosperous and less vulnerable source of income within these settlements, particularly in the processing industries and mills. Although these pledges may have sometimes been used as an excuse to remove people from agricultural lands, there were some good intentions to actually better living conditions for the rural population who had been repeatedly subject to poverty at the hands of a severe and unpredictable climate.

The Cheviot sheep was introduced to the region in 1806, and any good intentions by the agricultural 'improvers' to enrich conditions for the rural population of Caithness and Sutherland seemed annulled by this one act. It had an immediate success and resulted in the expansion of extensive sheep farming (a rise from 5,000 sheep in 1808, to 240,000 in 1874 within Sutherland). This involved further systematic eviction of tenants to make way for sheep - most notably from the inland glens and straths; during 1813 and 1814, what is known as 'The Sutherland Clearances' took place throughout Strathnaver and Kildonan, the evidence of which can still be seen today, with an abundance of abandoned and ruined settlements and fields.

People continued to move. Despite the herring boom, the expected long term expansion of local fishing never really materialised, and although there was some let up provided by the upsurge of industries such as Caithness flagstone and the wool boom between 1860 and 1880, the region's population continued to suffer from repeated crop failures, an expanding population, and the insufficiency of small, assigned, coastal crofts.

Regrettably, the large fortunes made by the sheep farmers were not invested back into the land, and as a consequence, the quality of

"...in Kildonan there is today a shadow, a chill, of which any sensitive mind would, I am convinced, be vaguely aware, though possessing no knowledge of the clearances. We are affected strangely by any place from which the tide of life has ebbed".

Neil Gunn



"Now and then we passed through winding valleys speckled with farms that looked romantic and pretty from a distance, but bleak and comfortless up close. Mostly they were smallholdings with lots of rusted tin everywhere - tin sheds, tin hen huts, tin fences - looking rickety and weatherbattered. We were entering one of those weird zones, always a sign of remoteness from the known world where nothing is ever thrown away. Every farmyard was cluttered with castoffs, as if the owner thought that one day he might need 132 half-rotted fenceposts, a ton of broken bricks and the shell of a 1964 Ford Zodiac".

Bill Bryson

grazing declined so that sheep numbers had to be reduced. This process was somewhat helped on its way by large losses of stock during a series of severe winters, especially that of 1879-1880, and the final sting in the tail was the collapse of agricultural prices at this time, particularly affecting wool. Most of the sheep grazers who had come to exploit the Caithness and Sutherland lands, now returned to the southern lowlands, leaving vast tracts of degraded grassland behind. It was a difficult time for the major landowners; there were few people left willing to rent their land, and yet this had substantially reduced in value as a result of overgrazing. Crofting unrest was also rife during the 1880s, agitated by rent strikes and the 'Crofters War'.

The 'Clearances' did not really ease up until the Crofters' Holding Act of 1886, when crofters earned security of tenure. However, this did not apply to lost lands and, as in many parts of the Highlands, Caithness and Sutherland contains a multitude of abandoned croft houses, enclosures, ridge and furrow marks and old drainage channels testament to this period of time. These features not only affect the visual appearance of the landscape, but also the culture of the region, and particularly the attitude of people to change and interference from 'higher authorities', strengthening their sense of identity.

The sporting boom which began during the 1880s was greatly welcomed by most landlords - seen as an escape from the problems of agriculture and crofting tenure. Many landlords began the process of exploiting river fishing, and extending deer forests and grazing into the old sheep walks, with great zest, and it is possible that this marked the ultimate dearth of agricultural activity and people within the vast inland tracts of Caithness and Sutherland which we inherit today.

The accounts of past suffering and exploitation, handed down from generation to generation, and within literature and the media, are inextricably linked to how the landscape of Caithness and Sutherland is experienced today. Many people appear to give little value to the landscape in which they now live, tied to the bitterness of past losses of land; this seems to often drive new building schemes and the dumping of material in defiance of the intrinsic character of the landscape. Many new kit houses seem to be built in this manner, appearing inappropriate in both siting and design by bearing no relationship to their surroundings - often isolated, and with their backs turned to the remains of past structures.

Agriculture, as the main activity and employer in Caithness and Sutherland, has continued to decline throughout this century (from 33% to 8.3% between 1931 and 1981 in Caithness). This gap in employment has mainly been filled by the growth of service

"It was a good-sized town with big council estates and winding streets of those grey pebbledash bungalows that seem to have been modelled on public toilets.... but no sign of factories or workplaces. What, I wondered, do all the people in all those houses do for a living in a place like Golspie?"

Bill Bryson



industries, initially stimulated by greater demands for social provision at the beginning of the century. The concentration of the population along or near to the coast has generally been reinforced by the growth of these industries, as these tend to be strongly tied to the main access routes which run along this edge.

Although large scale economic change was somewhat put on hold in the early years of this century because of the two world wars, employment in Caithness and Sutherland has gradually shifted towards a number of large capital projects. The largest of these in Caithness was undoubtedly the development of Britain's first fast breeder nuclear power reactor at Dounreay, started in 1955. This required a large workforce (known locally as the 'atomics'), filled by both incomers and locals. The latter often left their rural properties, keen to move into the new houses built for the Dounreay employees; these were mainly constructed in Thurso, and trebled the size of the town in the process.

The key capital investments in Sutherland since the middle of this century have been hydroelectricity, forestry and infrastructure construction. All of these activities have created short term boosts for the labour force, whilst affecting long term change to the landscape. By 1947 there were plans for a hydroelectric distribution scheme throughout Sutherland, with Lairg and Invershin power stations finally going into production in 1959. The massive scale of coniferous tree planting in Sutherland took off around 1950, with the late Duke of Westminster launching a 1215 hectare scheme at Loch More. By the beginning of 1965, numerous projects of this sort were responsible for the planting of approximately 8 million trees within the region.

continual change....

"Their qualities have been inherited, normal qualities of a healthy stock against an environment demanding courage and faith".

Neil Gunn



"The Government can do a certain amount, but enthusiasm has to come from the people themselves".

Lord Forbes, Minister of State for Scotland, 1959

Throughout the history of Caithness and Sutherland, there has tended to be only short term economic stability, with a pattern of exploitation and subsequent loss. Development has often been driven by political forces which have supported large capital input, but generally offer little continued assistance over time, usually only concerned with short term political support. Dounreay is now being gradually decommissioned and commercial investment forestry may have also seen its heyday at the hands of changing tax incentives, markets and environmental concerns (although like hydroelectricity, it continues to support a small work force). Agricultural development also seems to be tied to the hands of political control, particularly directed through the Common Agricultural Policy, and the fishing industry seems liable to continue declining as a result of dwindling fish stocks.

"The Highlands, of course, may yet become a popular tourist playground dependent on tourists and nothing else. After sheep, deer; and after deer, tourists. It is the ascending order of our age of progress. there will be regret at the gradual passing of the human stock that was bred of it."

Neil Gunn

"...Sutherland - a land of crofting, of sheep and store cattle, a tourists' paradise, which has yet to see its natural and indigenous resources fully exploited so that it can reach the stage where the flow of people is travelling northwards and insidious persistent depopulation is at last halted".

D Weir



"there is a dogged quiet determination in the Caithness spirit, more Norse than Celtic, that has in the past and can again turn adversity into opportunity".

J Miller

There appears to be an overwhelming theme in political circles and the media within Caithness and Sutherland that change is always necessary, and that further inward investment and capital projects are essential; yet it is often not clear how these can be any more sustainable than in the past. The increasing dependence on service industries and inward investment (most of which could be located anywhere) continues, but what does this mean for the landscape? There seems to be a weakening connection between people, their particular skills and the specific qualities and resources of the landscape in which they live.

The development of tourism may somewhat slow up this process, by encouraging and enticing a sense of pride in places and the community, through selling oneself to others. However, this is likely to be a long process, with the need to distance people from past bitterness and battles so that Caithness and Sutherland can truly be appreciated for what it has. As yet, so many of the tourist brochures merely advertise what services the region can offer, rather than promoting the intrinsic qualities which make it unique and so special.

In comparing the social and economic stability of Caithness and Sutherland to other parts of the UK, it is constantly frustrating to see that it continues to suffer such a bumpy ride between boom and bust, and that this quite clearly feeds through to the condition of the landscape resource. But maybe this is the intrinsic character of the landscape and its people? Perhaps the battle for subsistence is so ingrained into the society that it will always continue. The relationship between people and the Caithness and Sutherland landscape commands a certain amount of respect, derived from the defiance of the population to live within a region which is so peripheral, and has such testing physical conditions. We can all appreciate its immense quality of open space, skies, land, sea and culture, but only a few enable this to remain a living landscape.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES

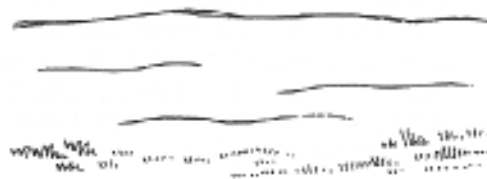
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Please note that the information contained within the landscape character subtypes should be studied in conjunction with that contained within the main landscape character type description.

1 SWEEPING MOORLAND



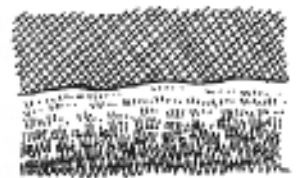
landscape character type 1 SWEEPING MOORLAND



This landscape character type forms extensive areas, mainly within the interior of Sutherland and west Caithness. It appears stunning on account of its simple composition of landscape characteristics and vast scale. Transitions between different areas and with neighbouring landscape character types tend to be extremely subtle.

key characteristics

- Sweeping moorland is dominated by its **wide open space**. This results in a high degree of exposure, affording extensive visibility.
- This landscape possesses a **simple visual composition**, its main elements being the sky, a horizontal or gently sloping, uninterrupted skyline, and vegetation. There is generally an absence of dominant visual foci, although these are sometimes locally formed by, for example, a lone lochan, tree, area of rock outcrops or hill.
- Sweeping moorland is usually characterised by having a **fairly flat, or gently sloping or undulating landform**, allowing open movement throughout the landscape. The character of the landform is often highlighted in particular weather and light conditions.
- This landscape is largely uninhabited, resulting in a perceived sense of remoteness. This, in addition to the visual simplicity, tends to direct attention towards the **foreground details and other experiential characteristics**. These include the sound of insects and birds, the feel and sound of the wind blowing around one, and the smell and spongy feeling of walking upon damp mossy vegetation.
- Many areas of sweeping moorland contain **lochs** and mature, meandering **rivers**. These sit within the shallow straths and basins in the landscape, forming foci and their horizontal surface subtly extending from the surrounding landform.



Simple composition of elements



Low light conditions highlight undulating landform



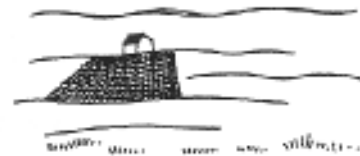
Juvenile **streams** exist within some areas of this landscape; the character of these varies considerably between different season and weather conditions. The sound of water passing along streams, particularly when in spate, forms a distinct characteristic in some locations, especially in remote areas where it is otherwise very quiet. Some of the water courses carve deep channels within the peatland; others create tunnels which run just below the surface of the peatland and coarse vegetation, so that they incite curiosity by being heard without being seen.

Ribbons of **broadleaf woodland** occasionally run along the water courses and loch edges within this landscape. These fragments mainly comprise birch, alder, willow and rowan species; they provide shelter, accentuated by their compact and wind pruned form which tends to appear moulded to the waters edge or channel. The tree leaves, especially birch, reflect light which can often seem to 'dance' upon the water surface.



Wind pruned trees appear moulded to the sheltered waters edge

- **Pockets of improved grazing** exist within some areas of sweeping moorland, appearing as green islands within the surrounding rough vegetation. These areas (often heavily grazed by sheep) tend to relate to the present or past location of farm or croft buildings and their enclosures.



The location of **ruined buildings, field boundaries and drainage channels** represent a history of past depopulation. The remains exude a sense of history and often incite curiosity concerning a past way of life within a landscape with such testing physical conditions.

- Most **existing settlements** within this landscape character type occur on the outer edges, particularly where abutting the sea or a strath. Settlements are only occasionally found within the interior; this means that where they do exist, they tend to appear as a surprise when travelling through the landscape, contrasting to the surrounding openness, exposure and sense of remoteness. It is often difficult, at first, to comprehend why these settlements should be located where they are within the open landscape, but on closer examination, they tend to be connected to either estate buildings, a bridging point, or a confluence of roads or the railway. Sometimes these settlements actually represent the remnants of what would have once been a widely populated crofting area.
- **Service elements**, such as roads and powerlines, pass through some parts of this landscape, tending to be highly visible on account of the open surroundings. The siting of these elements within this landscape may partly result from it being less physically restrictive than many of the surrounding character types. However, it may also be because this landscape is perceived by some to have less scenic value than other character types, on account of its large extent and visual consistency.



Open landscape with a sense of remoteness



Powerlines and road divide space and introduce lines.

Storage area creates focus and may portray a negative image if uncontained and 'messy'.

- Areas of **peat cuttings and haggings** occur within some parts of sweeping moorland, the exposed peat attracting attention on account of its dark brown colour, the lines that the peat faces create, and the character of the associated pools of water, particularly the insects and birds which they attract.

Peat haggling can portray a negative image to some, reflecting a vulnerability of the landscape to erosion which is exacerbated in places by heavy grazing pressure.

- **Vehicular tracks and wheel marks** from all-terrain vehicles are evident within some areas of this landscape. These routes are used mainly to provide access for deer stalking and to fishing lochs and peat cuttings. In some places, they appear as negative elements, as they may lead to erosion and vegetation disturbance which will take many years to recover, if at all (erosion may be aggravated if wheel marks divert water drainage).

Patchwork of wheel marks formed by damage to vegetation and erosion



Subsidence and water diversion results in track erosion, expansion and bifurcation

- **Coniferous plantations** form a dominant characteristic within some areas of this landscape type. Their impact varies considerably in relation to their extent, the character of the specific place in which they are located and the design of the plantation and its associated elements such as drainage ditches, access tracks, fences and associated storage areas. However, most mature coniferous plantations represent past forestry practises no longer advocated and are being gradually restructured.

From a distance, many large coniferous plantations can appear to fit within this landscape character type, blending into the wide open midground. However, their presence tends to be highlighted in snow and frosty conditions, and in contrast to broadleaf tree species and the orange brown colour of moorland vegetation in late autumn.



From a distance, large, simple form of plantation blends into open moorland space.



Plantation colour and texture contrasts to moorland in snow conditions



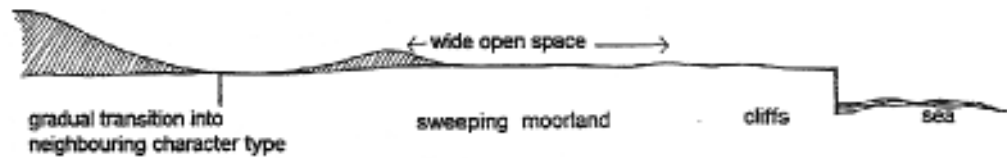
Plantation shape, species composition and facilities contrasts to moorland character

- As previously mentioned, **broadleaf woodland** forms a key characteristic within some areas of this landscape character type. This tends to be mainly linked to watercourses, lochs, the location of old estates and areas which are difficult for animals to access, for example upon river slopes. Many of these woodlands are not actively managed and are of a uniform age structure, with little regeneration evident due to heavy grazing.

transitions

- This landscape merges into surrounding character types in a very gradual fashion, with outliers and inliers often occurring within the transitional zone. It mainly borders **moorland slopes and hills**, **small farms and crofting** areas (particularly fringe crofting and historic features) and surrounds **lone mountains**.

This landscape sometimes forms a **raised shelf or plateau** near to the sea, running adjacent to the **high cliffs and sheltered bays** character type. In such locations, the coastline is often not visible from inland areas, resulting in an experience of surprise when the sea is finally viewed and heard upon arrival.



- Some area of this landscape character type form a subtype - ***flat peatland***. This shares the same key characteristics as sweeping moorland; however it is distinguished by the particular nature of some of these, as discussed within the next description of landscape characteristics in 1a.

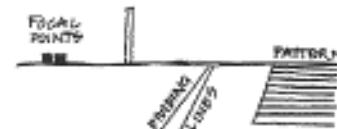
key forces for change and design guidance

General

When looking at change within this landscape character type, key considerations are its wide open space and simple visual composition; these tend to result in any new elements becoming focal features, affecting the existing undifferentiated character. It is also very important to consider how change may have an impact on the existing sense of remoteness within this landscape, and the ability to experience its characteristics.



Existing character - difficult to discern scale



New elements change undifferentiated character

Guidance

It is important to design and locate new elements in direct relation to the landscape, so that they seem appropriate to a particular place and function. These will appear to contrast less with the landscape's openness where their size and siting allows the surrounding space to be clearly visible. As most areas of this landscape do not contain human artefacts, it is important to explore whether the introduction of these, especially where they possess a distinct function, will impose their own character or image upon the landscape. As additional elements will tend to form focal points, it is also particularly important to consider their aesthetics, for example whether a structure appears visually balanced.



Element creates focus, but allows the surrounding open space to remain the dominant characteristic



New elements impose industrial character upon their surroundings

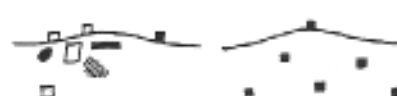


The impact of the design of a structure will depend on the image it portrays and its visual stability, influenced by its balance and proportions

The introduction of numerous elements into this landscape should be initially examined at a strategic level, as they will have a cumulative impact. Of particular concern will be whether this affects the characteristic openness and sense of remoteness within this landscape. It is also difficult to locate many elements within sweeping moorland without these seeming as disorganised additions, as the landscape does not typically possess a distinct pattern to which they can relate. This means that it may be preferable to concentrate or order elements so that they appear as an identifiable group in their own right.



Single element appears inferior to landscape character. Relates to specific point.



Cumulative impact results in elements becoming key characteristic of landscape. Similar design and location creates unified group, where the rationale for random elements is confusing.



Concentrated group as single feature, leaves surroundings open.

Road upgrading

Most roads within this landscape character type are of single vehicle width. These have tended to develop from rough tracks which possessed no foundations, so that they are often unstable. The wet nature of the moorland, and the heavy forces applied by traffic, particularly from timber and fish lorries, results in degradation and subsequent demands for road upgrading. This may also include the construction of new bridges, barriers, bollards, snow poles and parking or passing places. The introduction of these elements in a haphazard fashion can conflict with the rural and typically remote character of the landscape.



Single track road undulates through moorland as minor feature



Road character dominates landscape

Many single track roads within this character type possess eroded edges. This has tended to start when a motorist pulls onto a verge to allow another vehicle to pass, avoiding the need to reverse back to a passing place. This causes vegetation erosion, which in turn encourages more motorists to pull up onto the side. Eventually, a situation arises where drivers travel at fast speeds assuming they can pass other vehicles on the verges, rather than travelling at a slower pace because of the need to use passing places.

The process of roadside erosion is also exacerbated when road chippings, gravel or spoil is laid over the verges, or when they are eroded during other road maintenance works, such as ditch clearance: moorland vegetation is particularly slow to recover from this kind of disturbance, if it is ever able to do at all.



Single track road with passing places



Erosion of roadside



Informal surfacing encourages motorists to pull onto verges rather than using passing places, causing even greater erosion

Many roads are subject to piecemeal widening and straightening within Caithness and Sutherland. This practice results in the character of a road varying along its length - its relationship with the surrounding landscape also changing. Variation of a road's width and line tends to encourage erratic changes in the driving habits of motorists.

Guidance

It is imperative that the strategic implications and knock-on effects of road works is considered in relation to the character of this landscape; for example, road upgrading to a double track will encourage vehicles to travel faster, despite continuing hazards

such as wandering sheep, who tend to favour the well drained grass verges of new road edges.

It is difficult to upgrade roads within this landscape without these seeming to contrast to the remote moorland character. However, upgrading (including the widening of roads and the construction of bridges and barriers) will appear more appropriate where structures relate to both the nature of road usage and the surrounding landscape character.

Attempts should be made to halt the processes of roadside erosion, for example by reinforcing road edges, restoring or reseeding verges, or by limiting surfacing to a single or double vehicle width and avoiding anything in between. Maintenance works will be less disruptive where they avoid excessive peatland and vegetation disturbance, or the insensitive dumping of spoil.



Road dominates area as works disturbance creates image of neglect which encourages further 'abuse'



Road remains minor element as ditch maintenance carried out sensitively. Road erosion is halted by repair, limiting surfacing to minimal road width.

Land management

Land management and agricultural practices are set to continue changing through the provision of subsidies and grants, for example linked to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and programmes such as the Scottish Countryside Premium Scheme (SCPS). It is difficult to predict the nature of these changes; however, it can generally be expected that they will encourage a greater sustainability of land management and agricultural practices in the future.

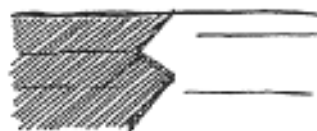
Some areas of sweeping moorland were previously managed more intensively than they are today, as indicated by the remains of abandoned buildings, field boundaries and drainage channels. Intensive management tends to be now limited to a few farms and crofts, with most of the surrounding landscape being grazed by deer and sheep. The extensive nature of such livestock management can result in the selective and intense grazing of the most favourable areas. This can cause erosion and peat haggling, and the spread of weed species such as bracken. These processes may be further influenced by poor muirburn practice.

Some areas of moorland are being increasingly fenced, in order to enclose sheep, or to prevent the movement of deer. The introduction of fences creates lines which contrast to the otherwise undifferentiated character of sweeping moorland, and prevents the unrestricted movement which is typical of this character type. The route of fences are emphasised where vegetation cover varies from one side to the other because of different grazing densities, and where animals erode paths along the barrier as they pace alongside them.

Guidance

Although it is uncertain how the provision of grants and subsidies will affect agriculture and land management in the future within areas of sweeping moorland, it is expected that these will support more sustainable practices. Generally, this will involve the reduction of sheep and deer numbers, the promotion of good husbandry, and additional control of bracken and muirburn, particularly within sensitive areas such as peat hags. Within the pockets of improved farmland, there may be more cropping and boundary and drainage channel maintenance. It is important that these practices reflect the particular characteristics within an area of sweeping moorland, in order to be sustainable and to appear appropriate to the place.

It is preferable to avoid the fencing of sweeping moorland, particularly in more remote areas; however, where necessary, the impact of fences can be minimised by routing them to follow the lie of the land, by providing pedestrian gateways, and by ensuring that any enclosure is not merely diverting or concentrating existing grazing pressure.



Fence conflicts with lie of land and concentrates grazing pressure on one side



Fence follows lie of land, gateways are obvious, and grazing pressure is balanced.

Woodland

The old single species coniferous plantations within this landscape tend to possess a simple and regular design which relates to their human derived character, almost like an elevated crop. However, most coniferous plantations will undergo re-structuring at some point in the future to create a more diverse age and species composition. The nature of this restructuring will vary between stands, but may include thinning, partial or complete felling and replanting, and the extension of some plantations. These actions will tend to occur in phases, and may require associated works such as the construction of access tracks and storage areas.

The character of new woodland planting is likely to be influenced strongly by the availability of grants and Forestry Commission guidelines. It is likely that new woodlands will be sited in areas which have a greater ability to physically sustain them than some past plantations, and that they will incorporate a greater proportion of broadleaf species and areas of open space.

Some coniferous plantations may be subject to insect infestation, such as from the pine beauty moth; this may result in the premature death of trees.

Guidance

It is important to plan strategically the restructuring of existing plantations and the planting of new woodland within this character type, and to consider what kind of image will be created by such works. The landscape impact of a woodland within this character type will primarily depend on its size, shape and species composition in relation to the surrounding openness and simple nature of the sweeping moorland.



Plantation appears to blend into midground, its simplicity complementing the surroundings.



Restructuring may either create a diversity which contrasts to the surrounding simple land cover, or it may be managed to integrate with the very subtle variations of landform and drainage conditions



Woodland will generally appear most fitting where tree growth, species composition and stand density directly relates to the specific conditions of a site. To avoid fencing, this would ideally involve a reduction of deer and sheep numbers to levels at which they do not pose a grazing threat. Unfortunately, this is invariably difficult to achieve in the short term, so that fencing will usually be necessary. This enclosure can result in a woodland possessing a strongly contrived character where there is the formation of a hard edged or dense stand (this is accentuated when animal numbers within the surrounding area are not reduced to compensate for the loss of land, resulting in an increase of grazing pressure in areas surrounding the wood).

Although there may currently be no easy alternative to fencing, the use of natural barriers within the design of a woodland will generally appear more appropriate to the character of the landscape, as well as reducing the length of necessary fencing, for example by extending to rock faces, watercourses, loch shores or the sea. Key considerations of the latter of these will be how far water levels fluctuate during the year and whether fencing to the waters edge will restrict pedestrian access. The planting of conifer stands along the edge of water bodies may also be resisted by conservation agencies on the grounds of potentially affecting the water ecosystem.



Woodland form relates to physical landscape characteristics which limit its extent and density

Where fencing is necessary, the impact of enclosure may be minimised where fence lines follow the lie of the land and a stand is periodically thinned.



Fence lines attempt to relate to landform, but woodland extends to form hard edge over time, where inadequately managed.



Reduction of grazing pressure allows expansion of wood, directly related to site conditions.

It is important to consider the need and effect of service facilities during the restructuring or new planting of a woodland. The impact of elements such as access tracks, plough lines and storage areas can be quite substantial within locations of sweeping moorland, although this will depend on their design and management, and particularly their scale.



Difficult to discern scale of plantation. Minimal width of road results in this appearing as an inferior element.



Excessive ground erosion caused by track and drainage channel construction creates a negative image.

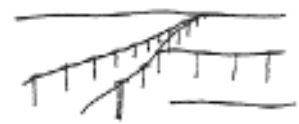
Power lines, masts and aerials

The location of powerlines, masts or aerials may constitute a force for change within this landscape character type. The visual impact of locating these elements within the landscape tends to mainly concern the creation of focal points and lines within a landscape which is otherwise largely undifferentiated, especially where they require access tracks or buildings.

The impact of these elements will depend on their design, their cumulative effect, and whether they impose their character upon the local area.



Single minor element



Cumulative impact. Double line of wires creates spatial corridor.

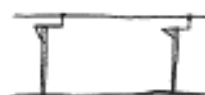
Guidance

It is generally preferable to upgrade or add to existing powerlines, masts or aerials, rather than constructing new structures, especially as vertical elements are so clearly visible within this landscape.

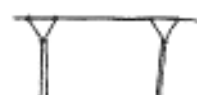
Although it is difficult to introduce powerlines, masts or aerials without them appearing as a contrasting element to the sweeping peatland, their impact can appear less disruptive where they relate to the specific characteristics and lie of the land. They will also tend to appear less negative where they possess a balanced aesthetic form and avoid associated facilities such as access tracks, which indicate their relative scale and reinforce a utilitarian image.



Repetition of elements and balanced form



Repetition of elements, unbalanced form



Precarious angle of supports can appear visually unstable



Contrast of form prevents powerline being seen as continuous element

Wind energy development

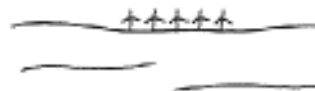
This landscape character type may be favoured for windfarm development on account of its typically consistent and high wind speeds, and its open space and fairly flat landform. A windfarm will

relate to the exposed, wind dominated character of this landscape, and can appear as a spectacular, futuristic-looking and sculptural addition. However, it may also conflict with the sense of remoteness and 'wild land' within many areas, particularly if a development requires associated facilities such as tracks and substations.

Guidance

A windfarm will tend to appear most appropriate where it is located within the wide open areas of this landscape character type, so that the size of the turbines appear inferior to the scale of the surrounding space. A windfarm should aim to portray a simple and sculptural image within moorland surroundings, as this landscape possesses no distinct pattern; this means that the layout of a windfarm will tend to appear most rational where it is arranged in a clearly ordered manner, as a unified and concentrated group with its own identity.

The location of a windfarm will tend to appear less disruptive where it avoids the construction of permanent facilities such as access tracks and buildings. This is important, as wind turbines generally have a lifespan of around 25 years, at the end of which they can be easily removed (replacement requires new planning permission). However, permanent features such as access tracks and substations have a substantial visual impact within sweeping moorland which is more difficult to reverse. If absolutely necessary, the impact of tracks can be minimised where they are narrow (possibly partially restored after the construction phase) and follow the lie and specific character of the land. Substations will generally appear most appropriate where they relate to the design and scale of other buildings in the landscape.



Windfarm scale appears inferior to the surrounding landscape. Simple, ordered form seen as 'controlled' human artefact.



Windfarm affects entire area. Rationale for layout is unclear. Access tracks portray a negative image of ground disturbance.

Peat extraction

Hand cutting of peat for domestic use has traditionally taken place within many areas of this landscape character type, usually occurring at a slow and sustainable rate. However, this may not be the case for mechanical peat extraction which is increasing within some areas of this character type. This is for both domestic use (usually involving the removal of peat 'sausages' or peat blocks with a digger) and commercial means with open cast extraction. The full effects of mechanical peat extraction over long periods of time is unknown. However, it is likely that it has the potential to affect drainage regimes and water levels, and removes peat at a rate which will have knock on effects for the biodiversity of the landscape.

Large scale peat extraction will have a visual impact on the landscape. The nature of this relates to the specific character of the place, the scale of operations, and the need for facilities such as tracks and storage and loading areas.

Guidance

The cutting of peat for domestic purposes is currently unregulated. However, it can be advised that until a time exists when the potential effects of mechanised peat cutting is fully understood, this practice should only proceed with great caution. Any form of peat extraction will have an impact on the landscape; however, this may appear less disruptive where the pattern of extraction relates to the traditional character of peat cutting, and where the extent of the works do not appear to dominate the moorland landscape scale. The impact of operations may also be reduced by strategically planning phases which will allow gradual regeneration of the vegetation. This may not be possible in some areas, however, due to the sensitivity of the habitat, where it may be more appropriate to encourage the reversion to another habitat type, such as wetland.

1_a FLAT PEATLAND



landscape character subtype 1a FLAT PEATLAND



This landscape forms a subtype of the sweeping moorland landscape character type previously discussed. This means that it shares the same key characteristics as sweeping moorland; however, some of these slightly differ in their nature and emphasis, mainly determined by a subtle difference of landform.

key characteristics

- This landscape possesses a **flat landform** and **immense openness** which creates **extreme exposure** and **panoramic visibility**.

There is a **dominance of the sky** within the composition of landscape elements, and this typically offers an exciting display of approaching and passing weather systems, with frequent changes of light and colour and 'racing' clouds.

This exposed landscape is often subject to **strong winds**, and this affects the experience of these areas, the wind often blowing and whistling around, and its effect seen by swaying grasses, ripples on water, and the permanent sculpturing of wind-pruned trees.



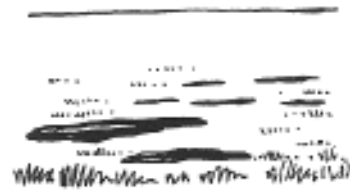
- Most parts of this landscape seem **very remote**, as it is largely uninhabited and access by vehicle is mainly limited to a few forest or estate tracks. There is little human activity, and what exists is mainly confined to forest workings and trains.
- There is an **extreme simplicity in the visual composition** of this landscape, mainly comprising the sky, a flat skyline, the vegetation and occasional pools. As this arrangement tends to vary little, it is typically **difficult to determine distance or scale** within views, accentuated by the effects of visual foreshortening when looking across a flat plane. However, there is an **acute awareness of other experiential characteristics** within this landscape, so that, for example, the occasional sound of running water or insects or birds seems disproportionately intense.

Few visual foci exist within this landscape character type, so that it is typically difficult to determine orientation; local focal points are, however, very occasionally formed by the location of a building or loch.

Views of very distant hills exist in most areas of this landscape character type. These hills tend to have very distinctive profiles, and they form faint backcloths to the horizon, their appearance often seeming to alter as one moves through the landscape and with changing weather and light conditions.



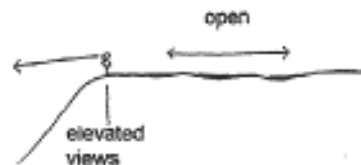
- **Water** forms a dominant element within most areas of this landscape. This is mainly evident as a wet, spongy, vegetation, and the location of lochs, water channels and *dubh lochans*. The latter of these often occur in distinct patterns, although this tends to be only clearly visible from elevated viewpoints, such as from surrounding plateaux or hills.



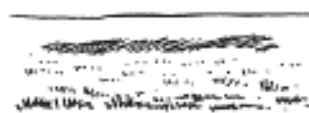
- The wetness and infertility of the peatland results in this landscape possessing a very **distinct flora**, dominated by *sphagnum* mosses, some of which are particularly conspicuous on account of their vibrant colours. The landscape is also inhabited by **many different kinds of insects** - bright, colourful dragonflies tending to create the most noticeable of displays in summer. Areas of flat peatland also have a **distinct bird population** - most salient when these are calling at certain times of the year - particularly the curlews and plovers. Many of these creatures are seasonal visitors.

Large areas of this character type are designated, on account of the international, as well as local, importance of the habitat. The designations also reflect the sensitivity of this landscape to any disturbance.

- Some areas of this landscape character subtype are located upon **plateaux**. The elevation of these areas and their surrounding space creates an even greater sense of exposure, particularly upon the edges of the landform, where distant views are afforded.



- Some parts of flat peatland are 'clothed' by an extensive cover of **coniferous plantations**. Within distant views, the large size and uniformity of these appears to blend into the horizontal composition of the landscape; however, at closer proximity, the plantations define spaces within the landscape by creating edges, enclosures and shapes. Their facilities, such as access tracks and storage areas, also have a substantial impact in the landscape, although it should be noted that the character of most of these plantations result from a past forestry practice no longer advocated.



From a distance, plantation appears to blend into horizontal midground



At closer proximity, plantations contrast to open and undifferentiated character of surroundings

- A **railway** runs through the most extensive area of this landscape character type within Caithness and Sutherland. This creates a line which stands out within its local surroundings, contrasting to the undifferentiated character. The trains may appear disturbing to some within this quiet, remote landscape; however to others, the activity and associated features, such as snow barriers, create an interesting focal addition of historic and social significance. The trains also allow a number of people to view this character type who would otherwise be unlikely to visit and appreciate some of its qualities.

transitions

- As a landscape character subtype, flat peatland is usually enclosed by sweeping moorland. The transitions between these tend to be very subtle in nature, the change of character most closely linked to differences of landform and drainage.

key forces for change and design guidance

General

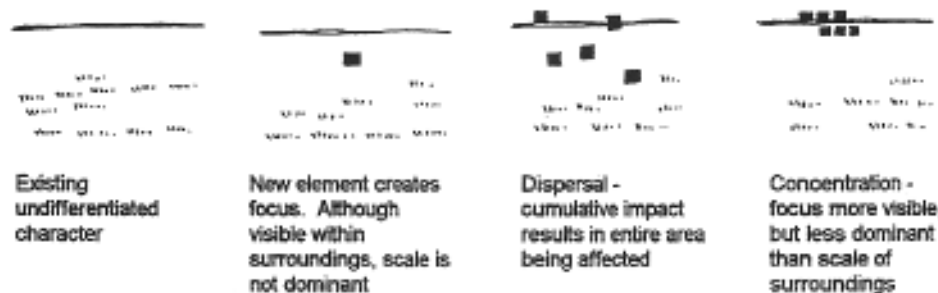
As a subtype of the sweeping moorland character type, this landscape shares the key forces for change discussed within the previous section. However, the nature of some of these are slightly different; this is mainly influenced by the extreme sensitivity of the flat peatland habitat, and limited by its designations, ground instability and inaccessibility to vehicles.

The introduction of new elements are likely to form foci within this landscape, on account of its extreme simplicity of visual composition and undifferentiated character. Vertical elements are also seen from far distances on account of the flat landform. New features may divert attention from the characteristic experience of this landscape and the appreciation of its open space and remoteness.

Any human disturbance will tend to have a substantial impact within this landscape, on account of its sensitivity to change and the fine balance which exists between the different constituents of the habitat; these take a long time to recover from disturbance, if ever at all. For these reasons, where physical change does occur, it can portray a very negative image.

Guidance

It is imperative that the planning of any change within flat peatland considers the very sensitive and finely balanced composition of the physical, aesthetic and social characteristics of this landscape. The strategic implications of any change should always be considered; this is particularly important within this character subtype, not only because of its international importance, but because forces for change tend to have knock-on effects and extend their impact over a vast area. This may mean it is most appropriate to concentrate, rather than to disperse, elements.



It is particularly difficult to locate and design new elements within this landscape; this is because flat peatland generally contains few features or land differentiation to which these can relate. This means that new elements will tend to impose their own character upon their surroundings.



Guidance

It is generally most appropriate to design structures so that they possess a simple form which relates to the simple composition of elements within this landscape and do not distract from its characteristic experience. The impact of new structures can also seem less disruptive where their function does not portray a dominant image - seen more as a neutral element within the surroundings.



Element seen as subtle addition to the horizon

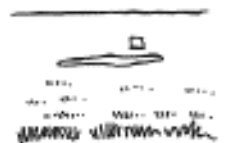


Clear contrasting feature seen as part of the sky. Affects only small area on the ground, although visible from afar.



Complex form contrasts to landscape composition - seen as conflicting focus.

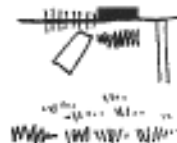
The siting of a new element will tend to appear most appropriate where it relates to an obvious existing feature; however, as these are few and far between within this landscape, it may seem most suitable to locate features in an ordered fashion or as a clear focus.



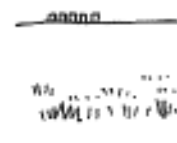
New element relates to existing feature - a lochan



Contrast of simple focus within the landscape



Complex form with unclear rationale for arrangement



Order creates simple form which collectively relates to landscape

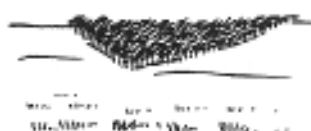
Coniferous plantations

Most existing coniferous plantations within this landscape will undergo restructuring at some point in the future, involving practices such as thinning, clearance and replanting. However, some plantations within this landscape character subtype may not be replanted on account of economic factors, for example most woodlands within flat peatland require heavy applications of fertilisers, whilst they often show only slow rates of growth and have limited vehicular access. The planning of plantations is also influenced by the presence of landscape designations within many areas of the flat peatland, as conifer plantations have the potential to affect the delicate ecosystem, for example by changing water levels and attracting new mammal and bird species which compete with the rarer, indigenous types.

It is not always straightforward to remove timber from this landscape, as some stands do not have existing access tracks, and have been surrounded by designations since their planting. The leaving of woodland debris may also affect the landscape, as the decay of tree trunks can result in an increase of ground fertility, affecting the peatland composition.

Guidance

The restructuring of coniferous plantations should be planned to ensure the minimum of peatland disturbance. It should also be designed to retain or create plantations which relate to the landscape composition of flat peatland; this will involve the creation of simple forms which avoids the creation of lines, enclosures or patterns, and require the minimum of service facilities.



Simple plantation form



Plantation creates focal points and spaces, contrasting to the surrounding landscape character

It is imperative that the methods of timber clearance within this character subtype result in only the minimum amount of disturbance to the sensitive peatland soil and vegetation. This may mean that unconventional, more costly, extraction methods are considered feasible on account of their environmental benefits. The potential visual impact of new features such as access tracks, storage areas and drainage channels or plough lines, should also be considered, as the impact of these will depend on their design in relation to the surrounding landscape, for example their line, pattern, shape and materials.

Visitor facilities

There have been proposals for additional visitor facilities within some parts of this character type, in order to encourage a greater number of people to experience the peatland landscape, whilst also informing them about its importance. However, it is invariably difficult to design facilities within this kind of landscape which allow people to visit and appreciate it, without the people themselves affecting its unique qualities which are linked to its inaccessibility and sense of remoteness.

Guidance

The planning and design of any visitor facilities within this landscape should relate to the unique character of the flat peatland; this will mean that 'standard' visitor facility design will be inappropriate. The aim of any facilities should be to portray the landscape in a positive light; this will mean that structures should appear attractive in their own right (not requiring mitigation measures) and possess a simple design - this may appear sculptural within this landscape in the absence of buildings of similar function. It is important that any visitor facilities not only provide information, but also help people to explore the landscape for themselves so that they can experience its unique qualities.



Standard facilities do not directly relate to the landscape and impose their own character upon the site



Low key facilities appear simple and as a minor element within the landscape



Sculptural structure reflects simplicity and stunning image of flat peatland

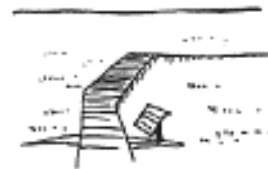
It is imperative that the planning of any visitor facilities should be based on an understanding of the carrying capacity of the landscape to accommodate people without its character being adversely affected. Visitor numbers should be controlled in direct relation to this, and constantly monitored over time to limit any disturbance. In order to minimise impact within the landscape, it may be preferable to concentrate most visitors, possibly upon the edge of an area of the character type, and then provide less formal facilities for those who wish to penetrate its interior.

Trails within flat peatland should avoid habitat disturbance or erosion. This can be done in many ways, for example by laying flag stepping stones upon the peatland surface and bridging the wettest points. The design of trails should relate to how people generally move through peatland in the absence of paths; this is usually in an indirect manner, as a person can only plan a route for a short distance (usually trying to avoid one wet patch after another) because of the limited midground visibility within this flat landscape.

The design of trails should also avoid the location of features which will have a dominating impact in the landscape, such as large interpretation boards. Alternatively, it should encourage a personal appreciation of the landscape, for example by having points which prompt people to examine their surroundings, possibly linked to information within a leaflet which they can carry. As the ground conditions for walking within this landscape demand constant attention, it is also preferable to provide points which encourage people to look up in order to take in the wider landscape views which they may otherwise overlook.



Stones have minimal impact and retain experience of stepping through peatland. Stopping places encourage people to look up and around at their surroundings.



The provision of a very 'easy' surface may allow larger numbers of people to travel along the path; however, the characteristic experience of the landscape may be lost - as a result of both the volume of people, and the fast and direct movement that the path encourages.

2 MOORLAND SLOPES AND HILLS



landscape character type 2 MOORLAND SLOPES AND HILLS



This character type occurs throughout Sutherland - often acting as a transition between low lying sweeping moorland and the higher mountains. The appearance of different areas of this landscape varies; however, they are invariably linked by their overall openness, subtle mix of sloping landform and ground cover, and the forces for change which prevail.

key characteristics

- This landscape comprises **sloping open moorland**, which usually undulates or gradually rises to form broad hills. The convex character of the slopes tends to **limit distant visibility and views of the hill tops** from their base.

The **variable slope** of landform creates some pockets of enclosure; however, at its broadest level this landscape remains **overwhelmingly open**, allowing unrestricted movement.



The character of ground cover varies throughout this landscape, partly as a result of different relief (linked to geology and drainage), but also because of the influence of land use and microclimate. This variation tends to be highlighted under certain season and weather conditions, for example the contrast of slope and rock is emphasised during low light and when covered by a thin layer of snow. The ground cover varies from a dominance of rock in some areas, to dense heather cover, moorland grasses or bog in others.

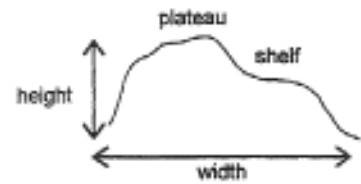
Rocky crags and outcrops occur in some places, especially on hill tops and glen sides, with deposits often collected on the lower slopes as a result of glacial or peri-glacial deposition. A surface of bare rock is sometimes exposed as a result of weathering and/or erosion, and often occurs on hill and plateau tops, steep slopes, or within peat hags and where access tracks pass through the landscape.

- The tops of the hills or plateaux tend to be spaced far apart and of a similar height; this means that it is generally difficult to discern their relative elevation - no one point tending to be more visually dominant than the other, creating **numerous minor foci**. From the high points, aerial views reveal the **interlocking arrangement of the moorland landform**.



The *hills* within this landscape *possess massive proportions*, their bases appearing wider than their height.

The sloping landform sometimes creates *plateaux, shelves and basins* within this character type. These areas, which have gentler slopes, tend to be badly drained and sometimes contain patches of peat haggling, lochs or *dubh lochans*.



- *Towns, estates, crofts and farms, and infrastructure routes* tend to be concentrated along the straths and coastline and the edge of this landscape character type. In these areas, there are often small pockets of shelter, gentle slopes and free drainage which has facilitated the improvement of agricultural land. The *interior of the landscape remains largely uninhabited*, typically inaccessible to vehicles and grazed extensively by deer.

Open and largely undifferentiated interior

Sheltered, semi-enclosed spaces



- *Fragments of broadleaf woodland* exist within some parts of this landscape character type; these mainly comprise birch or rowan species, with some bits of alder, willow and aspen. These patches of woodland tend to be located in fairly inaccessible locations, for example next to rocky crags or within remote straths, where grazing is restricted. Although, even in these areas, grazing pressure tends to still be evident on account of the single age composition of the woodland, and the absence of young trees or seedlings.

Broadleaf woodland within this landscape character type tends to possess a *dense and wind-pruned form*, which often appears fitted to the landform, utilising its shelter.



- *Coniferous plantations* form a key landscape characteristic within some areas of moorland slopes and hills. They tend to be located close to access routes and upon the foot slopes in order to utilise free drainage. The character of each coniferous plantation varies in relation to its age, design and location, and most mature stands represent past forestry practice which is no longer advocated. These coniferous plantations contrast to their moorland surroundings by their colour, texture, shape, spatial enclosure and lines. Some are also particularly noticeable on account of their vertical edges, which contrast to the diagonal lines formed by the sloping landform horizons.



Many coniferous plantations contrast in shape, colour and texture, and create foci.



Fragments of mature broadleaf woodland

transitions

This landscape often borders the *sweeping moorland* character type; indeed these two landscapes have quite a few similar key characteristics and forces for change - principally related to their openness and the peatland ground and vegetation. However, they differ in relation to their landform, and the implications that this has for the impact of forces for change within the landscape. Moorland slopes and hills often form a transition between *sweeping moorland* and the *irregular massif*.



This landscape character type also tends to link to *high cliffs and sheltered bays* where it borders the sea. The coastline is generally not visible from adjacent inland areas because of the convex slope of the landform; however, the variable landform allows distant views of the sea and its bays further along the coast.



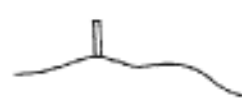
Adjacent coastline is not visible because of slope. However, distant views of the coastline exist, as difference of slope results in a variation of cliff height.

key forces for change and design guidance

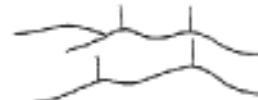
General

The key considerations of change within this landscape character type concern its variable and sloping landform, its openness and its subtle mix of ground conditions.

New elements tend to form foci within this landscape on account of the openness and simplicity of land cover, although the nature of this depends on their location and design.



Dominant single focus

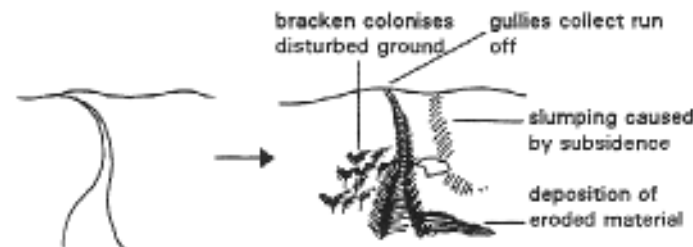


Distributed foci



Minor focus

Any new development which appears to disturb the ground surface, or the lie of the slope within this landscape, will be highly visible and may divide spaces and introduce lines and points. The sensitivity of the moorland soil and slopes means that ground disturbance tends to result in knock-on effects such as erosion, changes in the drainage pattern, and the spread of weed species and peat haggling.



Impact of access track on slopes over time



Distant view of route against moorland vegetation

The introduction of elements which cross this landscape can appear to unify its subtle definition of spaces and local variation of ground conditions. The expansion of certain elements can also disrupt the differentiation between inland and coastal areas or the inhabited and remote areas within this landscape. New developments in the latter of these areas, for example houses, woodland or windfarms, may also require additional infrastructure such as roads and drainage channels, which will have a substantial impact on their own.



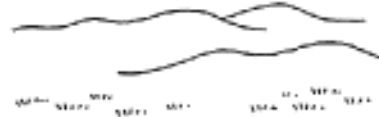
concentration of settlement



New access track encourages further development and mix of land use

Guidance

It is important to consider the full implications of introducing any new elements into this character type, as they will tend to create dominant visual elements within the landscape because it possesses no obvious hierarchy of characteristics.



Mix of slope and ground surface - no distinct hierarchy of characteristics



New elements create dominant focal points, lines and pattern

The location of new elements will generally seem most appropriate where they either appear inferior to the surrounding landscape scale, relate to the specific conditions of a site, or are concentrated as a single feature.



Inferior to surrounding landscape scale



Relates to specific characteristic



Concentrated as a single feature within open space

It is important to consider the scale and proportions of a new structure in relation to the slope of this landscape, so that it appears fitting and visually stable.



Element on slope can appear visually precarious and unstable (→ = visual movement)



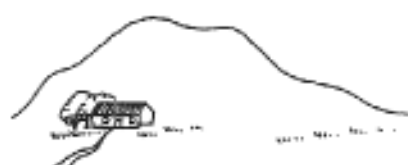
Balanced and logical position

The impact of a development can be limited by avoiding or minimising ground disturbance. This will involve exploring alternative locations, designs and methods of construction and maintenance so that they are the most suitable for a specific development and site, and consider the potential knock-on effects over time. This process may ultimately determine that some features, such as access roads, are inappropriate within particular areas because excessive and irreversible damage can not be avoided because of the sensitive nature of the ground conditions.

Where ground disturbance does occur, every effort should be made to limit and restore the damage as soon as possible. This may have to take place over many years due to the slow rate of vegetation and peatland recovery within moorland areas.

It is imperative to consider the cumulative impact of developments within this landscape as a whole, in order to retain the balance between areas of varying local

character and their distinctive sense of activity or remoteness. This is particularly important when contemplating the potential effect of locating large structures in this character type, which will tend to be highly visible due to the slope and openness of the landscape.



Structure minimises ground disturbance by utilising favourable site



Structure modifies site, causing excessive disturbance

Woodland

Most existing broadleaf woodland within areas of moorland slopes and hills is under pressure from deer and sheep grazing, resulting in stands of similar age structure with little regeneration. This means that most new woodland planting requires fencing which can result in a formal character which contrasts to that of the mature existing woodland. The character of new woodland may also appear contrived where it comprises a diverse mix of species planted irrespective of the specific conditions of the place, or the age of the woodland and the typical succession of native species.

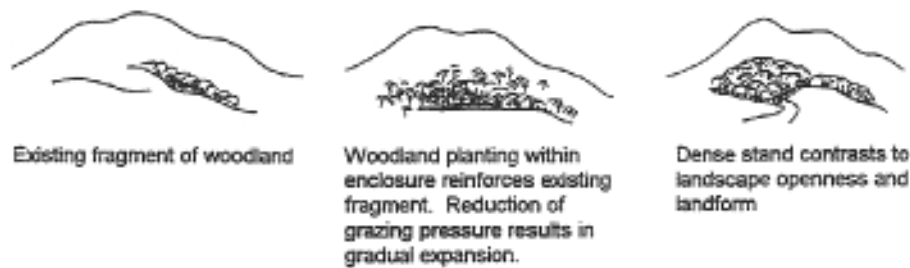
Many of the existing coniferous plantations within this landscape are undergoing restructuring, or will do so at some point in the future. This will tend to occur in phases. Any clearance, ploughing or drainage works tend to be highly visible within this landscape on account of the slope of the landform and its openness.

Guidance

Reduction of the heavy grazing pressure which exists within most parts of this landscape character type would encourage woodland regeneration, although this may be resisted by many land owners and crofters unless financial incentives are offered in compensation for the necessary reduction of sheep and deer numbers. It is also very important to manage existing woodlands in order to encourage the development of a diverse and more resilient age, and possibly species, structure.

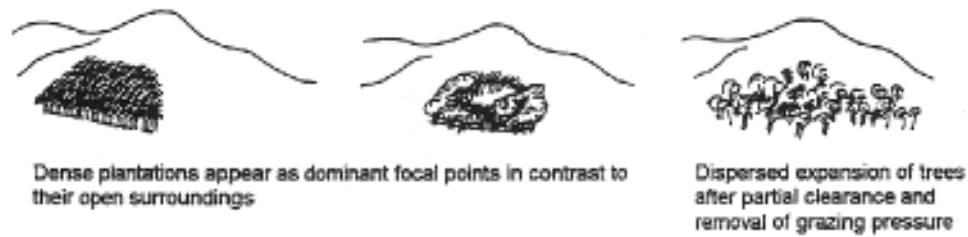
Although woodland regeneration, rather than planting, generally appears most appropriate to the character of this landscape, tree planting does enable an increase of the resource at a faster rate. If a woodland is to be designed, particular attention should be paid to how it relates to the wide open space within this landscape as a whole, in addition to the local variations of landform and ground cover.

New planting will tend to appear most appropriate where it relates to existing fragments of woodland within this landscape character type, which mainly run along water courses, loch shores and against the sheltered, steeper slopes. The species composition of new planting should also relate to these fragments and the particular conditions of a place. This will generally result in the use of species such as birch, rowan, alder or willow, together with occasional patches of oak or pine (possibly mixed with exotics for commercial purposes).



The impact of restructuring existing coniferous plantations can be limited by minimising disturbance to the underlying drainage and soil conditions of a site. If clearance occurs in phases, it is important to consider how the remaining standing crop will relate to the landscape, particularly in terms of its extent, shape and edges, and the potential impact of wind throw.

A plantation will tend to appear most appropriate where it seems to sit within the landform of this landscape character type, its form appearing to complement the slope lines. If fencing is required, the impact of this will tend to be most appropriate where retaining a soft edge to the woodland, and by routing fences to follow the lie of the land.



Land management

Agricultural and land management practises are set to continue changing through the provision of subsidies linked to the common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and programmes such as the Scottish Countryside Premium Scheme (SCPS). The impact of these will be most concentrated within the pockets of small farms and crofts within this landscape. It is difficult to predict the nature of these changes, although it is expected that they will encourage greater sustainability of future practises.

Some areas of this landscape character type are being increasingly fenced in order to contain sheep or deer. The introduction of fences creates visual lines which contrast to the surrounding landscape composition; they also prevent unrestricted and 'free' movement which is a typical characteristic of this landscape.

Guidance

Although it is uncertain how the provision of grants and subsidies within agriculture and land management will change in the future, it is envisaged that these will generally promote more sustainable practises. This should concentrate on encouraging better husbandry, particularly the reduction of deer and sheep numbers and their removal within sensitive areas such as peat hags, in addition to improved muirburn and weed control.

It is preferable to avoid the fencing of moorland slopes and hills, particularly within remote areas. However, the impact of fences may be somewhat minimised by routing

them to follow the lie of the land, by providing pedestrian gateways, and by ensuring that any enclosure does not merely divert or concentrate existing grazing pressure.

Infrastructure

The sloping landform and moorland conditions of this landscape has tended to limit development of infrastructure in the past. However, modern construction techniques can now overcome many previous constraints, allowing the building of new roads, tracks, powerlines and aerals. These tend to have a substantial impact in the landscape, not only visually by introducing lines and focal corridors, but also physically because of the requirement for ground modification such as embankments and drainage channels. Elements of infrastructure may also contrast to the perception of remoteness within many areas of this landscape type, although their impact will depend on the specific location, design and cumulative effect.



Existing undifferentiated character

Introduction of infrastructure - lines, points and corridors - conflict with remote character.

Guidance

The impact of infrastructure can be reduced by minimising ground modification and disturbance, and where any damage is restored and repaired. Infrastructure provision will also appear most appropriate where it is designed to relate to the particular character of a location, especially its scale or rural nature.



Direct wide route conflicts with characteristics



Indirect, narrow road allows route to follow most stable ground, avoiding excessive disturbance. Construction method minimises and restores any damage.

It is important to strategically plan the location of infrastructure within this landscape and to take into account the cumulative impact of elements, especially because they tend to be highly visible. It is generally more appropriate to upgrade existing facilities rather than construct new services, or alternatively to locate new elements near to existing settlements or access routes in order to retain some areas unaffected.



Existing



Upgrading of existing facilities



New facilities dominate old character

Wind energy development

This landscape may be favoured for windfarm development on account of its typically high wind speeds, its open space and the presence of 33 and 132 kV powerlines within some areas. A windfarm will relate to the

exposed and wind dominated character of this landscape, and may appear as a positive, futuristic-looking and sculptural addition. However, it may also conflict with the sense of remoteness and 'wild land' character of many locations, particularly if a development requires associated facilities such as access tracks and substations.

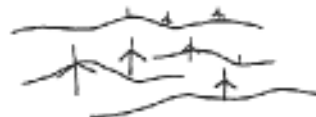
It is invariably difficult to locate numerous wind turbines within this landscape without creating a confusing visual image, on account of the variable nature of the sloping landform.

Guidance

A windfarm will tend to appear most appropriate where it is located within the wide open areas of this landscape character type, so that the size of the turbines appear inferior to the scale of the surrounding space. A windfarm should aim to portray a simple and sculptural image within moorland surroundings, as this landscape possesses no distinct pattern to which it can relate. This is generally very difficult to achieve within areas of variable slope, for although a single turbine may clearly relate to a specific point, it is hard to locate numerous turbines in this manner without creating visual confusion. This means that it tends to be most appropriate to arrange a windfarm in a concentrated and/or clearly ordered group.



Windfarm appears simple and inferior in scale to open surroundings



Confusing image created when turbines are sited at variable height, slope and spacing



Limited impact when concentrated, simple layout has clear relationship to land.

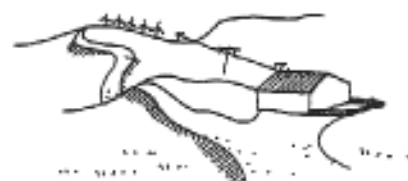
The location of a windfarm will tend to appear less disruptive where it minimises the need of associated service facilities, such as buildings and access tracks. This is important, as wind turbines usually have a limited lifespan of 15-25 years, at the end of which they can be easily removed (replacement requiring additional planning permission). However, permanent features, such as access tracks, tend to have a substantial impact in this landscape which is more difficult to rectify.

If absolutely necessary, the impact of access tracks may be lessened by designing them to be narrow (possibly partially restored after the initial construction phase), to follow the lie of the land and minimise the need for cuttings and embankments, and to avoid the channelling of water and subsequent erosion and deposition. They will also tend to be less visible where they are constructed of dark aggregate which does not stand out from the surrounding vegetation.

Substations will generally appear most appropriate where they relate to the design and size of other buildings in the landscape and are kept slightly apart from the windfarm development so that they do not indicate the relative scale of the turbines and contrast in form.



Windfarm appears to have sculptural image within landscape as temporary feature utilising resource



Windfarm appears more dominant and disturbing when linked to permanent features. These confuse the visual composition and may portray an industrial image.

River and lochs

Some landowners may wish to modify river channels and lochs within this landscape, mainly for the purpose of increasing fish stocks, but also to build a head of water in some places for the purpose of small scale hydroelectric generation. There is an increasing awareness that the wider river catchment area, including the banks and any existing riparian woodland, should also be actively managed in order to maximise fish stocks.

Guidance

It is important to consider the potential knock-on effects of modifying any river or loch which will be part of an extensive hydrological and ecological system; for example, the clearance of river material, which may act as a breakwater, can cause erosion further down river, with even greater deposition further on.

The presence of woodland along river banks and shores generally improves the conditions for fish, for example by providing partial shade, supplying invertebrates and leaf litter for food, and by reducing direct run off and the siltation of spawning grounds. To encourage woodland growth or regeneration, it is generally advisable to reduce any existing grazing pressure imposed by sheep and deer, rather than resorting to tree planting. However, if this is not possible, fencing can be used to help woodland establishment in the short term. Riparian woodland will appear most appropriate where it relates to the particular river or loch side conditions, reflecting the varying dominance of characteristics within an area of moorland slopes and hills. This approach will also lead to a subtle diversity of habitat.



Woodland regeneration creates variable cover in relation to specific site conditions



Dense plantation - fenced and unthinned with heavily grazed surrounds



Planting within enclosure repeatedly thinned. Gradual expansion as reduction of grazing pressure.

Dams and water pipes will appear as distinctly human-made features within the moorland slopes and hills landscape character type; these appear to contrast with the remote nature of most locations and can also subdivide areas and introduce lines and focal points.

Guidance

Hydroelectric development should relate to the specific conditions of a locality, in addition to the wider character of the area, so that any new water body or dam appears to sit within the landscape. A development will tend to appear most appropriate where it seems inferior in scale to its surroundings and is of a design which simply contrasts to the landscape without creating visual confusion.



Small scale dam and building appears inferior in scale to landscape



Large dam, building and road dominates surroundings

3 CNOCAN



landscape character type 3 CNOCAN



This landscape character type occupies a large part of west Sutherland. It comprises an extensive, rough and convoluted surface of extremely old and hard rock called Lewisian gneiss, which is abruptly separated from the eastern moorland and mountain interior by the Moine Thrust Zone. The landscape consists of a concoction of different landform and ground cover.

key characteristics

- This landscape possesses a **deeply undulating landform**. There tends to be a fairly equal balance of high points, known as cnocs, and low points within basins. The cnocs tend to be of similar height and equal visual dominance.
- **Exposed rock** forms a key characteristic throughout the **jumbled visual composition** of this character type, which also comprises variable slope lines, patches of various vegetation and scrub woodland, water bodies and water courses, and the occasional settlement or isolated house.



The contrasting mix of rock and vegetation within this landscape often seems to create **natural patterns**. These are highly complex, although they can seem clearer when certain elements are highlighted under particular season or weather conditions; for example, low light highlights variation of slope, and a light cover of snow accentuates the contrast between rock outcrops, vegetation and landform depressions.



Clear skies



Low light

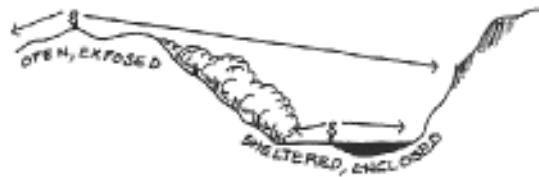


Light snow cover

As the **pattern of land cover and visual foci seems random** within this landscape, it is frequently difficult to get a sense of orientation. This can be both exciting and bewildering, as it is unclear what is around the next corner.

- There is a strong **contrast of experience between the cnocs and the low points** within this landscape, especially when repeatedly passing from one to the other. The cnocs are generally high points formed by rock outcrops or crags, and offer extensive views of the surrounding interlocking landform, and the sea and distant mountains in some areas. In contrast, the low points tend to be semi-enclosed, poorly drained, and sometimes occupied by a lochan. The shelter and quiet within these places creates the feeling of a hidden retreat, in contrast to the higher exposed ground surrounding them. This is sometimes

accentuated by the location of small fragments of woodland, which usually consist of birch, aspen, alder or oak, tending to appear moulded to the landform due to their wind pruned form.



Many areas of this landscape seem quite *remote and 'barren'*, as they remain largely uninhabited, with only the minimal amount of ground modification by weathering and erosion, and a prevalence of exposed rock. Many visitors find this combination appealing, as it suggests to them a 'primitive wildness' (although it has been, and remains to be, affected by the practice of grazing, muirburn and the decline of woodland).

This landscape possesses an *indented coastline with many offshore islands*, which appear as focal points within offshore views. Beaches are often located within the coastal inlets, leading back into an area of dunes. The beaches are often targeted by visitors to the region, which has led to many places offering *tourist services* such as visitor information and signs, car parks, campsites and caravan parks.



Aquaculture buoys and rafts are located at intervals along the sheltered coast of cnocan. The appearance and intermittent activity associated with these tends to attract attention to these facilities within offshore views.



Landscape features tend to appear fitted into the cnocan landform as they utilise favourable areas, for example the shelter within hollows, good drainage on slopes and access along the coastal edge.



Crofts and woodland tend to utilise the lower slopes, glens, basins, or the coastal edge within the landscape.

The layout of buildings is typically restricted by the cnocan landform. This means that *settlements tend to be either concentrated*, with buildings arranged around a harbour or area of good agricultural ground, or *organised as a series of separate groups*. Crofting inby tends to be highlighted by the bright colour and formal division of the fields in contrast to the surrounding rough landform, vegetation and rock.



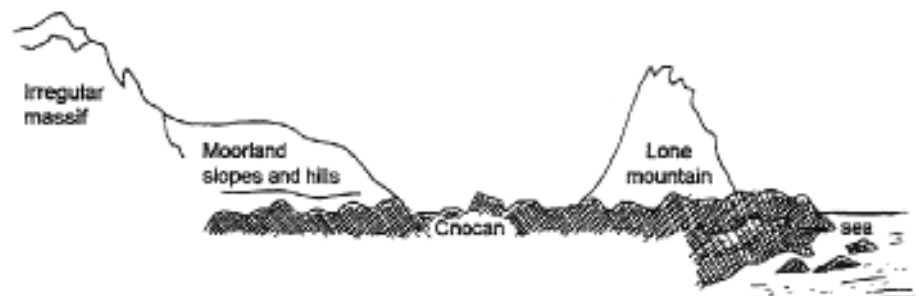
The *west coast harbour settlements* tend to be quite busy in the summer months, as they are very popular with visitors to Sutherland. This may be

partly attributed to their compact layout (ideal bases for short walks and sea-based recreation), a combination of service facilities and fishing activity, a sheltered microclimate, and the appeal of a variety of coastal colours, smells and views.

- This landscape character type contains a *few very deep, winding and narrow river glens*. These are sometimes lined by mature broadleaf woodland, their shelter and containment resulting in the noise of the running water echoing between opposite slopes.

transitions

This landscape character type tends to either rise up into *moorland slopes and hills* or the *irregular mountain massif*, or occasionally surround a *lone mountain*. It borders the sea along an indented coastline with many islands arranged around steep-sided sheltered waters.



key forces for change and design guidance

General

When assessing the potential impact of forces for change within this landscape, the key considerations tend to relate to its landform, particularly its scale, the balance between high and low points, the variation of ground cover, and the impact of disturbance within the semi-enclosed spaces and on the sense of remoteness. The key forces for change tend to be infrastructure upgrading, agricultural change, settlement and tourist development, and house building.

It is difficult to accommodate any additional elements into this landscape without creating new visual foci and affecting the balance between the cnocs and the low points. If new elements are linked to one key characteristic, for example lochans, this may highlight this one characteristic over the others within the generally mixed visual composition.



Jumbled visual composition



New visual foci, concentrated within low points

The introduction of any new element into this landscape may cause visual confusion due to the complex visual composition. New developments may also affect the sense of remoteness in some areas, and they may seem inappropriate if they require landform modification.



Jumbled visual composition. No indication of scale. Sense of remoteness.



Visual confusion. Human artefacts dominate landscape as they impose their own character upon the area.

A new element may appear to disrupt the character of the semi-enclosed spaces within this landscape if it dominates in scale, creates a disturbance which conflicts to the existing remote qualities, or creates views out of these places.



Remote space with 'hidden' quality.



New structures dominate in scale. Access routes affect previous sense of remoteness.

Guidance

The location of numerous elements is less likely to cause visual confusion where they directly relate to each other, as well as to the landscape; for example, sited in direct relation to a similar key characteristic, or concentrated or ordered as a distinct group. The relationship to the landscape will appear clearer where new elements are sited within a local area of similar key characteristics, rather than where these are mixed together.



Sited in direct relation to similar characteristic



Rationale for layout unclear



Ordered as group within distinct area

New elements should relate to the existing location of features within this character type, many of which appear fitting to the landscape by utilising favourable conditions for their function, for example shelter, a view, or a water supply.



Existing feature utilises favourable conditions

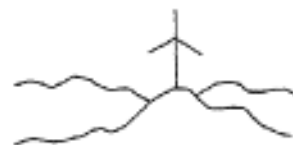


New feature relates to similar conditions



Rationale for new feature unclear

As new elements tend to form foci within this landscape, it is particularly important that new structures are designed to possess a simple and visually balanced form. These elements should be sited so that they appear appropriate to their specific location as well as the wider landscape setting, either as an inferior feature sitting within a low point, or as a logical focus to a cnoc. They will tend to appear most appropriate where they possess a clear form which either relates to the existing character of features within the landscape, or simply contrasts to them as a 'sculptural' addition, thereby avoiding visual confusion.



Appropriate focus to cnoc, directly related to function. Simple, visually balanced form.



Rationale for location unclear. Unbalanced and visually confusing form.



Simple feature inferior to landform scale.

It is important to strategically consider the location of elements within this landscape, in order to retain the sense of remoteness which exists within most areas. This may mean that the concentration of new elements, rather than dispersal, is preferable. It is particularly important to consider whether the design and function of any new element will conflict with the experience of the semi-enclosed spaces within this landscape, for example, a noisy and active development will contrast to the quiet qualities and sense of retreat.



Dispersal of elements affects entire area. Distributed foci.



Concentration of elements affects small area, although focus is more dominant.

Road upgrading and new buildings

There is demand for the upgrading of some of the existing single track roads within this landscape, as these tend to restrict traffic because of their rolling nature and their many blind bends and cnoc summits. Although road upgrading can offer safer travel, it will affect the unique 'rollercoaster' experience which the existing narrow roads offer within this landscape. It will also reduce the sense of surprise which occurs as one travels from one semi-enclosed space to another, affecting the quiet and 'hidden' character of these areas, and diverting attention away from the foreground landscape characteristics.

There is also a demand for new buildings within some areas of this character type; this is mainly for houses, agriculture or fish farming buildings, or for development linked to tourism.

Guidance

It is important to consider the overall need for road upgrading within this landscape as a whole, prior to any phased works. This is because the existing single track roads within this character type offer a unique experience and degree of integration with the landscape which tends to be affected by upgrading.

It is imperative to consider the potential knock-on effects of road widening, for example faster traffic can pose an increased risk to loose animals or pedestrians and cyclists, which may then result in additional requirements for structures such as street lighting and traffic calming features within the settlements, and additional signs, road barriers and fencing on the open road; these will all have further impact in the landscape, both separately and cumulatively. Although road upgrading may enable some industries and settlements to expand which would otherwise be restricted by their poor access, this has to be balanced against a possible loss of landscape resource, which will also have financial implications; for example resulting in less visitors, or these passing through to stop in other areas where they are able to experience the intrinsic character of the landscape.

A double track road will tend to appear most appropriate where it directly relates to the character of this landscape, retaining some of its curving and undulating form. It will also appear more suitable and minimise visual confusion, where it possesses a simple design which does not encourage excessive speeds and avoids the need for additional features, such as barriers, bridges, cuttings, embankments, wide junctions and signs.



Main road and associated structures dominate character of landscape



Compromised route and design. Sensitive construction avoids excessive disturbance.

Where road barriers are absolutely necessary, they will appear most appropriate where they are designed to either extend out from the surrounding landscape, for example as a stone wall, or comprise a simple light structure which appears minimal within the rural character and scale of this landscape.



Standard barriers tend to appear excessive in scale within this landscape.



Stone wall extends out of surrounding landform as subtle physical barrier



Simple, light visual barrier appears as minimal element within the landscape.

The development of any new building or road upgrading should minimise ground disturbance wherever possible, as the typical vegetation and peatland soils are very slow to recover, if they are able at all. Where works do cause disturbance, the impact may be somewhat reduced by ensuring that the ground is subsequently restored sensitively.



Human artefacts fit into landscape



Human artefacts dominate over landscape characteristics

New buildings will appear most appropriate, where they directly relate to the existing structures within this landscape, both in their design and location (for example, located within an area of favourable ground conditions or microclimate). The planning of any new building should take into account the overall existing pattern of settlement within the landscape and the potential cumulative impact of any development, to avoid uncharacteristic sprawl or concentration of structures.



Existing dispersal or grouping



Uncharacteristic sprawl or intensification

Settlement and tourist facilities

Settlements within this landscape typically have rural crofting or harbour origins, closely integrated to the landform and ground characteristics. However, there are now some demands for the provision of facilities which have been more closely associated with urban settlements in the past, for example tourist centres, pavements, roadside barriers, play areas, car parks, lamp posts and large signs. These elements contrast to the traditional rural character of this landscape and can cause visual confusion in some areas.

Guidance

The introduction of 'urban' facilities into the settlements within this landscape character type should be avoided if possible. However, if absolutely necessary, they may appear most appropriate where designed to relate to the distinct character and scale of the cnocan landscape; rather than limiting the choice of furniture and materials to standard catalogues (sometimes assuming they are the cheapest), alternative options for local 'one off' design and construction should be explored, the product of which is usually more closely related to a particular place.

It is important to consider the cumulative impact of visitor facilities within this landscape character type, to avoid replication, and therefore competition, of some services, whilst others are lacking. Visual confusion can also arise from the excessive provision of signs which represent competing facilities.

Service facilities require maintenance, and it is essential to ensure that adequate resources are available for this prior to construction, to avoid the development of an image of neglect over time. It is imperative that the design and scale of any tourist facilities relate to the rural character of this landscape, where the smallest of details can impose a negative image, for example the character of a remote parking place can appear overwhelmed by smooth grass verges, high walls, large litter bins, signs and kerbs.



Agriculture and land management

The agricultural parts of this landscape have undergone great change over recent years, as management has tended to become less intensive. Most have been under heavy grazing pressure, mainly from sheep within the crofting townships and estate farmland, and from deer upon the open moorland. This heavy grazing has resulted in a reduced biodiversity in places, with selective grazing often causing ground erosion, and the spread of weed species such as bracken occurring when intensive grazing is finally relaxed or abandoned.

Land management and agricultural practices are set to continue changing through the provision of subsidies through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and programmes such as the Scottish Countryside Premium Scheme (SCPS). It is difficult to predict how these will have an impact within the cnocan landscape in the future, although it is expected that they will encourage a greater sustainability of land management and agricultural practises. This may also be influenced by the potential for more crofting townships to become owned and managed by community trusts which generally encourages a greater diversification of land use and entrepreneurial development.

There is a demand for additional fencing within some areas of this landscape character type to restrict grazing. The introduction of a fence will create a line and barrier which contrasts to the open character of this landscape and its mixed visual composition.

Guidance

Although it is uncertain how the provision of grants and subsidies will affect agriculture and land management in the future, the promotion of more sustainable practices will probably involve improved animal husbandry (principally the reduction of sheep and deer numbers), the increased control of muirburn and bracken, and the improved maintenance of field boundaries and drainage channels. It may also encourage a greater diversity of practice, for example small scale woodland planting and cropping. It is important that these relate to the particular characteristics within an area of CNOCAN, recognising both its assets and limitations, in order to be sustainable and appear appropriate to the place.

It is preferable to avoid the use of fencing within the moorland areas of this landscape by limiting sheep and deer numbers. However, where absolutely necessary, the impact of fences may be minimised by routing them to follow the lie of the land, by providing many pedestrian gates, and by ensuring that any enclosure is not merely diverting or concentrating the existing grazing pressure.

Woodland

The existing fragments of broadleaf woodland within this landscape tend to be under pressure from sheep and deer grazing, which has resulted in single age structure woodlands with little regeneration.

A few coniferous plantations exist within this landscape. Although the number and extent of these is unlikely to greatly increase in the future, existing plantations will undergo restructuring at some point in time, and usually in phases. This will result in ground disturbance and may involve changes in woodland design.

Guidance

Most existing broadleaf woodlands within this landscape character type are in need of active management, as they are often over-mature or affected by sheep or deer damage, increasing their susceptibility to fungal attack or disease. Although ideally sheep and deer numbers should be reduced to a point at which they do not adversely affect the woodland, in the short term this will probably involve fencing.

The enclosure of a woodland means that it is less likely to seem integrated with its surroundings. However, the visual impact of this can be minimised by locating fences to follow the lie of the land, and possibly by utilising water and precipitous slopes as a barrier wherever possible, and by designing woodlands so that they appear to sit within the landform; the continued management of the woodland, particularly thinning, can also limit the formation of a dense stand. New tree planting will tend to appear most appropriate where it makes use of favourable ground conditions and links to an existing woodland, which can also aid natural regeneration by providing an adjacent seed source.



Although irregular form of woodland at planting, gradually forms dense stand over time with inadequate thinning and no compensating reduction of surrounding grazing pressure.



Enclosure follows water edge and managed to retain loose edge and clearings. Reduction of grazing pressure encourages natural regeneration over a very long period of time.

Aquaculture

Aquaculture has steadily increased over the past 20 years within the inlets and channels of this landscape character type, and may continue to do so in the future as technological advances allow more exposed sites and new species to be exploited. As aquaculture rafts and buoys need to only be accessible by boat, these are often located in very remote areas. Although existing developments tend to form only occasional foci along the coast of the cnocan character type, the potential cumulative impact of this development may be substantial, particularly when seen and encountered from the sea.

Rafts and buoys do not necessarily dominate the visual composition of this character type, despite being highly visible, as they tend to appear as an inferior element in relation to the large scale of the sea expanse. However, their impact also depends on their design and location in relation to the shore, and the cumulative impact of numerous developments. Of greater landscape impact than the rafts and buoys, tends to be that of the associated onshore facilities for aquaculture, which tends to comprise a slipway, large storage buildings, and a yard containing various equipment such as boxes, ropes, buoys and machinery.

Guidance

The location of buoys and rafts within this landscape will appear most appropriate where their siting and arrangement directly relates to the line and spatial containment of the nearest shoreline. Rafts and buoys tend to appear less visually confusing where they appear as a unified group with a consistent design, and create a clearly recognisable shape.



Layout of rafts relates to the coastline, appearing as a simple focus within the enclosed bay.



Layout of rafts contrasts to the coastline and crosses the edge of the bay area.

The visibility of rafts and buoys upon the sea surface may be reduced when they are of a similar colour to the water; however, as the character of the sea constantly varies, this is difficult to achieve, which may mean that it is more appropriate for these elements to be subtly complementing or neutral in colour.

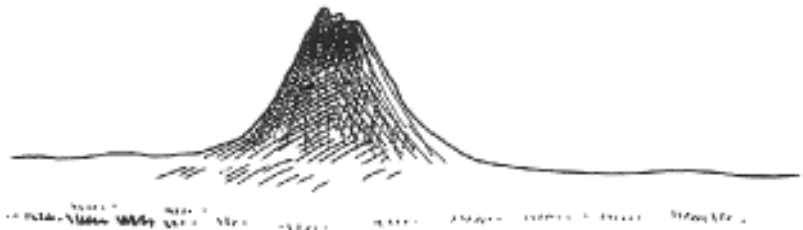
Aquaculture should be planned to consider potential cumulative impact; this is of particular concern within the cnocan character type which tends to be closely associated with this kind of development. This will probably involve the concentration of developments within some areas, and the identification of development free zones in others.

The impact of aquaculture onshore development will seem more appropriate where it is linked to the existing location of buildings and access roads, and is concentrated to avoid visual confusion and clearly ordered to prevent a negative image of clutter. Aquaculture buildings will tend to appear most suitable where they are designed to relate to other structures in the landscape and do not appear dominant in scale.

4 LONE MOUNTAINS



landscape character type 4 LONE MOUNTAINS



This landscape character type comprises individual mountains which lie isolated within an open 'sea' of moorland, like upward pinches in a sheet of fabric. They possess distinctive profiles which are visible far beyond the edge of the character type, often appearing by surprise on the distant horizon of Caithness and Sutherland landscapes.

key characteristics

- The **mountains** in this character type are **located within a wide expanse of open space**, which stresses their importance as **dominant focal points and landmarks**. The size of the mountains is far less than that of the open space surrounding them, which allows the form of the mountains to be fully appreciated (very different to the interlocked nature of most mountain ranges).
- The mountains possess a **distinctive profile** which is high in elevation and usually has steep, sweeping, concave slopes, which make them quite elegant and graceful in appearance, and deceptively steep to climb. This profile is most clearly illustrated by a **simple, clear skyline**, and most obvious when observed from a distance. These views often seem quite startling and surprising, on account of the extreme contrast of the peaks to their surrounding landform.

The **mountain profile sometimes varies from one side to another**, often being very steep on one side and gently rising on the other. This can mean that the mountains appear different from alternative directions, and compromises their reliability as landmarks to those unfamiliar with an area.



- The **character of this landscape greatly varies in different season and weather conditions**. The intricate shape of the mountains tends to be highlighted in patchy sun and cloud, when the effect of shadows 'playing' on the slopes and surrounding moorland can make the landscape seem 'malleable' and 'alive'. The mountains tend to appear more two dimensional in bright light and clear sky conditions, seeming like cardboard cut-outs on the distant horizon, whilst the visibility and focal dominance of the mountains is removed during low cloud, and the peaks are revealed in surprise when finally encountered.



Patchy cloud and sun

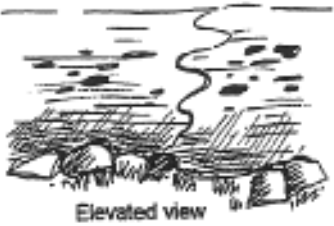



Clear skies



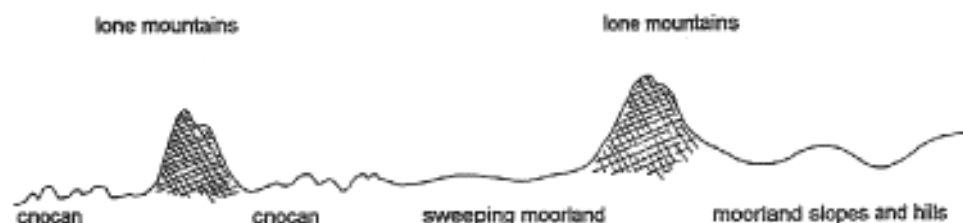
Low cloud

The lone mountains are **extremely exposed**, as they are surrounded by an immense open space. This means that the experience of this landscape is strongly influenced by the wind - especially the feeling and sound of it as it whips around the mountains.

- The peaks of the lone mountains offer **extensive views** of the surrounding area in clear visibility conditions. The angle of these views often catches the reflection of the sky upon water which highlights the pattern of drainage channels and *dubh lochans* within some areas of surrounding moorland.
- 
- Elevated view
- The **scale of this landscape tends to be very difficult to perceive**, as there are no definite size indicators. This means that the true height of the mountain is typically deceptive, especially as visual foreshortening tends to occur when looking up to the peaks from the surrounding moorland. In reality, the height of the mountains varies from a few hundred metres, to Munros over 1000 metres, their identification as a lone mountain being more closely linked to their isolation as a dominant focus within open surroundings, rather than their specific elevation.
 - The mountain peaks are generally topped by **exposed rock**, which usually leads down to scree slopes and then sparse dwarf vegetation, before gradually merging into the moorland surrounds.
 - A large number of **tributaries** exist within this landscape - water tumbling down from the mountain peaks into rivers below. The noise of these water courses and their **waterfalls** often echoes through this landscape in still weather conditions when the howling noise of the wind is calmed. Some **ribbons of broadleaf scrub woodland** provide additional shelter along these water courses, and this mainly comprises wind pruned birch, willow and alder species.
 - This landscape is **largely uninhabited**, creating a sense of remoteness, although some of its peaks attract significant numbers of hill walkers, especially during the summer months. The slopes are generally **grazed by deer**, and some buildings do exist around the base of the footslopes, mainly comprising **estate houses or farm buildings**.
 - **Coniferous plantations** are located at the edge of the footslopes around some of the lone mountains. These create shapes, patterns, lines and landmarks within views from the mountains. They also screen some views of this character type from the surrounding moorland so that the appearance of the mountains on the skyline is even more surprising when finally revealed.
- 
- Elevated view

transitions

This landscape character type is typically located within areas of **sweeping moorland**, or adjacent to **cnocan** or **moorland slopes and hills**. The focal dominance of the mountains means that their influence extends far away into other landscape character types.

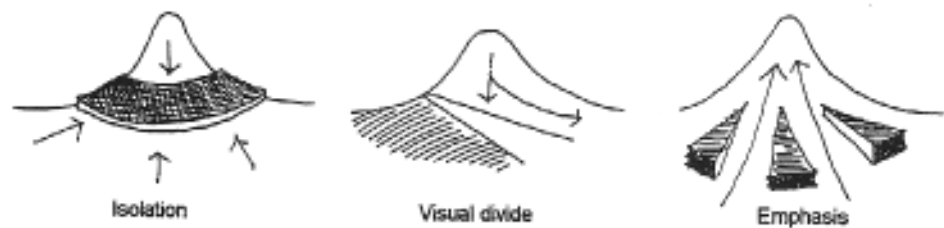


key forces for change and design guidance

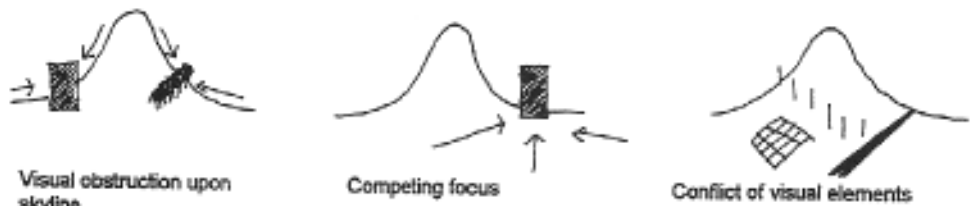
General

Key considerations for change within this landscape concern the potential to alter the relationship between lone mountains and the surrounding moorland, and affect the sense of tranquillity and remoteness which exists within most areas. The vulnerability of the mountain habitat to any disturbance is also a major consideration; some areas of this character type are designated, recognising these sensitivities, and this in itself will influence the nature and control of change within these locations.

Any force for change which affects the existing balance between the mountains and their surrounding space, and how this is appreciated, will have a significant impact in the landscape. Although it may be unlikely that development will occur upon the upper slopes of the mountains themselves, because of their extreme sensitivity to disturbance, the character of the mountains will be affected by changes upon the footslopes and within other surrounding character types. The location of new elements within these areas will affect views into, within, and out of the landscape, on account of the open visibility. They may also isolate, visually divide or emphasise the mountains within the surrounding area.



It is important to consider the potential impact of any change upon the skyline within this character type, as an appreciation of the mountains' distinct profile relies upon this feature. New elements can also compete with the existing focal dominance of the mountains, or conflict with the visual composition of the character type, for example, creating patterns, or diverting attention to new foci, and indicating their relative scale.



The location of new development will tend to have an impact on the experience of this landscape, for example introducing noise or activity which will affect its sense of remoteness.

Guidance

It is important to consider strategically the potential impact of forces for change surrounding this character type, in addition to within the lone mountains themselves. This is particularly important because of the open visibility within this landscape which

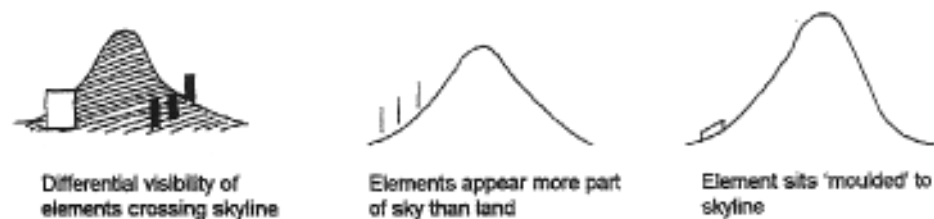
means that change tends to influence a large area; it is also because of the finely balanced nature of the relationship between the mountains and moorland surroundings, and because only a few areas of this landscape character type exist.

Elements will tend to have a greater impact, the closer they are to the mountains, and also if they cross the character type boundary. In order to retain the balance between neighbouring character types, it may be more appropriate to concentrate new elements as minor features within the composition which appear inferior in scale and focal importance, rather than creating dispersal.

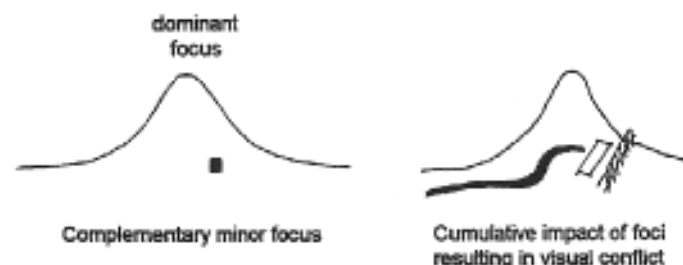
changing balance of visual composition



To avoid visual confusion and obstruction of the distinctive skyline within this character type, new elements will tend to appear most appropriate where they either appear as a light 'sculptural' element - more a part of the sky than the land - or alternatively, sit low upon the skyline, seeming like an minor addition. It is difficult to accommodate elements which cross the skyline without visual confusion arising from their differential visibility against a backdrop of sky and land.



New elements are likely to form foci within this landscape, due to the simplicity of the existing landscape composition. These will tend to appear most appropriate where they appear as a minor focus in relation to the mountains' dominance in views, and are simply arranged to avoid conflicting with the existing visual composition.



Elements may have the greatest impact where they are of a known size, by indicating the relative scale of the mountains and the surrounding open space. In a few locations, this may seem to compromise the focal importance of the lower peaks; however, in some areas, the location of a small focal element can actually heighten the appreciation of the mountains' colossal height.



It is very difficult to accommodate any new development within this landscape without this affecting its intrinsic quality of experience which relies on it being largely uninhabited and undeveloped, with a resulting sense of remoteness. However, activities which directly relate to the experiential characteristics of this landscape, and consequently do not change them, can seem acceptable, for example small numbers of hill walkers, or a small development which utilises a unique natural resource such as the local wind or water power.

Land management

The moorland and lower slopes of this landscape character type tend to be under pressure from grazing - mainly from deer, but also from sheep on the surrounding estate farmlands. The way in which these are currently managed is thought to be partly responsible for a general reduction of biodiversity, in addition to exacerbating peat haggling and the spread of weed species such as bracken which is also influenced by insufficient control of muirburn. Deer and sheep also cause animal track erosion and apply pressure upon the existing fragments of woodland within this landscape, preventing tree regeneration.

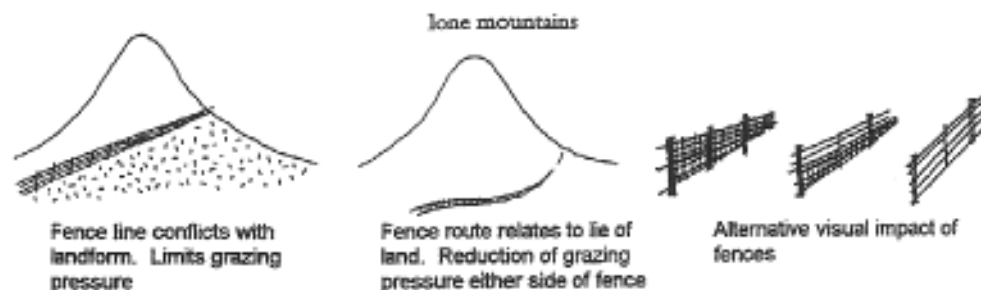
In connection to the high deer and sheep population, there is a demand for additional fencing within some parts of this landscape, particularly to prevent them entering adjacent crofting and farming areas or woodlands.

Access tracks and pathways, mainly for the purposes of stalking, but also used by animals and hill walkers, tend to have a substantial impact in this landscape. This is not only visual, by introducing dominant lines into the landscape - but also physical, by directly causing erosion and diverting drainage, and all of these have further knock-on effects.

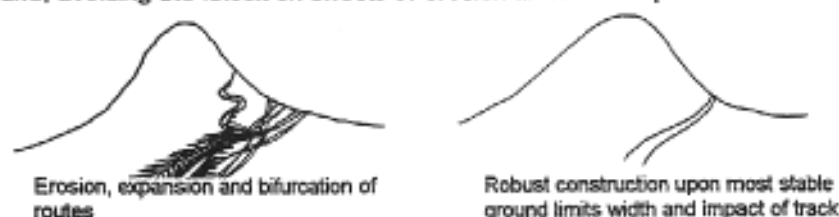
Guidance

Grazing pressure should ideally be reduced where it occurs within this landscape. Control of deer numbers may potentially be directed through the Deer Commission for Scotland, and sheep numbers may be limited through the provision of grants and subsidies via the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and programmes such as the Scottish Countryside Premium Scheme (SCPS).

Fences will have a substantial impact within this landscape, by introducing lines and edges, although this will depend on the route and design of the fence. Their impact may be minimised by being located along the lie of the land and by appearing as visually unrestrictive as possible (although this may then result in a need for flags to warn birds). Although fencing may be used as a short term measure to relieve grazing pressure within sensitive areas, the creation of any enclosure has the potential to divert and concentrate surrounding grazing; this means that it should also require a compensating reduction of animal numbers.



It is difficult to accommodate any access tracks or pathways within this landscape without these appearing visually dominant and affecting the sense of remoteness. However, this may be minimised where tracks follow the lie of the land and are kept to minimum widths. They will also appear more suitable where they avoid any conflict with the existing drainage pattern and are routed upon the most stable ground, avoiding the knock-on effects of erosion and route expansion or bifurcation.



Visitor provision

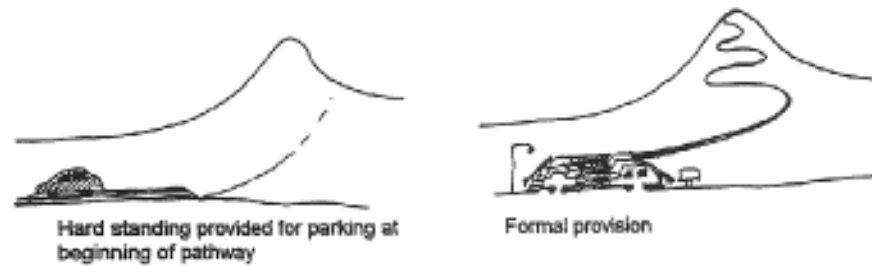
This landscape character type is visited by many hill walkers, most aiming for the Munro peaks (over 3000 feet high) or mountains which possess a particularly dramatic profile. The majority of these visitors park their cars by the edge of the nearest road, which sometimes causes ground erosion and obstructs access. This, in addition to occasional deer disturbance, prompts some landowners to erect signs discouraging people from walking within this landscape character type, especially during the stalking season. These signs portray a very negative and antisocial image which in turn affects the experience of the landscape.

Guidance

Plans for access changes to the Munro peaks within this character type should be considered in consultation with landowners and organisations such as Scottish Natural Heritage and the Mountaineering Council of Scotland. Although it is difficult to upgrade facilities, for example the surfacing of pathways or the provision of informal parking areas, without affecting the experience of this landscape, these measures may limit the extent of disturbance within a landscape by concentrating impact.

The provision of any facilities should be considered strategically in relation to the whole of this character type within Caithness and Sutherland, so that a range of facilities can be provided according to the particular character and demands upon a certain mountain. However, the potential knock-on effects of this must also be taken into account. For example, the provision of additional facilities may actually attract greater numbers of people to a particular peak; this may then create even more pressure in that area, and also divert greater numbers of people to nearby peaks so that these are subject to increased strain.

The design and location of facilities such as pathways and parking areas should directly relate to the character of this landscape. This will generally require them to appear as minimal and informal as possible within this sensitive rural landscape.



Coniferous plantations

Most coniferous plantations which are located adjacent to this landscape character type lie within areas of sweeping moorland or moorland slopes and hills. The nature of forces for change acting within these areas is previously discussed within the relevant sections.

Most coniferous plantations adjacent to lone mountains will undergo restructuring at some point in the future. New plantations may also be created, although these are likely to differ from those which currently exist and represent past forestry practice no longer advocated.

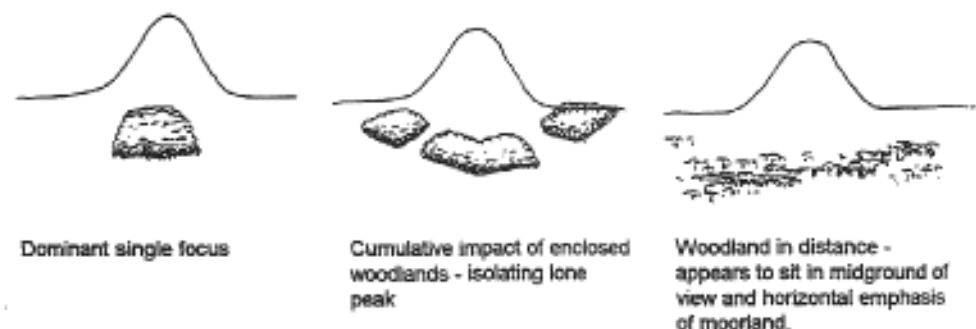
Plantation restructuring is likely to have a great impact upon this landscape character type. Operations will involve noise and activity which can temporarily conflict with the typical experience of this landscape, and the visual impact of clearance can be substantial. New planting is expected to be more sensitively designed than has occurred in some areas in the past, although this may be restricted if grazing pressure remains, due to the requirement for woodland fencing.

Guidance

The restructuring of coniferous plantations should aim to have minimal landscape impact in this character type. The planning of these operations should explore the absolute need for associated facilities such as access tracks and storage areas, as these tend to be highly visible from the lone mountains, particularly from their peaks.

New woodland will appear most appropriate where it appears as a minor feature which fits into the fabric of this landscape as a key characteristic, rather than as a focus which competes with the intrinsic balance of mountains and moorland, or conflicts in shape, line and pattern. This will be most successfully achieved by allowing gradual tree regeneration by removing existing grazing pressure; however, the length of time that this requires may mean that fencing and planting is preferable in the short term.

Enclosed woodlands will be seen as distinct foci and shapes when located within the open ground surrounding lone mountains. However, their presence may seem less dominating where they are located at a far distance from the peaks and where they appear to sit within the landscape, their fence lines following the lie of the land.



5 IRREGULAR MASSIF

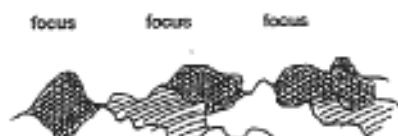



landscape character type 5 IRREGULAR MASSIF



This landscape character type consists of high, rugged mountains, interlocked by a range of rocky crags, steep slopes and summits. It mainly occurs along the Moine Thrust Zone in the west of Sutherland, resulting from an uplift of mountains during the closure of the Iapetus Ocean about 420 million years ago.

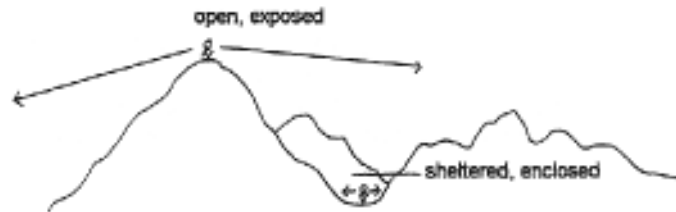
key characteristics

- This landscape comprises a **mass of large mountains**. These are **enormous in size** and possess a **complexity and irregularity of landform** which results from their geological characteristics. The landscape can seem very exciting, as the views of the mountains constantly change as one travels through the landscape, often making an area seem larger than it is.
- The mountains tend to have **very steep slopes** which are often covered in **scree** and incorporate **rocky ridges, crags and peaks**. Some areas are divided by corries and glens which are occasionally occupied by deep, dark and sheltered lochs.
- The mountain peaks of the irregular massif tend to form **landmarks**, rising above the interlocking mass of lower slopes. Although these usually have equal focal dominance, they are seen as distinctive individuals, distinguished by their varying height, profile and ground cover.
 
- This landscape possesses a **complex visual composition**, most closely derived from its elaborate landform and rock characteristics. There is a variety of lines, points, textures and colours, the relationship between these appearing different in alternative weather and light conditions.
 
- **Rock is exposed** throughout most of this character type, its dark colour and coarse texture tending to portray a 'hard' and 'rough' image.
- The irregular massif is largely **uninhabited and difficult to access**. The small number of settlements and roads which do exist, tend to be located at the edge of this character type and at the intersection of a strath or loch. The interior of this landscape is mainly visited by hill walkers and deer stalkers, the majority of the former aiming for the Munro peaks (over 3000 feet).

The lack of human activity and artefacts within this landscape, and the difficulty of access, results in it possessing a **sense of remoteness** which is most intense within its interior.

- The steepness of slope and immense size of the mountains within this character type result in **limited visibility upon the lower slopes**, creating a sense of retreat. There seems to be a heightened sensitivity to experiential characteristics within these areas; this means that sounds, mostly formed by birds, animals and rushing waters, typically echo through the landscape, and seem disproportionately loud and intense.

In contrast to the enclosed spaces, the **mountain peaks offer extensive and panoramic views** of the surrounding landscape. They provide an **exhilarating experience of open space and exposure**, and the sense of arrival at these points is heightened by the difficult journey incurred in order to reach them.



- This landscape is **extensively occupied by deer**. These animals tend to remain on the higher slopes in summer, venturing down to the lower areas and the edge of the character type during winter.

transitions

- This landscape generally rises up from the **cnocan** or **moorland hills and slopes** character types; however, its rough and rugged form often means that the border with these is unclear. The height and distinctive form of the mountains within the irregular massif means that they often create landmarks which are seen from far away locations in clear visibility conditions.



key forces for change and design guidance

General

The forces for change within some areas of this landscape and adjacent regions are influenced by designations, many of these protecting geological features.

Although the irregular massif covers large areas, activity and pressure for development tends to be concentrated in certain parts (mainly the edge of the character type). The interior is largely uninhabited and rarely visited by people, so that the key considerations for change mainly concern land management.

This mountain landscape is very sensitive to disturbance; not only physically, because of the fragile nature of its soils, flora and fauna, which take a very long time to recover from any upheaval, if ever at all, but also visually and experientially in relation to its quietness and sense of remoteness.

Changes which occur within this character type and adjacent areas can have a substantial impact on account of the extensive views from the highest peaks within this landscape, although visibility is generally limited within the lower interlocking slopes.

The introduction of new elements into this landscape have the potential to result in visual confusion, on account of the complexity of the visual composition. The visual impact of new elements will depend on their design and visibility, and how they relate to the various landscape characteristics.

Guidance

It is imperative to consider the overall impact of landscape change within this character type, which generally has a low threshold level for disturbance - both physically and experientially. Development upon the higher slopes and peaks of this landscape will tend to be inappropriate, due to the difficulty of accessing these areas and their extreme sensitivity. If damage results from disturbance at any time, it should be appropriately restored as soon as possible.

In order to protect the overall character of this landscape, it may be most appropriate to concentrate development and change within certain areas, linked to the location of existing features. However, the planning of these areas should not occur in isolation, especially as the experience of the more remote areas is affected by their route of arrival, which will tend to pass through the concentrated areas, as access is limited elsewhere.



Dispersed elements affect entire area



The concentration of elements limits impact; however, they still affect the experience of remoter areas as they are encountered en route to these.

There is an absence of existing artefacts to which new elements can directly relate within many areas of this landscape. However, they will generally appear most appropriate where they are simple in design and relate to the particular characteristics of a specific place, whilst also considering potential cumulative impact and avoiding visual confusion.



Simple design and location of elements upon favourable site.



Cumulative impact of individual elements. Visual confusion due to variety of design and relationship to landscape.

New elements will tend to appear most suitable where they appear as a minor focus within the visual composition, either individually or collectively, and are inferior in scale to the surrounding mountains.



Elements dominate scale and focal dominance of mountains



Minor foci within landscape

Land management

Deer management will affect the condition of the ground where it is grazed and trodden by these animals. Insufficient control can exacerbate processes such as erosion, ground poaching, peat haggling, the spread of bracken, and the prevention of woodland regeneration. These may be further affected by pedestrian and vehicle erosion and muirburn, the latter having the potential to reduce biodiversity and increase soil erosion where insufficiently controlled.

There may be pressure to construct additional fences to limit deer movement through this landscape. These will tend to introduce lines and edges into the landscape which form visual, as well as physical, barriers which affect pedestrian movement.

The few access tracks and paths which exist within this landscape tend to be heavily used by stalkers and hill walkers, and to a lesser extent mountain bikers, at certain times of the year. Some of these tracks and pathways suffer from erosion caused by heavy use, especially where they cross drainage channels or pass over unstable peatland. This may result in expansion, diversion and bifurcation of the routes, so that their impact gradually extends.

Guidance

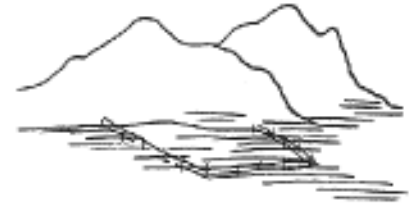
The pressure imposed by deer within this landscape may be alleviated by reducing numbers, the level of necessary control established by the Deer Commission for Scotland where overstocking is recognised to be causing damage. Pressure upon

ground conditions may also be eased by greater control of muirburn practice, and by preventing erosion which occurs along some access tracks.

It is preferable to avoid the construction of new fences within this character type wherever possible. However, these may aid ground recovery in the short term - particularly for protecting very sensitive areas. The planning of any enclosure should ensure that grazing pressure is not merely diverted to the surrounding area. It generally appears most appropriate where designed to create the minimal visual barrier, routed to follow the lie of the land and incorporating pedestrian gates or stiles.



Hard edge created by dense fencing. Ground conditions contrast to surroundings where grazing is concentrated.



Fence appears as visually unrestrictive as possible, aided by grazing pressure being reduced outside enclosure too.

The impact of access tracks will be minimised where they follow the lie of the land and are routed over the most stable ground, incorporating small bridges, fords or stepping stones in order to avoid intercepting drainage routes. The impact of a track can be limited by using construction methods and materials which allow minimum widths, and use dark coloured or local aggregate. The location of any borrow pits should be carefully chosen, to minimise the extent of disturbance and visual impact.

It may be preferable to limit the use of some tracks in order to prevent erosion, for example requesting that bikes are only used in dry conditions. The erection of notices may encourage responsible use, by explaining the problems which result from erosion; however, the siting of discouraging signs may convey a negative image to visitors. If erosion does occur, measures should be taken to stop and repair this as soon as possible.



Track created by informal dumping of aggregate. If not adequately maintained, tends to develop holes and gullies which encourage movement along edges, especially where these are indistinct.



Contained track. Initial robust construction, repair work and adequate maintenance resists erosion and knock-on effects.

Roads and powerlines

There may be pressure for the upgrading of infrastructure within this character type, for example road expansion, bridges and drainage, and new powerlines. Although the routes of these tend to be limited by the landform and ground cover characteristics within the interior of the irregular massif, these elements often run along the border of the character type or through passes formed by straths. These elements may compromise the remote character of the landscape, and

introduce competing visual foci, edges and patterns, although this will depend on their location and design, and particularly their scale. The development of infrastructure may also result in knock-on effects such as encouraging new house building and woodland planting - all of which will have a cumulative impact.

Guidance

Infrastructure routes such as roads and powerlines will tend to appear most appropriate where they follow the lie of the land and appear minimal in scale, directly related to their use as well as to the landscape. It will generally be preferable to upgrade existing facilities rather than constructing new elements, for example replacing small powerline supports rather than constructing additional parallel routes which will create a distinct corridor within the landscape.



Existing route of road and powerlines

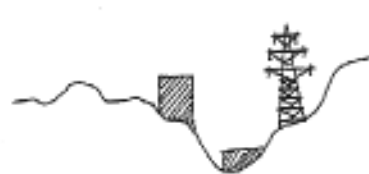


Additional structures



Subtle upgrading of existing facilities

The route and scale of service elements should relate to the landscape scale and degree of enclosure within areas through which they pass. Of particular concern is the potential for large elements to dominate the enclosed spaces within this landscape; it is generally easier to accommodate small elements within these areas, locating larger structures within the open spaces of the character type. It is important not only to consider how the scale of elements will affect their visual impact upon the enclosed areas, but also how they will influence the experience of these places which tend to be very quiet and secluded, and generally disturbed by additional noise or activity.



Large elements dominate enclosed space



Elements appear more appropriate within wide open areas or related to small scale of spaces

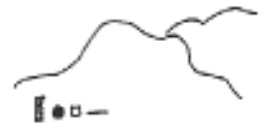
As most areas of this landscape do not contain human artefacts, it is important to pay particular attention to the design of any new structures, as these may act as a precedent to which additional elements relate in the future. Apart from there being a logical connection between their design and function, it is important to consider the most basic visual composition of elements, ie whether their proportions appear visually balanced and harmonious, or whether they possess visual repetition, order, rhythm or pattern, or create foci.



Confusing complexity of elements, with no clear image.



Simple forms, visually balanced, and in repetitive pattern.



Variable forms, but all visually complement each other in simple arrangement.

The knock-on effects or cumulative impact of introducing new roads and powerlines should be considered prior to any new development. It is important that the location of these elements should not be used as the sole rationale for further development, which should only occur if the character of a development is appropriate to a particular place irrespective of this link.



The location of a new road is acceptable as it appears as an inferior element within the landscape.



New elements relate to road only, seeming in contrast to their other surrounding characteristics.

Visitor facilities

There may be demands for additional visitor facilities within this landscape. These will tend to be linked to the main access roads and settlements, and may range from additional parking areas, to picnic sites, interpretation boards, or pathways leading to the mountain interior. The built elements associated with these, and the impact of large numbers of visitors, will tend to contrast to the rural and remote character of this landscape.

Guidance

Visitor facilities should be located and designed to directly relate to the specific character of the landscape within a locality. Their planning should take into account the ability of the landscape to accommodate these elements, and the associated number of visitors they attract, without its intrinsic character being affected.

If excessive noise and activity is introduced into areas, people will tend to selectively concentrate on particular visual elements within the landscape, 'blocking out' the other experiential characteristics which are disturbed. However, it is the complete composition of this landscape which makes it so special. This means that it may be preferable to plan and design services so that there is a hierarchical arrangement, balancing facilities to visitor expectations. For example, 'viewpoint' parking areas may be provided which are easy to access, but where the experience of the landscape is not so acute, in contrast to the sole provision of low key signs in other areas which merely encourage individuals to explore the landscape for themselves.

6 HIGH CLIFFS AND SHELTERED BAYS



landscape character type 6 HIGH CLIFFS AND SHELTERED BAYS



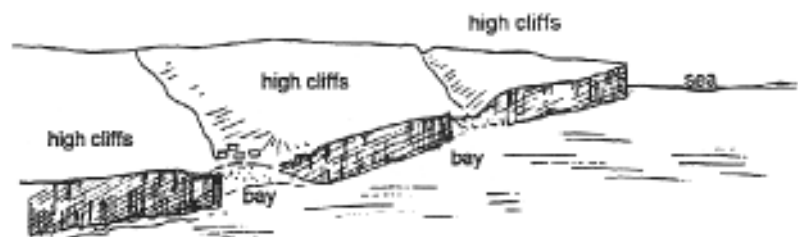
This character type runs along sections of the north and north-eastern coast of Caithness and Sutherland. It forms long narrow strips of land and sea, divided by a defining edge of cliffs or beaches; the experience of this landscape is overwhelmingly influenced by its open exposure to 'the elements'.

Although high cliffs and sheltered bays occur as isolated features within other character types, they form the dominant characteristics within this landscape.

key characteristics

- This character type comprises *long stretches of high cliffs* which are *regularly interrupted by the location of a bay*, typically corresponding to the intersection of a glen. This pattern creates a *rhythmic repetition of alternating characteristics* along the length of the coast, the character of the various elements dependant on their relationship with each other.

The intersecting glens vary in character. Some are very narrow and deep, with juvenile rivers carving steep routes through the cliffs in order to reach the sea, and containing waterfalls and lined by trees. Other glens are wider and gentler as a result of glaciation, and the rivers within these tend to be slower and more meandering, and often lead towards a wide flood plain.



- The cliffs within this landscape create a strong and limiting *linear edge* where there is an equal emphasis of land and sea. In these areas, views tend to be directed along the coast and out to sea, especially where there are offshore foci such as islands, rigs or boats. In contrast, the bays and beaches tend to contain attention.



- The experience of this landscape is *dominated by the presence of the sea/land edge*, although the local character varies between the cliffs and bays. It is also linked by the distinctive coastal light, immense openness, the soaring

and nesting of sea birds, and the movement and sound of breaking waves. The cliff tops offer an exhilarating experience of being precariously perched upon a high edge, with open elevated views, whilst being exposed to all the weather can offer. In contrast, the bays are generally sheltered by the surrounding cliffs, and sometimes form sun traps. The sea tends to seem less intimidating at this lower level - the distinct edge, focus and feeling of sheltered retreat within the bay creating a sense of relaxation.

The coming together of all these elements can create a **breathhtaking sense of drama** within this landscape. Indeed, the character of this landscape is very **dynamic** - not only experientially, but also physically, as demonstrated by its stacks, caves, pebbles and collapsed cliffs.

The extent to which the sea dominates the experience of this landscape is closely related to the coastal landform. It tends to be most acute on the promontories, which often seem more a part of the sea than the land itself.



- **Prominent buildings** are occasionally located on the cliffs in this landscape; these form focal points and often create distinctive landmarks. Their location tends to be linked to their function, for example a castle, fort or broch in a defensive position, or a lighthouse sited in a very visible place. The scale of these structures often seems to emphasise the vertical dimension and scale of the cliffs in comparison.



In the absence of artefacts of known size, it is difficult to discern the height of the cliffs



Prominent buildings located upon the cliff edges

- As the cliffs within this landscape are very high and tend to be almost vertical, the inlets often have very deep and sheltered waters, and sometimes contain **harbours**. Where these are large, they tend to form a distinct character type in their own right; whereas the smaller harbours generally sit tight into the cliff bases. They usually serve only a local area, being just accessible via narrow and steep steps, or by a line and pulley over the cliff edge.
- **Sheep** are frequently to be seen on the cliff tops within this character type, free to wander from adjacent small farms, crofts or moorland areas. These tend to congregate near to the cliff edges where the ground is generally well drained and the grass is improved by guano deposits. **A very short mat of vegetation** tends to cover the ground in these places, influenced by the heavy grazing of sheep and the abrasion caused by people walking along the coast; this thin cover creates a smooth surface which clearly reveals all the intricacies of the landform below.

transitions

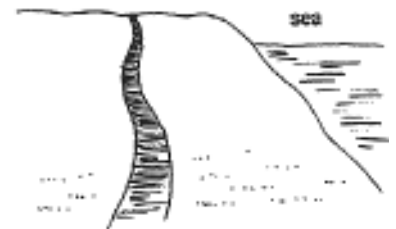
- High cliffs and sheltered bays tend to abut areas of **sweeping moorland, moorland slopes and hills, or small farms and crofts**.

transitions cont.



- A **main road runs parallel to many stretches** of high cliffs and bays, following the Caithness and Sutherland coast. **A number of settlements occur at frequent intervals** along these roads, tending to be either located on the high coastal shelf which occupies stretches of raised beach, or where the intersection of a glen results in an open area of favourable ground conditions and shelter.

The coastal roads typically offer views to the sea; however, it is usually very difficult to actually see or reach the coastline because of the great height of the cliffs, and their steepness and rough rock surface. This is another factor which encourages people to concentrate at the points where glens intersect the coast, as these allow easier access to the sea.



The settlements which are located adjacent to this character type tend to be linked to crofting or farming land use, or to a harbour or the provision of local facilities. These settlements often act as a focus to visitors to Caithness and Sutherland, particularly where they are located adjacent to sandy beaches. This can result in a concentration of **large numbers of people during summer months**, particularly where visitor services such as car parks, footpaths, visitor interpretation and accommodation are provided. This contrasts to the remote character within other parts of this landscape, and typically portrays a very positive and vibrant image of activity and colour.

key forces for change and design guidance

General

Forces for change may affect the fairly complex balance of components along the coast within this character type, and influence how it is experienced. New elements may obscure, distract or compete for attention.

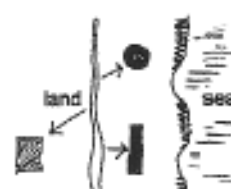
Plan view



Existing composition



Elements visually divide and obstruct views from the surrounding area



Elements distract and compete for focal attention.

As this landscape forms long narrow strips, it is greatly influenced by changes which occur within the neighbouring inland character types. Even if not directly affecting the high cliffs and bays, these can influence the appreciation of this landscape from surrounding areas, especially en route.



Dominance of high cliffs and sheltered bays character throughout approach



Neighbouring elements influence experience of high cliffs and sheltered bays

Any new elements which affect the distinct repetition of characteristics within this landscape will have a significant impact. This can occur as expansion or infill of existing elements, or the introduction of a new feature which unifies or crosses the boundaries between different areas, linking them in the process. If these elements are located along the boundary of the high cliffs and bays character type, they may also isolate this landscape from its surroundings.



Distinct repetition



Infill



Expansion



Dominance of unifying feature

The location of new elements may obstruct visual movement through and across this landscape. If they cross the coastal space, they may

appear to break its distinct linear edge and division between the sea and land environments.



Element obstructs linear visual movement



Element crosses and conflicts with the linear edge of the coastline

The introduction of new elements may also affect the focal dominance of the existing prominent buildings within this landscape, such as castles and lighthouses, so that they seem less monumental in their position and scale.



Castle appears monumental in scale, creating dominant landmark within surrounding area



New elements compromise monumental image of castle

Guidance

It is important to consider the overall impact of change within this landscape and adjacent areas, taking into account the cumulative impact of developments and how they affect the experience gained when travelling to, and through this landscape.

As this character type occurs as a thin band, the smallest amount of linear development can divide this landscape. This may mean it is preferable to reinforce existing concentrations of elements to collectively form minor foci, whilst allowing areas to remain unaffected in-between. The planning of this development should aim to prevent the complete obstruction of views through the landscape.



Existing landscape - dominance of coastal edge



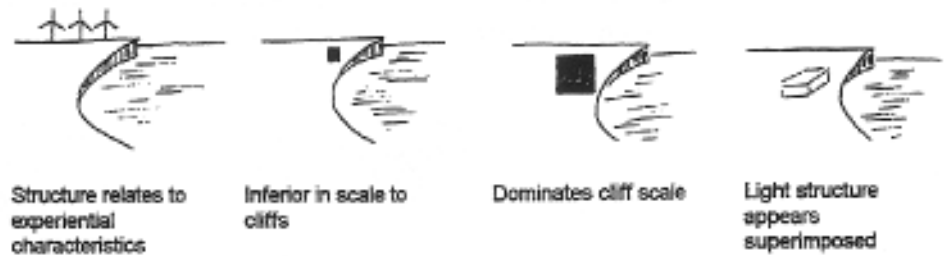
Gradual spread of elements has cumulative impact, dividing high cliffs and bays and obstructing views



Concentration allows retention of dominant characteristics between, also allowing open or diverted views.

Structures will tend to appear most appropriate where they directly relate to their specific location and its characteristic experience. They will also typically seem more complementary where they are inferior in scale to the coastal edge, and possess a simple form which avoids conflict with the constantly changing, complex composition of coastal characteristics. Structures may seem less disruptive where they have a

lightness of form which appears superimposed upon the landscape; alternatively, they may also look appropriate where they seem to sit integrated within the landform.



New structures should relate to the existing prominent buildings within this landscape, for even if these are not actually visible within a particular location, they form an essential component to the linear repetition of features as one travels through. New buildings should not mimic their older counterparts, as the design and siting of these directly relates to a specific function or fashion in the past. Instead, new buildings should make reference to elements of siting and design that relate to the present or are still relevant, for example located next to some sheltering trees or being of a traditional scale or colour. New buildings will only appear appropriate next to old structures where they directly relate to the function of the original structures. Otherwise, they can conflict in form and lessen the focal dominance of these.



Land management

In some places, the vegetation along the coastal edge is eroded by walkers and the heavy grazing of sheep and rabbits - the latter also causing disturbance by burrowing. This can increase the vulnerability of this landscape to cliff collapse and sand blow. It can also result in knock-on effects such as the spread of weed species, for example bracken and gorse.

Guidance

Although this is a dynamic landscape where the character of the coastline is constantly undergoing change, it will generally be advisable to reduce pressure upon the cliff top vegetation from animals and pedestrians, as these may dramatically accelerate these processes.

The existing grazing pressure upon cliff top vegetation may be alleviated by reducing rabbit and sheep numbers. The latter may be achieved through imminent changes of grants and subsidy availability through the Common Agricultural Policy and programmes such as the Scottish Countryside Premium Scheme. However, as the coastline tends to provide quite favourable grazing, unless stock movement is controlled, these areas will still be targeted by sheep. Although generally undesirable, this may mean that these areas will require additional fencing. To minimise the

landscape impact of this, fences should be kept low and as visually unobtrusive as possible, and should directly relate to the existing pattern of the landscape as well as being minimal in length, and kept back from the cliff edges. They should also include frequent pedestrian gates or stiles and be well maintained.



Fences obstruct movement through the landscape and prevent pedestrians from travelling along the cliff edge



Fences set back from cliff allows movement along the coast

The siting of fences, gates or stiles, in combination with signs, may be used to limit pedestrian movement or direct people in particular directions. Although it is generally preferable to avoid the provision of pathways, this may be necessary in order to concentrate people in certain areas where their impact is excessive. Unfortunately, the formal provision of pathways is likely to contrast to the intrinsic character of this landscape, directing people through it in a fast and direct fashion which does not encourage them to appreciate their surroundings and the intricate variations of the coastal edge characteristics. To avoid this, it may be advisable to design and surface paths in a way which encourages less purposeful movement, possibly with alternative routes as part of a network. However, where the ground surface is particularly sensitive to disturbance, for example over sand and marram grass, it will generally be necessary to contain access routes - often on raised walkways.



Footpath erosion and spread of weed species



Gateways direct route of people, although fences cross the linear space



Formal pathway limits impact but affects experience



Informal pathway created by aggregate partially covered by grass

It is advisable to control or eradicate any existing weed species within this landscape, such as bracken and gorse, and it is generally preferable for this to be achieved by physical means rather than resorting to chemical sprays. However, the removal of weeds needs to take place many times before the vigour of these plants will be suppressed.

Visitor facilities

Visitors create demand for service facilities, particularly in the areas of this landscape adjacent to settlements or beaches. It is very difficult to locate these facilities without affecting the remote or rural character of this landscape. The location of service facilities will also have knock-on effects; for example the provision of a small parking area and pathway to a beach may concentrate visitors, resulting in additional pressure, for example pathway erosion, and create further demand for services such as signs, toilets and litter bins.

Although formal visitor accommodation tends to be concentrated within the settlements adjacent to this character type, many people camp within this landscape. The most popular camp sites tend to be located within open grass areas near to beaches, with the provision of washing and toilet facilities. However, only a few sites of this kind exist within this character type, which results in these being very busy in the summer months, which in turn imposes great pressure upon the site utilities. An increasing number of camper vans also park upon hard verges or stone borrow pits for overnight stays, and this often results in the erection of discouraging notices in these locations.

Guidance

The overall provision of visitor facilities should be planned to avoid the competition or replication of some services, whilst others are lacking and under pressure. The potential knock-on effects of this kind of development should also be considered, ensuring that the resources exist for these to be adequately maintained, and in order to prevent the clutter of utilitarian elements. The planning of facilities should also ensure that some areas remain essentially unaffected, retaining their sense of remoteness.

Visitor facilities should be designed and located to directly relate to their specific function and the characteristics of the landscape in which they are located. It is generally preferable to upgrade existing facilities where possible; however, in some circumstances, it may be appropriate to construct anew. The requirement for a new building, such as a visitor centre, may create an exciting opportunity to construct a contemporary prominent structure, complementing the existing buildings of this type, yet illustrating the change of architectural style over time. Utilitarian facilities, for example parking areas, should be designed sensitively to avoid these dominating the landscape and affecting the design and image of attached buildings.



Standard building design does not relate to the specific character of this place, the car park and 'urban furniture' dominating the landscape.



Simple form of building, with minimal impact of associated facilities. Creates isolated focus, similar to existing prominent buildings. Does not compete with surrounding landscape character.

The planning of visitor provision within this landscape should limit the numbers of campers in relation to the ability of a site to accommodate these without resulting in excessive disturbance to the landscape, particularly during peak periods. It is important that the edge of any camp site is clearly indicated, to prevent campers extending their impact as they search for a quiet plot during busy times.

The design of facilities within a campsite should directly relate to the character of this landscape in addition to their function. This will appear more appropriate than the location of badly designed facilities which are merely screened in an attempt to mitigate their impact; this is because the act of screening implies that a structure is

considered inappropriate for a place, creating a negative image, and because any vertical element will conflict with the open character of this landscape character type.



Campsite located upon well drained ground, avoiding the need for access tracks. Wash facilities are located next to farm buildings.



Dispersed wash buildings and access tracks have significant impact in landscape. Although these will appear less dominant during peak periods, due to the number of people and their tents and vans, it appears great out of season when empty.

Harbour facilities

Most of the small harbours within this landscape are now rarely used, as there has been a shift of activity towards the larger harbour towns. This has resulted in many of the structures within these small harbours degenerating as they are inadequately maintained. Even where not in use, however, these small harbours can have great visitor attraction, as they sit hidden within the coast, subject to whatever the sea throws upon them, their structural relics suggesting a past use and activity which incites curiosity.

Guidance

It is generally preferable for the small harbours within this landscape to remain operational, as they offer a wealth of interest - culturally, physically and visually. However, where this is not possible it is still desirable for access to be retained so that their unique character can be experienced. This provision of access may need to look constructively at the enforcement of safety standards, as to modify structures to conform to these will generally result in a change of the intrinsic character of these places.

Tipping

Tipping of rubbish occurs over the cliffs within some locations of this landscape character type. This not only appears unsightly, but may cause pollution and portrays a very negative image of care within these areas.

Guidance

It is very difficult to prevent tipping on private property within this landscape character type, unless an area is designated. It will be preferable to prevent or remove waste by active encouragement; however, if this fails, the intervention of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) may be more successful, or possibly the use of 'shaming' publicity as a last resort.

7 LONG BEACHES, DUNES AND LINKS



landscape character type 7 LONG BEACHES, DUNES AND LINKS



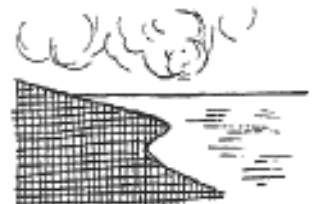
This landscape character type extends along stretches of the east Caithness and Sutherland coast. The reason for its location is sometimes quite obvious - tucked within a bay, or where an estuary meets the sea. However, in other areas, the views of the bright sands and smooth shapes appear as a surprise as one travels around the coastal edge of this region.

key characteristics

- This character type tends to occur in narrow strips running along the coast, its variable landform and slopes tending to form a *soft linear edge* to the sea.
- The landscape is characterised by its *wide open space* and *extreme exposure*. This openness results in *extensive visibility*.
- The *visual composition of this character type is simple* - mainly comprising sky, sea and land, and the dividing lines between them. The composition and relative prevalence of these elements is strongly affected by the northern *coastal light*; this has an extreme clarity which sometimes accentuates particular textures, shapes and colours, whilst at other times, clothes them in its own warm hues.



Wide open space and extensive visibility.



Basic visual composition - sky, land, sea, and dividing lines.

- The openness of this landscape strongly affects its experience, which is *dominated by the relationship between the sea, weather and light characteristics*. This ranges from times of sea mist, when the noise of breaking waves echo through the haze, to periods of extremely strong winds, when sand and sea spray seems to blast every surface raw, and marram grasses bend over in the force. In contrast, clear skies may result in the sun's heat being so intense as to create a rising shimmer of warm air radiating up from the sand, and the sea appearing as the deepest blue, gradually becoming sprinkled with sparkling light as the sun lowers.

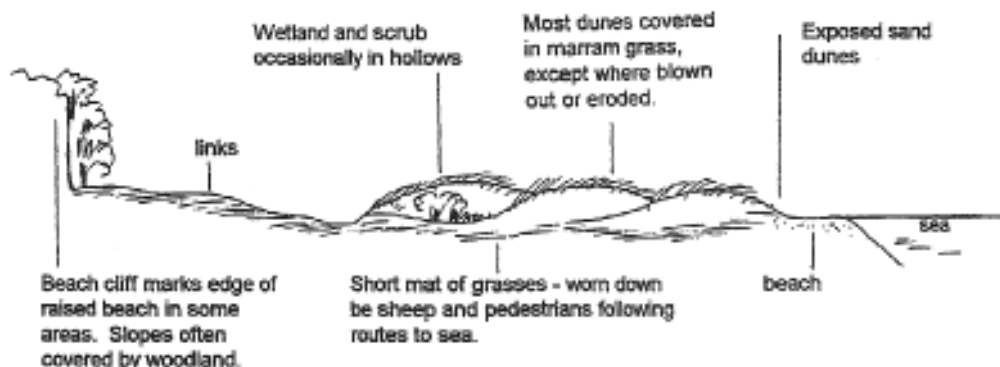
The way in which *birds* influence the experience of this landscape often relates to these different weather conditions, for example they can catch the eye when hovering upon strong winds or bobbing upon a rough sea surface, or attract attention when their calls ring through the landscape during still conditions.

- This landscape character type is **very dynamic** - both physically and experientially. This tends to be most clearly visible by the blowing of sand (leading to the migration of dunes), and the constantly changing character of the sea and passing weather systems.
- The landscape typically comprises a **linear space**, which in combination with its dynamic quality, encourages continual movement through the landscape. This is both physical and visual, although it is less direct through dune areas, and visual movement is occasionally attracted to focal points, for example formed by the enclosure of a bay, or the location of features such as buildings or woodlands on the mainland, and boats, rigs or islands offshore.



- This landscape generally possesses a **curved shape and smooth surface**. This shape is formed by the gentle slopes and subtle interlocking of dunes, the curved lines of bays, and the vast scale of this land and seascape which makes any small irregularity appear inconsequential. The smooth appearance of the landscape partly results from its horizontal emphasis, the character of sand, and the absence of many vertical elements.
- **Dune areas** contain alternating exposed high points and low pockets of semi-enclosure. The complex pattern of this arrangement is typically difficult to discern from within these areas, although it appears clearer when viewed from nearby elevated points or when the shape of the dunes is emphasised by shadows during low light. The semi-enclosed depressions within dune areas provide sheltered and quiet areas of retreat, screened from the surrounding exposure and complexity of marine characteristics.

Dune areas tend to gradually vary in their detailed character with additional distance from the sea, a typical section shown below. Sheep frequently graze this landscape, in addition to rabbits which also burrow into the sand. The browsing of these animals is partly responsible for the existence of a smooth surfaced mat of short vegetation in many places.



- Most areas of this landscape are used for **recreation**, mainly for walking, but also for organised activities such as golf links. The attraction of visitors to this landscape has resulted in the provision of associated facilities, and

accommodation is provided in the form of camp sites and caravan parks within the character type itself, in combination with hotels and B&Bs at the edges of these areas, or within neighbouring character types.

This landscape, particularly the links, often merges into rich agricultural areas behind, these being frequently divided by shelter belt woodland. This character type is also occasionally utilised for the location of roads or railway lines and, to a lesser extent, airstrips and industrial units.

transitions

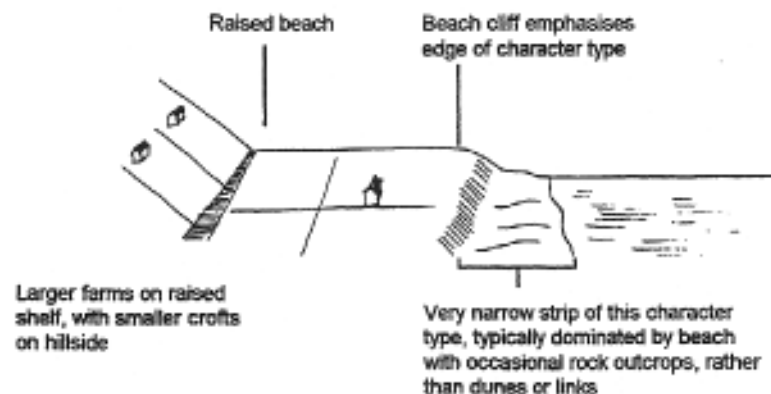
Areas of long beaches, dunes and links border many different landscape character types, as they are related to the coast which runs along the edge of these. They do, however, tend to occur adjacent to areas of mixed agriculture and settlement, coastal shelf, small farms and crofts, woodland, or an adjacent settlement.

- Transition to farmland

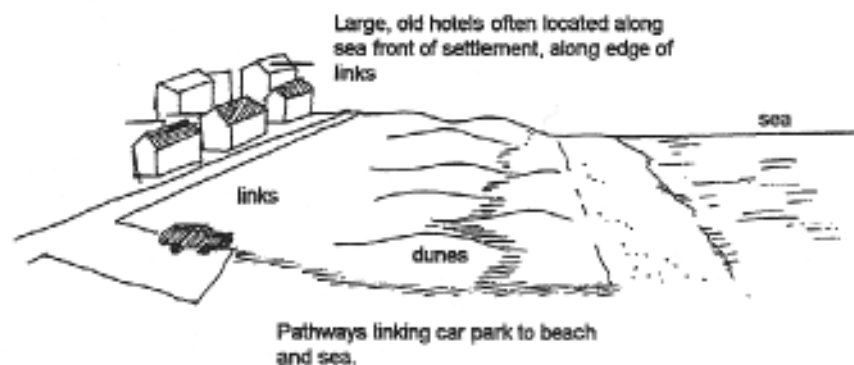


Fairly rich and flat or gently undulating agricultural land tends to border this character type. There is a simple composition, with field patterns often running parallel and at right angles to the coastline.

- Transition to coastal shelf



- Transition to settlement



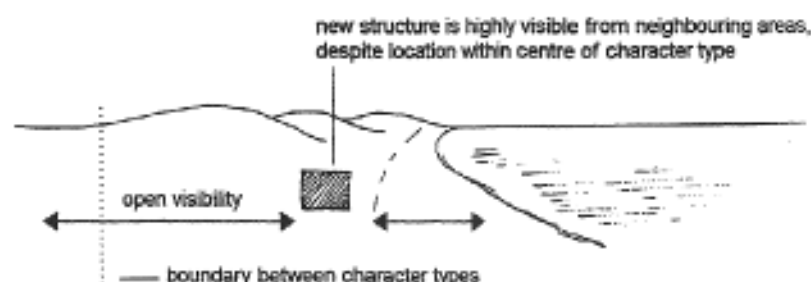
key forces for change and design guidance

General

Many areas of this landscape are designated, for both their habitat and scenic qualities. Although the existence of these designations will not directly affect decisions made on purely landscape character grounds, they will affect the forces for change and what kind of development is considered acceptable through the planning system, in relation to the sensitivity of this landscape to disturbance.

The major considerations for forces for change within this landscape relate to its linear space, openness, simple visual composition and the combination of its experiential characteristics.

This landscape is likely to be affected by forces for change in adjacent areas as well as within the character type itself, and vice versa. This is of particular importance due to the extensive visibility within this landscape, and because its narrow width means that even its interior is close to other character types.



Guidance

It is important to consider the cumulative impact of change throughout this character type, particularly because of its narrow, linear form, and the distinct experience travelling to, and through this landscape.

As the character type tends to occur in narrow strips, even a small amount of development can divide the landscape from its surroundings; this means that it is generally better to avoid locating any elements which would cross the width of this character type, or would run along its border to divide it from its surroundings. Instead, it is generally preferable to reinforce existing concentrations of elements, whilst allowing the areas in-between to remain unaffected and ensuring that views through the landscape are not obstructed.



Existing openness and linear space of landscape dominated by physical and experiential characteristics rather than human artefacts.

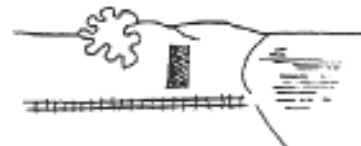
Gradual spread of elements has cumulative impact, by crossing linear space and dividing character type from its surroundings.

Concentration allows retention of typical characteristics between areas, although these become dominant foci and will affect experience by directing movement.

The location of structures within this landscape tends to be very noticeable on account of its openness and simple visual composition. However, numerous or large structures can occasionally be accommodated without them seeming to dominate, because of the openness and vast scale. What may have greater impact is the location of an element with a complex form or pattern, or one which crosses the width of the character type; these will tend to contrast to their surroundings, and act as competing foci.



Element is very noticeable due to surrounding openness, however appears inferior in scale



New elements contrast to the character of the landscape - in form and line

Guidance

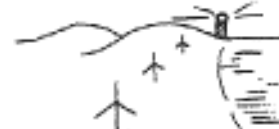
Elements which are located within the open spaces of this landscape will tend to seem less dominant in scale. However, they will only appear appropriate where their function and design directly relates to a specific place, and the other elements contained within it - considering the potential cumulative impact to avoid visual confusion or focal competition.



Although house scale is dominated by surroundings, no obvious reason for location, so it appears irrational



Rationale for location is clear - linked to specific landscape characteristics



Elements are more dominant in scale, but relate to character of particular place

The distinctive northern coastal light within this landscape may highlight certain forms, textures, colours or shades, whilst the 'harsh' climate often has an adverse impact on the exterior condition of structures.

Guidance

The planning of any development within this landscape should explore alternative designs, and the potential impact of different form, colour, texture etc, and how these appear in the various weather conditions. It is important to carefully design and select materials which can withstand the climate of this landscape without quickly looking 'shabby' and therefore inappropriate for the location. For this reason, it is also imperative that the planning of any development considers potential maintenance costs over time, to ensure that adequate resources exist.

Any element which conflicts with the experiential characteristics of this landscape, or more likely, the appreciation of these, will tend to have a substantial impact. For example, a new element may act as a

screen at close proximity, preventing an awareness of the landscape's wide open spaces and exposure, whilst at a distance, it may compete as a focus.



Elements obstruct views so that wide open space beyond is not experienced.



From other end of beach, elements appear as dominant focus.

Although this landscape is typically very dynamic, forces for change may accelerate these natural processes; for example, pedestrian disturbance can increase the rate of dune migration. The sensitive balance of the beach and dune habitats will mean that any disturbance will tend to have extensive knock-on effects.

Guidance

It is important to consider the potential impact of a force for change on the experience of this landscape in addition to its physical character. Elements which either directly relate to the experiential characteristics, or allow them to be fully appreciated without distraction or imposing their own character, will tend to appear most appropriate.

It is imperative that the planning of any landscape change considers potential knock-on effects, and the impact of different weather conditions. The location of any development should attempt to avoid areas of particular ground sensitivity, and if disturbance occurs by accident, every effort should be made to repair and restore this.

The location of new elements has the potential to conflict with the linear space of this landscape, by physically or visually obstructing movement, or by dividing spaces.



New structures tend to create additional visual foci, as they are usually very noticeable, partly as a result of this landscape containing few other artefacts. An increase of foci will further disperse attention so that the traditional and existing foci in this landscape may seem less significant. They may also create visual confusion if they contrast in form or function, or create new patterns. The location of numerous elements may also affect the typical smooth and curving appearance of this landscape.



Existing foci



Additional elements reduce focal dominance of existing structures

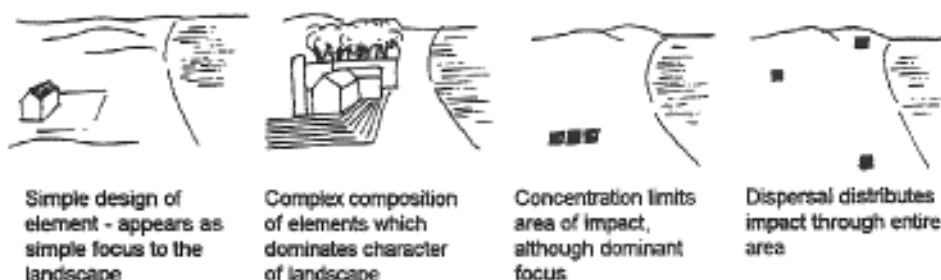


On the ground, the complex composition of elements results in visual confusion, seen more as an overall rough clutter than individually positioned focal features.

Guidance

It is important to plan and design elements to relate to the distinct linear space of this character type, in addition to its existing foci. It is difficult to locate any new elements without them creating foci and affecting the experience of the landscape. It may be preferable to concentrate elements to limit their impact, although the dominance of a single collective feature will tend to be very great. Less intense impact will result from the equal distribution of elements; however this will affect an extensive area, the minimal amount of landscape remaining unaffected.

The design of elements should relate to the visual composition of this landscape and avoid visual confusion. This will mean that they tend to appear most appropriate where they possess a very simple design and appear inferior to the landscape scale.



Coastal erosion

Some stretches of the coast within this character type are subject to excessive coastal erosion. In order to prevent the eroding of the land edge, there may be a demand for the construction of sea defences, for example walls, gabions or concrete blocks. However, these will tend to have a substantial visual impact, and may limit access to the coast and result in unforeseen knock-on effects on the dynamics of the sea.

Guidance

It is important to strategically consider the potential knock-on effects of modifying any part of the coastal edge, as this may result in increased erosion or deposition further along the landscape. Where defences are constructed, alternative methods for wave energy reduction, deflection or obstruction should be explored so that these can be designed and constructed in as sensitive a manner as possible.

The design of any structures will appear most appropriate where they directly relate to the character of the surrounding landscape and their specific site, and ideally incorporate through points for pedestrian access and views. The need for sea defences may even provide the opportunity to create a contemporary and exciting structure which appears attractive and positive by representing the combined ability of engineering and visual or sculptural design.



Land management

The vegetation within many parts of this landscape is under pressure from disturbance caused by pedestrians and the heavy grazing of sheep and rabbits, in addition to burrowing by the latter. This may increase the vulnerability of this landscape to erosion, mainly by exposing sand which is then blown away. It will also have other knock-on effects, for example the accumulation of sand in other areas, or colonisation by opportunist weed species.

Guidance

Despite this being a very dynamic landscape, where the character of the coast is constantly in change, it is generally advisable to reduce existing pressure on the ground conditions where they occur, as this may dramatically accelerate the natural processes.

The existing grazing pressure within dune areas may be alleviated by reducing rabbit and sheep numbers. The latter may be indirectly achieved through imminent changes of grant and subsidy availability through the Common Agricultural Policy and programmes such as the Scottish Countryside Premium Scheme. However, as these specific areas tend to be favoured by sheep, they will remain under pressure unless the movement of sheep is controlled. Although generally undesirable, this may require additional fencing. To minimise the impact of this, fences can be kept as low and visually unobtrusive as possible, and relate to the linear space and pattern of the landscape. They can also be planned to be of minimal length and to avoid the beach front.



Visually obtrusive fence limits pedestrian access and conflicts with linear space.



Minimal visibility of fence. Follows lie of land and contains many gateways allowing pedestrian access.

It is generally advisable to control or eradicate weed species within this landscape, such as gorse. Although it is preferable to achieve this by physical removal rather than by using chemical sprays, this will usually need to take place many times before these plants are effectively destroyed.

Visitor facilities

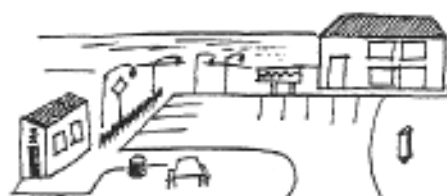
Although this open landscape has the potential to accommodate fairly large numbers of people without its intrinsic character being greatly affected, the facilities often provided for visitors, such as car parks and public conveniences, usually have a very significant impact. This is because these tend to create dominant foci and compromise the dominance of 'natural' and experiential characteristics, rather than human artefacts, within this landscape. The location of any facilities also tend to have extensive knock-on effects; for example the provision of a car park will tend to concentrate people, which may in turn result in path erosion or further demand for toilets, notices, litter bins etc, all affecting the characteristic experience of the place.

Guidance

The overall provision of visitor facilities should always be carefully planned; this should involve determining the capacity of this landscape to accommodate visitors without adversely affecting its character, prior to any development taking place. Planning should also prevent the competition or replication of certain services, whilst others are lacking or under pressure. The potential knock-on effects of this kind of development should also be examined, ensuring that the resources exist for facilities to be adequately maintained, to prevent a growing clutter of utilitarian elements.

Visitor facilities should be located and designed in direct relation to their specific function and the character of the particular landscape. New development should relate to existing facilities where these already exist, and it will generally be preferable to upgrade or adapt these rather than constructing anew. It may also be appropriate to make use of the facilities within neighbouring landscape character types which are less sensitive to disturbance, for example within a nearby town or woodland plantation, with paths linking to the long beaches, dunes and links.

Where a new building is needed, the opportunity may exist to design and build a contemporary structure which relates to the dynamic character of this landscape. It is imperative that the sensitive design of this should also extend to the associated service facilities at all scales, from the car park layout and materials to the location and design of litter bins; this is to avoid these imposing a utilitarian image which would conflict with the surrounding landscape.



Chaotic collection of facilities creates visual confusion and dominates surrounding landscape.



Simple design of facilities and minimal provision - surrounding landscape remains dominant in character.

Housing

There is a demand for new housing within some parts of this landscape and in adjacent areas. A large proportion of this is for visitor accommodation, or for new homes to replace previous properties which are then converted into visitor accommodation. There is especially a demand for properties with sea views which are close to a main settlement, particularly popular for those entering retirement.

Guidance

It is imperative that the strategic planning of any housing development takes into account the composition of property users within areas. If this is dominated by visitor accommodation, these areas will appear deserted in winter, and will impose demands on seasonal services and employment. Alternatively, if an area is dominated by retirement properties, the residents of these can alter the demographic balance within an area, so that its character gradually changes to provide for the distinct requirements of this population.

It is very difficult to locate new housing within, or at the edge, of this landscape, without it affecting its open and exposed character, and contrasting to its typical absence of these kind of structures. However, it must be appreciated that the provision of accommodation attracts visitors and residents to this landscape who are very important to the economy of the region and help to convey a positive image of activity and prosperity.

The planning of new housing within, and on the edge, of this landscape should also take into account the need for new utilities, for example sewage treatment, as this landscape often has no mains servicing, and the ground conditions are not suitable for constructing new facilities. For this reason, and to avoid the gradual spread of urban development near to this character type, it may be more appropriate to locate new housing within the existing settlements close to this character type.



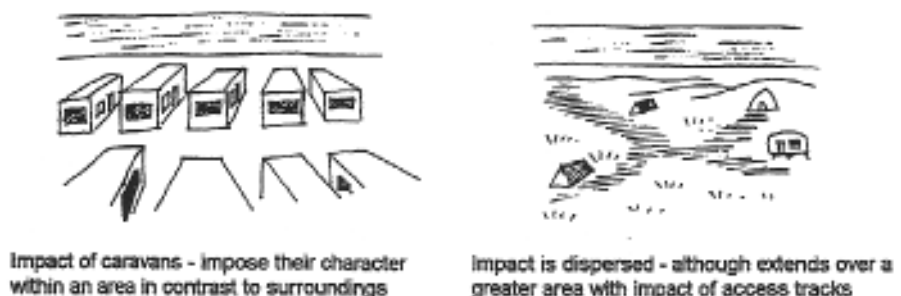
Campsites

Although most visitor accommodation tends to be concentrated within adjacent settlements, many people wish to camp within this landscape. It is very difficult to accommodate camping sites or caravan parks without these affecting the experience of this landscape.

Guidance

It is very difficult to locate camp sites and caravan parks without these contrasting to the open and exposed landscape character, which typically possesses few structures and foci. Numerous tents, caravans, or motor homes will tend to impose their own character on an area, and will introduce new patterns. They also result in an intense concentration of people and activity which contrasts to the open character where people typically disperse and keep moving during recreation.

Although concentrating this kind of development may limit the impact, this is likely to significantly affect the character of these places for which people have come to visit in the first place; yet, to disperse elements will result in disturbance over a larger area.



In order to minimise the substantial impact of camping facilities, it is generally preferable to plan camping so that there is a distinct hierarchy of services. This should range from informal camping sites with minimal facilities, but where the experience of this landscape can be closely appreciated, to organised caravan parks which contain all the necessary services, and where people have to leave the site to gain an experience of the unique surrounding landscape. The relative location of these different services is very important; ideally, they will be separated, so that the character of one does not affect the other (and a visitor does not have to pass through one to reach another). Their impact on their surroundings may also be minimised by limiting their extent, and so that people can easily avoid these areas if desired.



Minimal impact of occasional informal camping



An increase in numbers. As people move to edges, this leads to expansion of area of impact



Marker posts indicate edge, limiting impact, but may result in greater intensity of ground disturbance

Golf courses

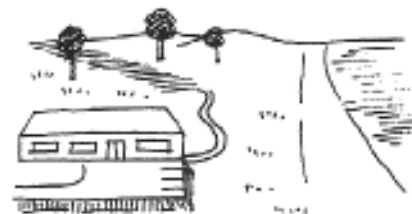
There may be demands to extend the existing golf courses within this landscape, or to construct additional facilities. The impact of these will depend on their specific location and design and their cumulative impact upon this landscape character type. Where golf courses are designed around existing landscape characteristics, their impact tends to be minimal; however, if they modify these, particularly if they affect access through an area or construct sea defences, they will considerably affect the typical experience of the landscape.

Guidance

The planning of golf courses within Caithness and Sutherland needs to take into account cumulative impact, as most are located within this particular character type, so that they may seem to become a key landscape characteristic. Golf courses will tend to appear more appropriate, and less contrasting to their surroundings, where their design directly relate to, and utilises, the specific characteristics of a landscape. Their impact may also be minimised where they limit the need for hard construction works, such as pathways, car parks and club buildings; this may possibly be achieved by exploiting services provided in adjacent areas, for example by a nearby hotel.



Golf course utilises character of links



Golf course contrasts to character of links

Woodlands

The coniferous plantations which lie adjacent to this character type will require restructuring at some time in the future. This will have an

impact in this neighbouring character type, particularly by affecting its views and the experience of arrival. These adjacent woodlands often form the inner edge to the long beaches, dunes and links character type, and so by clearing them, it may appear more open and have less distinction of its edge.

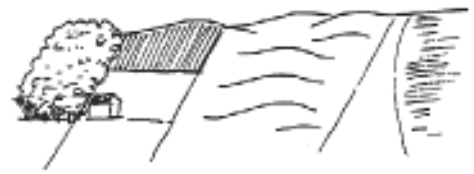
Guidance

The landscape impact of restructuring woodlands will be influenced by the method and operation of these works. It may be more suitable to phase works, so that clearance and replanting occurs in stages, especially to avoid wind throw, and so that the physical impact seems less, although extending over a longer period. The planning of woodland restructuring should consider the potential visual impact and operational noise of the works and associated facilities, such as access roads and storage areas, on the intrinsic experience of this neighbouring character type.

New planting which forms part of woodland restructuring will tend to appear most appropriate where it is set back from the border of the long beaches, dunes and links, in order to avoid contrasting with the openness of this character type, and dividing it from its surroundings. However, the design of a woodland should also relate to the other surrounding character types. This will mean that a very simple design tends to appear most appropriate within these locations, not only relating to the basic composition of the long beaches, dunes and links, but also to the surrounding agricultural and crofting patterns.



Woodland clearance works may affect appreciation of neighbouring landscape, although impact is temporary



Woodland planted at distance from character type so that it avoids conflict with openness. Relates to simple pattern of adjacent landscapes.

Industrial development

There may be a demand for new industrial development such as mills, storage areas or service buildings, within or adjacent to this landscape, particularly near to existing settlements where there may be a shortage of alternative open land. This kind of development will typically have a substantial impact - not only physically because of the sensitivity of ground conditions, flora and fauna - but also experientially and physically by becoming a dominant focus which portrays a distinct utilitarian image in contrast to the surroundings.

Guidance

Although new industrial facilities will always have a considerable impact in this landscape, this may be minimised where they are located immediately next to an existing settlement so that they appear more connected to this, than the long beaches, dunes and links. Alternatively, they may seem to convey a positive image as an isolated feature where they are designed to portray a sculptural, rather than utilitarian image. The impact of this kind of development will also be lessened where designed to possess the least amount of service facilities such as roads and

parking, and where the construction and use of these creates the minimum amount of ground and habitat modification.



New utilitarian building contrasts to character of long beaches, dunes and links landscape, and confuses image.

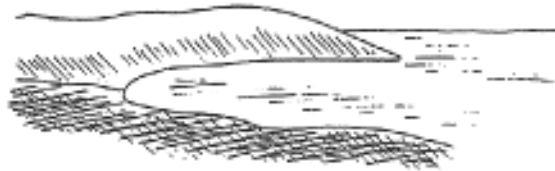


Although preferable to locate new development within the adjacent settlement, its impact may be more appropriate when seen as a simple, sculptural element with no distinct function.

8 KYLES, FIRTHS AND SEA LOCHS



landscape character type 8 KYLES, FIRTHS AND SEA LOCHS



Kyles, firths and sea lochs penetrate parts of the north and south-east Sutherland coast. They act as a transition between the open sea and the glens and straths which extend from the interior of the region. Although they vary considerably in local character, they all contain an inlet of water which creates a central space around which hills provide a sheltering backcloth, sometimes adorned on their lower slopes with a mixed pattern of settlement, agriculture and woodland.

key characteristics

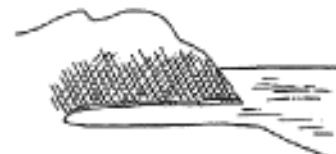
- This landscape character type consists of a **central body of water, sandwiched between opposite land masses**; this creates a **linear space** surrounded by a distinct boundary.

Although this character type encompasses the interface between land and marine environments, in most areas its experience is **dominated by the character of the sea**, and how this changes in different weather conditions.

- The **sense of enclosure** within this landscape depends on the width of the inlet in relation to the height and slope of the surrounding land.



Weak sense of enclosure - wide inlet and gentle, low slopes



Strong sense of enclosure - narrow inlet and steep, high slopes

The kyles and firths tend to be **wide, surrounded by a low and gently sloped landform**. The visual link between opposite shores is quite weak at the widest points, and the **central space is open and exposed**. Water levels tend to be shallow, exposing **complex and changing patterns of mud flats, sand banks and water channels** at low tide, forming a haven for wading birds.

In contrast to the kyles and firths, **sea lochs** tend to be quite narrow, linked to a line of geological weakness, for example running along a thrust zone. The sea lochs have high and steep sides which create a fairly sheltered and enclosed space. Views tend to be concentrated within the character type and mainly pass between opposite shores or along the linear space. In these areas, the depth of the sea tends to result in very dark waters, with a narrow and steep inter-tidal zone, mainly indicated by the intermittent exposure of seaweed.

At a broad level, and in its most basic form, this landscape possesses a *simple visual composition*; however, this is overlain in some places by a more detailed arrangement of land use characteristics. A combination of elements such as woodland, settlement and focal structures can create a complex and interesting pattern, which clearly contrasts to the hill backdrop and the open water. The balance of this composition is affected by the vertical dimension of the hills, the horizontal width of the open sea, and the impact of the area occupied by human settlement or land use. As views pass between opposite shores of this character type, these elements are often viewed in elevation.



At a broad level, this landscape possesses a simple visual composition. However, this may be overlain by a more intricate pattern of elements in detail.



Equal proportion of open land: intensive land use: water: open land



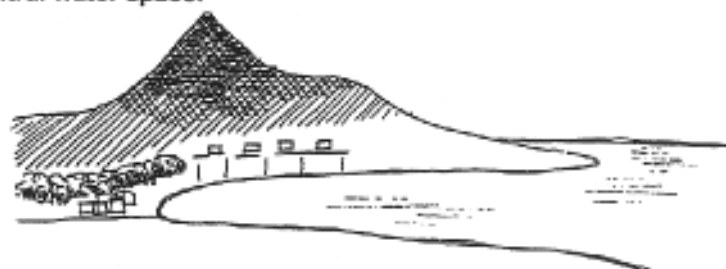
Dominance of area of intensive land use over sea and open land

The *pattern of land use* within this character type tends to directly relate to the linear space and altitude, so that elements are often arranged in *horizontal tiers*.

The kyles and firths tend to be quite *densely populated* along their shores, with a long tradition of occupation. Estate farmland often lines the lower slopes of this character type near to the shore, whilst *settlements* are concentrated either at bridging points or where boats and ferries once crossed at the inlet mouth. These settlements are the traditional service points for the local area, and typically contain a concentration of old stone buildings which gradually lead out to sparser crofting, farming and moorland areas.



The settlements within this landscape often attract *visitors*, not only for the services they provide, but also because of their position which allows access to both the interior and coast of the region. They generally appear very attractive within distant views of the landscape, as they tend to form the visual foci of the kyles, firths and sea lochs which surround them, revealed by the openness of the central water space.



The tradition of occupation within this character type results in the location of many *historic features* within the landscape, particularly in prominent and defensive positions by the waters edge, for example forts and castles. These

features tend to be important landmarks and convey a sense of history to the experience of these landscapes. Some of the marginal areas of this character type also contain the relics of old settlements, many of which represent areas depopulated during the 'Clearances'.

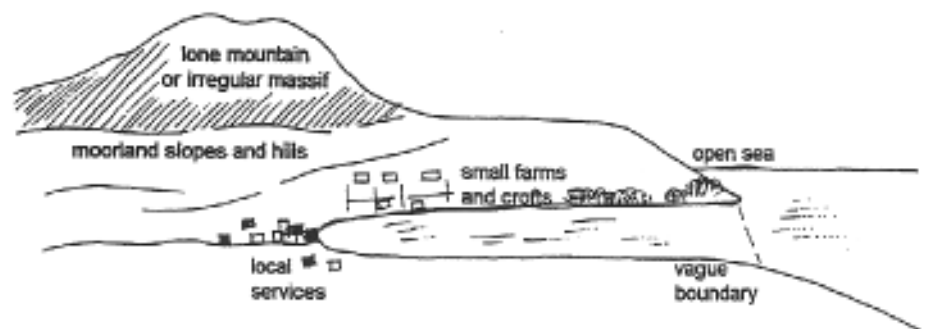
- A tradition of occupation within this character type means that it typically possess many **patches of mature broadleaf woodland and conifer plantations**. These usually contain trees which seem imposing due to their 'classic' shapes and large sizes resulting from favourable ground conditions and shelter, in contrast to the wind pruned and smaller specimens found in other character types in Caithness and Sutherland. Woodland provides great seasonal interest in this landscape with its changing colours and textures, particularly emphasised where broadleaves are seen in contrast to conifers.
- **Access routes** tend to run parallel and close to the shoreline within this landscape, roads often running along opposite sides of the inlet, linking at bridging points. The ferries which once crossed the mouths of some of the kyles, firths and sea lochs have now mainly been replaced by a causeway. These divide the central water space, separating the inlet from the open sea.



Passing across **causeways** offers a very different experience to that of a **ferry**. Where ferries remain, they provide a slow crossing which allows time to take in the surrounding landscape backdrop. This is combined with an intense experience of the sea characteristics:- the activity of birds, the feeling of rocking upon the sea surface, the smell of seaweed and close-up views of the turbulent currents which pass through these waters. Although travelling over a causeway, rather than a bridge, does convey some sense of contact with the water's surface, and the speed can seem quite exhilarating, the experience of the specific and detailed qualities of these areas tends to be less acute, and the views are split between the inland and coast.

transitions

This landscape tends to penetrate into areas of **moorland slopes and hills**, and often linked to **straths**. Its open central space frequently offers views of **lone mountains** or **irregular massif** in the distance, whilst areas of **small farms and crofts** (many of which contain local facilities) and woodland are often located along the lower slopes. The division between this character type and the open sea is very gradual, the edge vaguely determined by the point at which the landform no longer contains a distinct linear space.



key forces for change and design guidance

General

Some parts of this character type are designated, for both their quality of natural habitat and scenic quality; this will affect the control of forces for change within these areas.

Key issues to be considered when assessing forces for change within this character type concern its sense of enclosure and linear space, and the balance between open water and the surrounding slopes.

Any element which disrupts the balance between land and water within this landscape, or the boundaries which separate these, and their relative proportions, will have a significant impact. Changes of land use may also affect the appreciation of the distinct experiential characteristics, possibly by distracting attention.



Existing balance between land and sea



Balance and proportion of land and water affected by new development



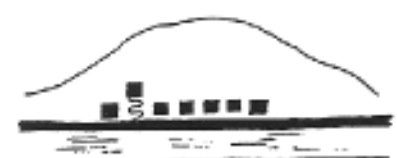
New element crosses and unifies various components

Guidance

It is important to consider change and development as a whole within this landscape, taking into account cumulative impact. A new element or change in land use will appear less disruptive where it directly relates to the experiential character of this landscape and does not affect the appreciation of this by screening or distraction.



Single building and track appear as minor element within overall landscape composition



Additional structures and upgrading of access has cumulative impact - acting as a band dividing inlet from hills behind



Dominance of marine experiential characteristics and distant view



Road dominates foreground appreciation of shoreline, diverting most attention to distant view

The introduction of new elements into this landscape can divide or conflict with the existing composition, and can create foci; these may contrast to the typical linear space and visual movement along and across the central space of the kyles, firths and sea lochs, and may

conflict with the traditional features, and possibly compromise their focal importance and monumental image.

Guidance

Elements will generally appear most appropriate where they relate to the distinct linear space within this landscape, avoiding the obstruction or diversion of visual movement.



New elements conflict with linear space and visual movement - shape contrasting to landform



New elements relate to linear character of landscape

The planning of any new element should assess its potential to form a focus in the landscape, considering how it relates to the position, scale and image of any existing foci. It may be most appropriate to link a new focus to those which already exist, or alternatively to clearly separate it on account of its contrast of form or function, preventing visual confusion.



Existing foci formed by historic structure



New foci contrast to traditional focus and compromise its importance as a landmark



New foci are inferior to focal importance of historic structure and separated by visual buffer

The location of elements within the central space of this landscape will conflict with its openness and may disrupt the visual link between opposite shores. The introduction of new elements can also affect the overall sense of enclosure within this character type.

Guidance

It is generally advisable to avoid the location of new elements within the central space of this landscape if possible, as these invariably create foci and may seem to encroach upon the distinct water space. However, the impact of these can seem more appropriate where their function directly relates to the character of the sea, and they comprise a light structure which appears almost superimposed upon the water, rather than seeming to directly change it.



Elements encroach upon central water body, affecting its intrinsic character



Elements float upon surface, reflecting the character of the sea

It is important to consider the overall location of elements within this landscape, to ensure that they do not upset the balanced sense of enclosure within this landscape, or how this typically changes along the length of a kyle, firth or sea loch.



Open enclosure - subtle variations only



Additional elements increase sense of enclosure



New elements decrease sense of enclosure

New buildings

There is demand for new buildings within some parts of this landscape character type, particularly for housing and service facilities around the edges of existing settlements and along the main access routes. It is generally very difficult to locate new buildings because of the sloping topography, and this may result in pressure for construction to modify this characteristic; this will have a very substantial impact on the character of the coastal edge. It is also difficult to site new buildings within this landscape without them dividing the linear space or creating new foci which contrast to the existing composition of elements.



Landform limits construction potential due to lack of flat sites



New developments involve substantial modification of the landform - changing its character

Guidance

It is important to consider the potential cumulative impact of locating new buildings within this landscape, to avoid these contrasting to the characteristic arrangement of elements within this character type.

The location of a new building will appear most appropriate where landform modification is not required, and it directly relates to existing structures within the landscape. This will mean that new buildings may be best suited within the existing concentrated settlements of this landscape, typically located at bridging points. Care must be taken, however, to ensure that these are not just located around the edges of existing settlements, as this can appear as sprawl and isolate the traditional heart of the settlement from its surroundings.



Existing concentrated settlement at bridging point incorporating new development



New development creates new dispersed foci, contrasting to previous character



New development appears as sprawl and separates traditional settlement from surrounding landscape

Although the location of new buildings outwith the existing concentrated settlements within kyles, firths and sea lochs will generally have a substantial impact, this may be minimised by considering the potential cumulative impact of new buildings, avoiding the conflict of foci, division of spaces, or the formation of sprawl.



Typical dispersed layout of crofting township - direct relationship between building and land



New houses increase impact of buildings within pattern - contrasting to typical relationship between buildings and land



Cumulative impact - development divides space

Road upgrading, bridges and causeways

There may be pressure for road upgrading in this landscape, particularly those existing roads which remain single track. Although a main road may visually and physically divide the components of this landscape, it does not necessarily conflict with its character, as it can relate to the linear form, existing activity and human artefacts. It may even heighten the experience of this landscape for drivers, by removing the foreground distraction of having to avoid approaching traffic, allowing the distant open views to be appreciated (although this may be a false sense of security as hazards such as loose stock may still exist).

The impact of road construction or upgrading will depend on the routing and design of the road, and possible knock-on effects such as the additional provision of lay-bys or signs.



View concentrated on road and foreground details



View directed at distant landscape surroundings

Guidance

The impact of road upgrading will relate to the route, detailed design, and the method of construction. This may be limited by minimising the amount of ground works, verge construction and associated structures such as barriers and signs - all of which contrast to the character of their surroundings. It may also be limited where roads relate to the lie of the land and utilise the most stable areas of ground (minimising the need for cuttings and embankments).

It is important to consider the potential knock-on effects of any road upgrading, as this may result in an increase of traffic speed and numbers, especially large lorries. This can reduce the appreciation of this landscape, for example the sound of vehicles conflicting to the experience of tranquillity along a shoreline in calm weather, and even echoing across the water surface. It is important that the location of a main

road should not be used as the sole rationale for further development; this should only occur if the character of a development is appropriate to a particular place in its own right.



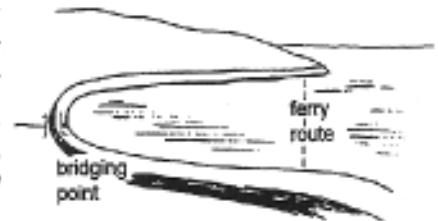
Road relates to overall linear space and local character of landform. Minimal design.



Main road appears as dominant element in the landscape.

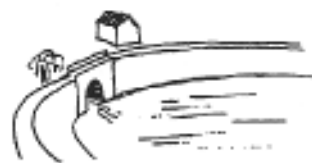
Traditionally, roads have tended to pass along the shores of this character type, crossing at the most convenient bridging point. However, many of the old bridges which served these routes are narrow and old, resulting in demand for their upgrading or replacement. Unfortunately, the typical character of new, wide, standard bridges tends to merge with the road either side, rather than highlighting the nature of the waters over which they cross, and how this relates to the surrounding landscape.

To pass across the mouth of a kyle, firth or sea loch requires a very long journey around the coast, or a slow irregular crossing if a ferry does operate. This may result in pressure for the construction of a causeway or bridge in these locations. The impact of these is substantial as they will divide the character type, isolating the inlet from the open sea. This kind of re-routing also has considerable knock-on effects, by diverting traffic from the traditional bridging settlements and affecting the experience of travelling around the coast.



Guidance

A new bridge will tend to appear most appropriate where it is designed to highlight the presence of the water over which it is passing, rather than appearing as an extension to the road. Although the impact of a bridge can be minimised by designing it in the style of traditional structures, the need for a new bridge can offer an exciting opportunity to construct a contemporary feature which adds another dimension to the historic character of the landscape, appearing as an additional landmark which portrays a positive image of development. The design of such a structure will tend to appear most appropriate where it possesses a simple form which does not conflict with the diversity of land use elements within this landscape, or the complex composition of marine characteristics associated with the sea. The impact of the bridge will also depend on its scale and mass in relation to the surrounding enclosed landscape, tending to be most appropriate where it appears inferior in size and of a light construction, possessing a sculptural image.



Traditional small bridge



Crossing of river not obvious - loss of experience as bridge is part of road



New feature highlights crossing point - light and sculptural form

Causeways tend to have a substantial impact in this landscape, dividing the space through which they pass, and contrasting with the characteristic composition of elements. This means that it is very important to examine whether the scale and enclosure of a particular kyle, firth or sea loch can accommodate this kind of development. It is also imperative to consider the cumulative impact and knock-on effects of causeways, which have the potential to be developed within every area of this distinct character type throughout the region.

The design and route of a causeway, as previously described for bridges, will tend to appear most appropriate where it highlights the presence of the water crossing and appears simple in design.

Land management and agriculture

The management of crofts, small farms and hill areas within this character type has changed over recent years, and is now dominated by sheep grazing within the inby and common grazings. This has been prompted by the availability of grants through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Unfortunately, the high numbers of sheep, together with deer on the hills, have imposed pressure on the vegetation and ground conditions within some areas, sometimes exacerbated by muirburn; this has led to disturbance such as peatland erosion, the spread of weed species, and a general reduction of biodiversity.

Land management and agricultural practices are likely to continue to be influenced by the provision of subsidies and grants through the CAP, and programmes such as the Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants and the Scottish Countryside Premium Scheme. It is not clear how the different aims of these will fit together in the future, and what will be the overall impact on the landscape; however, it is expected that they will encourage a greater sustainability of practices.

Land use and agricultural practice may also be influenced by the potential for more crofting townships to become owned and managed by community trusts; this often encourages a greater intensity of management, land diversification and entrepreneurial development.

There may be demands for additional fencing within some areas of this character type in order to restrict grazing. The introduction of a fence will create a line and barrier which has the potential to contrast to the linear space and the characteristic organisation of elements within this landscape.

Guidance

Although it is uncertain how the provision of grants and subsidies will affect agriculture and land management within this character type in the future, the promotion of more sustainable practices will probably result in improved husbandry; this will principally involve a reduction of sheep and deer numbers, the increased control of muirburn and bracken, and the improved maintenance of field boundaries and drainage channels. It may also encourage a greater diversity of agricultural land use, for example cropping and small scale woodland planting. It is important that these relate to the specific characteristics within a landscape, recognising both its assets and limitations in order to be sustainable and appear appropriate to the place.

It is preferable to avoid the construction of additional fencing within this landscape wherever possible. However, where fences are absolutely necessary, their impact may be minimised if they directly relate to the linear space and organisation of elements within this landscape, and are kept back from the shoreline, and include enough gates to allow free pedestrian movement. The creation of any new enclosure should be planned in combination with a reduction of stock numbers, in order to ensure that it does not divert and concentrate grazing pressure in the surrounding area.

Woodland

The existing broadleaf woodland within this landscape tends to be mature in age and under pressure from sheep and deer grazing. In the absence of sufficient management, many of these woodlands are in decline, their typical single age structure containing little regeneration.

Proposals coming forward for new woodland, mainly broadleaf, or mixed broadleaf and coniferous, will generally reinforce the existing resource. The character of these are likely to be heavily influenced by the availability of grants, particularly through the Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS).

The existing coniferous plantations within this landscape will probably undergo restructuring, for example involving practices such as clearance, replanting and expansion of stands. These works tend to have a significant landscape impact, although only short lived, as plantations on slopes tend to be highly visible when looking to and across the kyles, firths and sea lochs, and they also strongly affect the sense of enclosure within the character type. Forestry works, like any activity, will affect the experience of this landscape, particularly by creating background noise which often echoes through this landscape on account of its enclosure and the presence of a central water body; however, if sensitively carried out, this activity can be seen to be positive in relation to the long tradition of land use and inhabitation in this character type.

Guidance

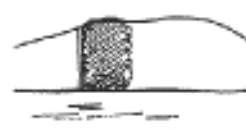
Most of the existing broadleaf woodland within this character type is in need of active management, as it tends to be over-mature or affected by sheep or deer damage, increasing its susceptibility to fungal attack or disease. Although ideally sheep and deer numbers would be reduced to a level at which they do not adversely affect the woodland, in the short term this will probably need to be achieved with the aid of fencing.

Despite the enclosure of a woodland creating somewhat 'false' conditions, the visual impact of this may be minimised by locating fences to relate to the existing land use pattern and local landform characteristics within the character type, or by utilising natural barriers such as the shoreline or rocky crags.

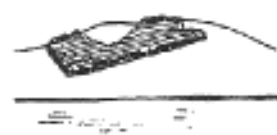
It is important to consider the most appropriate location and scale of any new woodland as a whole, in order for it to relate to the characteristic balance and enclosure in this landscape.



Woodland fits into existing land use pattern, although divides space.



Woodland and access track contrasts to land use pattern and linear space



Woodland appears irrational and unbalanced upon top of hill - hard edge

New woodland will seem to fit best where it utilises sites which outwardly appear appropriate for this land use, for example where it links to existing mature woodland. Continuous management of any woodland is always advisable, and thinning can prevent the formation of a dense, hard edged, single age structure stand. Care must be taken, however, if clearings are deliberately created, as these will only appear rational if they directly relate to the specific occurrence of unfavourable ground conditions, rather than occurring haphazardly.



Woodland appears to relate to the most favourable growing conditions - utilising shelter and thicker soils, whilst avoiding crags and wetlands



Rationale for woodland shape and variation of density is unclear

As forestry works tend to be highly visible upon the slopes of this landscape, the visual impact of restructuring coniferous plantations may be minimised by limiting soil disturbance, the construction of hard surfaces for access or storage, and where tree debris is broken up into small parts and equally dispersed over a site. If clearance occurs in phases, it is important to consider how the remaining woodland will relate to the landscape, particularly in terms of its extent, shape and edges, and the potential for wind throw.

Visitor facilities

In recent years there has been demand for visitor services within this landscape, most often located along the shores of the kyles, firths and sea lochs. In some locations, this diverts attention from the traditional service points and foci, usually concentrated at the bridging or ferry crossing points. The provision of similar services in different locations can have a substantial impact, as they may compete to the advantage of neither, and yet cumulatively appear as a very dominant landscape characteristic.

The slopes of the kyles, firths and sea lochs tend to physically limit the development of structures. This means that where visitor facilities are built, they tend to involve substantial construction works which may change the landscape character. Where facilities are located at close proximity to the main roads, the experience of these will be affected by the character of the route, including its activity and noise.

Guidance

The overall provision of visitor facilities should be planned to avoid excessive pressure, competition or replication of services, whilst also ensuring that some areas remain essentially unaffected and retain their intrinsic character. The potential knock-on effects of this kind of development should be considered, ensuring that the resources exist for these to be adequately maintained, and preventing clutter of utilitarian elements.

Visitor facilities should be designed and located in direct relation to their specific function and location (so that standard 'catalogue' facilities tend to appear inappropriate). The location of these facilities should relate to the traditional location of services within the settlements of this landscape, although pathways linking to the kyle, firth and sea loch shorelines will be very popular. Service facilities for visitors, such as car parks and public conveniences, should be planned and designed as sensitively as possible to avoid these utilitarian elements dominating the experience of this distinct landscape.

Sea lochs - aquaculture and quarrying

The potential development or expansion of aquaculture and coastal quarries may be of particular concern within the sea lochs of this character type. These developments may conflict with the distinct linear space, and affect the sense of remoteness which exists within the northern areas of this character type.

Guidance

It is particularly important to carefully plan the location of any new development within sea lochs, as there are few within Caithness and Sutherland. The impact of new development will obviously depend on its location and design, particularly its scale in relation to the sense of enclosure within the sea loch. It can introduce additional interest by conveying a positive image of activity and prosperity; however, it may also seem to disturb the typical experience of this landscape, particularly during calm weather conditions, when the atmosphere is still and tranquil.

Although aquaculture development upon the sea is temporal, it tends to create dominant foci within the open water space. The impact of shore based development may also be quite substantial, often introducing a clutter of features near to the shore.

The impact of quarrying will significantly depend upon its scale and the nature of operations. Of particular concern may be the generation of noise and dust and the requirements for access routes.

9 STRATH



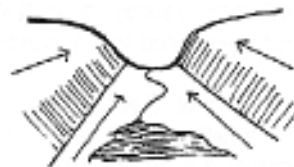
STRATH



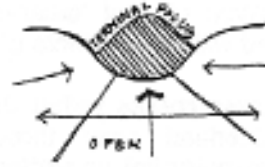
Straths act as channels which pass through surrounding landscape character types. The dominance of their characteristics may subtly vary along their length; however, they are invariably linked by their enclosure and the distinct composition of a strath floor with contrasting slopes.

key characteristics

- The strath creates a **linear space**. Its floor, typically open and containing either a river or loch, forms the **central visual focus**, with dominant views passing along and between opposite slopes of the strath. Where slightly curved, visibility along the strath is restricted; this results in a sense of surprise when travelling through the area.



linear space



dominant views

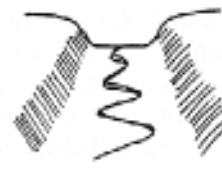


limited visibility

The degree of spatial enclosure within a strath depends on the height and steepness of its slopes in relation to the width of the strath floor. It is also based upon the character of the ground surface, for example a loch creates a more open and exposed space than fields, houses and woodland, which form a rough texture and sub-divide the central space. The degree of enclosure within a strath affects its experiential qualities, such as the degree of sound echoing and the impact of aspect in forming shadows and 'sun traps'.



open strath



enclosed strath with open strath floor



strath spatially divided and enclosed by features

Straths which create a channel, open at each end, seem less enclosed than those which form inlets.

- Water** is often a key characteristic within the strath; in addition to a central loch or river, there are often areas of wetland within the strath floor, or numerous, fairly evenly spaced, tributaries running down the strath slopes.
- Straths tend to accommodate **various land uses**. Where this differs between the strath floor and the slopes, or where woodland exists on one or the other, the sense of strath enclosure is emphasised.

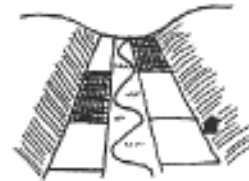
The pattern of land use tends to relate to the distinct linear space of the strath, with the occasional bridge, church, or large house creating a minor focus.



similar vegetation covers entire strath



contrast of vegetation accentuates strath profile



land use pattern directly relates to linear form

- The strath often has a **distinct micro-climate** from that of its surroundings. This depends on its orientation and the weather; sometimes winds are channelled down the strath, whilst at other times its slopes provide shelter. Aspect also has an impact, especially in the north and within straths running broadly east-west, where north facing slopes receive considerably less sunlight than their south facing counterparts.
- Many straths possess a **historic character**, inherited from a tradition of settlement, with features such as ancient brochs, patches of mature woodland and old walled enclosures. Some areas possess features which indicate a far greater intensity of land management and density of settlement in the past, containing, for example, neglected land drains and abandoned croft buildings. An indication of past 'clearances' can portray a negative image to some, associated with the conflicts of land ownership and tenure.
- Most **access routes** within the interior of Caithness and Sutherland pass through straths. These traditional routes link up settlements and rural estates; however, they tend to offer a restricted view of their surroundings due to screening by the strath slopes. Power lines often run parallel to the roads; these tend to accentuate the linear form of the strath but may appear to intimidate the strath floor where they are located on high ground or cross the central space.



Minor road and powerlines run along the strath, emphasising its linear form.

- Settlements** tend to be concentrated at bridging points, at the confluence of river courses, or at the mouth of straths. In these locations, they form a focus within the linear strath space, often possessing a strong sense of arrival.
- Many areas of strath contain ribbons of **broadleaf woodland** along the shores of the rivers or lochs, and sometimes reaching up the strath slopes and tributaries. Certain areas also contain **coniferous plantations**, usually upon the strath slopes; the character of these woodlands are greatly influenced by their species, age, density, line of fences and access tracks.

subtypes

- Open strath**
This strath subtype possesses a weak definition of enclosure; this tends to be solely apparent by the difference of slope (often shown by shadow) and certain areas of woodland. Many of these straths are uninhabited, although they often show evidence of previous settlement and a greater intensity of past land use.



- **Linear farming/ crofting**

Within this subtype, there tends to be an equal spacing of houses, creating a distinct repetitious pattern in direct relation to the linear strath space. The houses are most commonly located on, or at the base of, the strath slopes, linked together by an access road, and with a formal field pattern running down to, and across, the glen floor. Within certain straths, some of the houses are now abandoned, the remaining farms or crofts tending to be more visually dominant, as they have expanded to incorporate surrounding land.



- **Estate settlement**

Within this subtype, the strath floor tends to accommodate the most active land use, which is typically improved grazing for sheep or cattle. However, even in these areas, the strath often contains the relics of more intense former management, for example neglected stone walls and land drains.



The strath slopes tend to be extensively grazed by sheep and deer, highlighted in contrast to the strath floor by the difference of vegetation character, especially its colour and texture.

The estate house creates a dominant focal point. It is generally very large, with a cluster of surrounding service buildings of a similar architectural style; these are imposing structures, typically lying adjacent to mature trees or woodland.

transitions

- Straths tend to run through areas of moorland slopes and hills or cnochan, these providing open space surrounding the strath. The steepness and angle of the strath slopes often mean, however, that these areas are not visible from within the strath floor.



key forces for change and design guidance

The key considerations of change within this landscape character type concern its distinct linear space, enclosure, land use pattern and historic character.



Existing composition



New elements contrast to distinct linear space, the openness of the strath floor and the traditional location of structures

Guidance

The introduction of new elements within this landscape will appear less disruptive where they directly relate to the distinct linear space and the traditional location of elements.



Addition to cluster



Repetition of element



Related to linear space and traditional character

It is important to consider the subtle variation of dominant characteristics within different areas of strath, as the introduction of unifying elements can reduce the distinct sense of place and surprise as one travels through areas. New elements will tend to appear most appropriate where they appear to fit into the landscape composition without, for example, filling the central open space or cutting into the enclosing slopes.



Distinct areas within strath



Unifying features

Agricultural land

Most areas of strath have undergone agricultural change over the years; management has generally become less intensive, with a current predominance of sheep grazing within the strath floors and lower slopes, and with deer on the higher ground. In certain areas, this practice has resulted in heavy grazing pressure and the neglect of structures such as field boundaries and drainage channels, and the expansion of weed species. Many croft and farm houses have been abandoned, and their land incorporated into neighbouring properties.

As agricultural practice is heavily influenced by subsidies available through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the imminent change of this system is likely to have a great impact on how land is managed within straths in the future. This will also be influenced by the Scottish Countryside Premium Scheme (SCPS) which is aimed at promoting a greater sustainability of agricultural production and management.

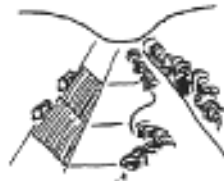
Guidance

Although, as yet, it is uncertain how CAP reform and the introduction of the SCPS will affect agricultural practice within strath areas, a more sustainable approach would probably involve reducing sheep numbers, removing stock from sensitive areas and at particular times of the year, and an increase of cropping, boundary and drainage channel maintenance, and bracken and muirburn control.

It is important that the specific characteristics and opportunities of a locality influence agricultural change and management (policies which represent best practice in other areas, particularly in southern regions, may not address the key landscape issues within the straths). Factors such as landform, drainage, climate, soil and social characteristics have contributed to the existing pattern within this landscape; by relating future policies directly to characteristics such as these, this composition will be reinforced.



Existing extensive grazing



Various land use in direct relation to site conditions



Land use does not appear to relate to site conditions

New structures

Demands exist for additional residential and agricultural buildings within some strath areas. At the moment, this is mostly satisfied by the construction of new buildings, related to the availability of grants for such works; there is generally no comparable funding for converting old structures. Many buildings constructed in recent years do not relate to the traditional style or location of existing structures, thereby attracting attention as focal elements, and disrupting the integrated visual composition of the strath.

Most roads within the Caithness and Sutherland straths remain single track - these often run parallel, and along opposite slopes. With an increase of traffic and the size of commercial vehicles, there is pressure for some of these roads to be upgraded to double track, and to be linked across the strath floor.

Some current methods of road works, especially drainage ditch construction and maintenance, create a large amount of ground disturbance. It takes vegetation and soil a long time to recover from this, sometimes resulting in knock-on effects such as erosion, changes in surrounding water levels and the expansion of weed species.

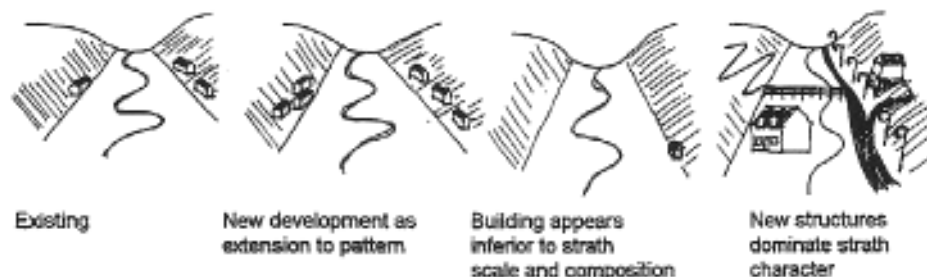


Guidance

The conversion of existing abandoned buildings, for current use, will tend to appear more positive than merely leaving old structures to be replaced by new buildings.

The construction of new buildings will appear most appropriate where they relate to the surrounding landscape character, particularly to that of existing buildings in both location and design. The introduction of new buildings will generally appear most suitable where they extend or reinforce the existing pattern of structures, whether this is spaced and/or repetitive, or as a cluster.

Current engineering methods allow structures to be built upon strath slopes and the strath floor, rather than being limited to the traditional location at the foot of slopes or upon ledges. However, it is very difficult to place new buildings, roads or bridges within the strath floor without these seeming to conflict with the openness of this space, its linear visual movement, and existing structures. New elements will seem most appropriate where they are of a scale and design which does not appear to dominate the existing strath composition, or conflict with its typically remote and rural character. Their impact can also be minimised by avoiding excessive works and ground disturbance.



Woodland

The majority of existing broadleaf woodland within strath areas is under pressure from deer and sheep grazing. This means that most stands are of a similar age structure, with few seedlings or young trees. Although some new broadleaf and mixed broadleaf and coniferous planting is taking place, a requirement for fencing and vehicular access can impose a formal character which distinctly contrasts to that of the existing mature woodland. The character of new woodland can also appear contrived where it comprises a diverse mix of tree species planted irrespective of the specific conditions of the place, its age, or the typical succession of native species

Some areas of strath contain coniferous plantations, particularly on their slopes. Many of these trees will undergo restructuring in the future; this will normally occur in phases, although operations may be complicated by the steepness of strath slopes in certain places.

Guidance

Land management should aim to reduce the heavy grazing pressure which exists within many straths, enabling woodland growth and regeneration. The need for practices such as thinning, scarifying and fencing should also be considered, to encourage the development of a diverse woodland age and species structure.

Although tree regeneration, rather than planting, is generally most successful in forming a woodland which appears to integrate with the landscape, planting can quickly increase the woodland resource. If this is to be designed, particular attention should be paid to how it relates to the linear space within a strath, the character of the slopes, and the characteristic differences between these and the strath floor, especially in terms of visual balance and enclosure.



Dense woodland creates a hard edge along the fence line, also conflicting with the linear strath space, obstructing visual movement.



Reduction of sheep and deer numbers encourages woodland regeneration within the most favourable areas.



Woodland within fenced areas maintains 'loose' edge by being regularly thinned.

If fencing is required, it is imperative that woodland management prevents the development of a dense stand with a hard edge; this can disrupt the existing balance and integration of a strath. The design of any enclosure should also relate to the linear form of the strath space.

It is important to consider the impact of new fencing and woodland on the visibility within a strath. These may limit and direct views in certain directions so that it is difficult to appreciate the entire composition of the strath in a balanced fashion.

The species composition of any woodland planting should directly relate to the particular conditions of a place. This will generally result in a majority of tree species such as birch upon strath slopes, and alder and willow along water courses (possibly mixed with exotics in commercial plantations).

The landscape impact of clearing coniferous plantations will appear less where disturbance to the soil, ground vegetation and drainage is kept to a minimum. If clearance occurs in phases, it is important to consider how the remaining woodland stand will relate to the landscape, particularly in terms of its area, shape, edges (especially concerning wind throw and the creation of hard visual lines) and its balance within the strath composition.



Plantation creates visual imbalance, but relates to linear strath space



Clearance creates shape which forms a point, punctuating and contrasting to the strath linear space.

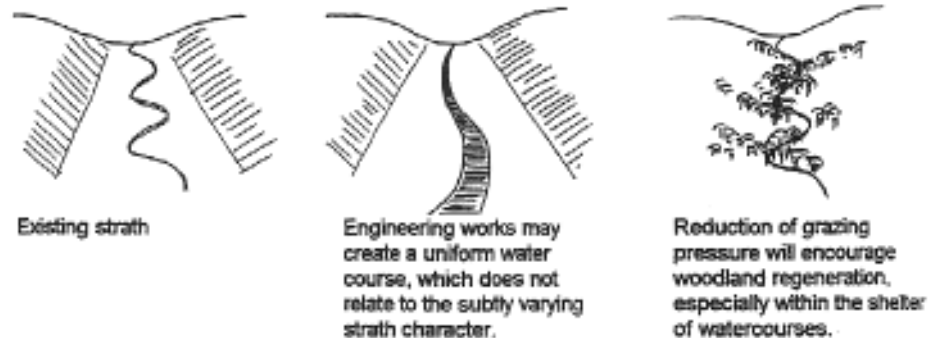


Remaining woodland retains linear form, enhanced by new planting.

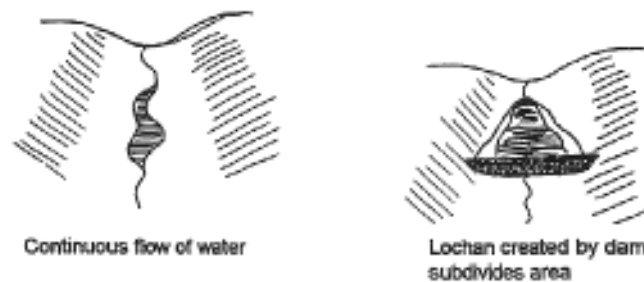
Rivers and lochs

Landowners often modify river channels and lochs in an attempt to increase fish numbers; this usually involves the creation of pools, and the removal of river deposits and obstructions. However, there is an increasing awareness of the importance of managing the wider river catchment area, including the banks and any existing riparian woodland, in order to maximise fish stocks.

Sheep and deer often concentrate along river and loch sides, where the ground is better drained, and the banks offer shelter and an edge to rub against. This can cause erosion, both directly and indirectly, by creating short vegetation which encourages water run off rather than infiltration. In the short term, this damage may be reduced by fencing river and loch areas, and this may also encourage woodland growth and regeneration.



There are a number of existing small river and loch dams, mainly for the purpose of fish management. These can subdivide areas within straths, obstructing the continuous character of the river and loch system. As a distinctly human made feature, dams may appear to contrast to the remote character within some straths.



Guidance

It is important to consider the potential 'knock on' effects of any river or loch modification, as it is part of an extensive system which usually extends outwith the strath area.

If heavy grazing pressure exists, it is generally preferable to reduce sheep and deer numbers within an entire river catchment area, rather than merely fencing off certain parts, as this will create a 'false' division which also limits pedestrian access. If fencing is to take place, however, care should be taken to ensure that any woodland is adequately managed to avoid the development of a hard visual edge and dense composition.

Riparian woodland will appear most appropriate where it relates to particular river or loch side conditions, reflecting the various dominance of characteristics which occur along a strath. This approach will also lead to a diversity of habitat.



Various character of strath.
Distinct difference between the
strath slopes and its floor.



Fenced woodland,
unmanaged, creates dense
corridor which is divided from
its surroundings, screening
views.



Management allows gradual
expansion of trees to reflect
site conditions, retaining views
through the strath.

10 COASTAL SHELF



landscape character type 10 COASTAL SHELF



This landscape character type runs along sections of the eastern coastal edge of Caithness and Sutherland. It comprises a narrow corridor of level land, tightly squeezed between inland hills on one side, and the open sea on the other, this broad composition overlays a complexity of land use characteristics.

key characteristics

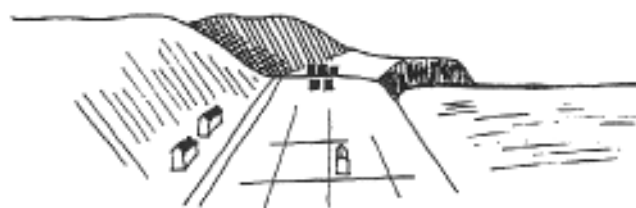
- This landscape consists of a distinct **linear space**, **semi-enclosed** with **seaward views** on one side and a **screen of inland hills** on the other. It comprises an **elevated** platform created by a coastal plain of Mesozoic sedimentary rocks which is separated from the neighbouring hills by a marked fault line. This platform also extends into a number of raised beaches which formed as a result of land rebounding from the weight of glaciers following the Ice Age.



The beach cliffs or dunes which run along some stretches of the coast, tend to limit direct visibility and experience of the coastline from inland areas, particularly when the sea is 'up' during high tide.



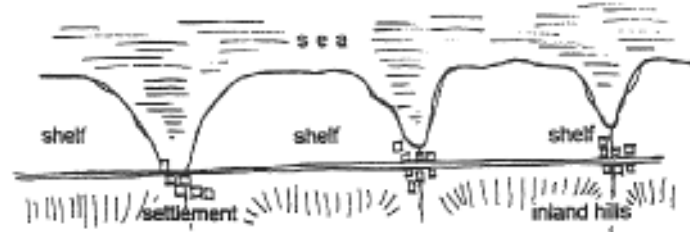
- This landscape is strongly influenced by the character of **open skies** and the **distinctive coastal light**.
- The pattern of land use largely relates to the linear space** of this landscape. The dominant elements which form this pattern tend to be service routes (a main road, powerlines and railway) and a linear arrangement of crofts; these run parallel to the coast, intermittently crossed by glens and the occasional focus formed by a town. At a more detailed level this pattern is influenced by the crossing of field boundaries and minor access roads, and focal points created by large farm houses, castles, forts, churches, cemeteries and lighthouses.



Some of the **glens which intersect this landscape** are very narrow and steep, and these tend to carve very deep crevices through to the sea, and are often lined with woodland. Others are broader and sometimes open out to form a

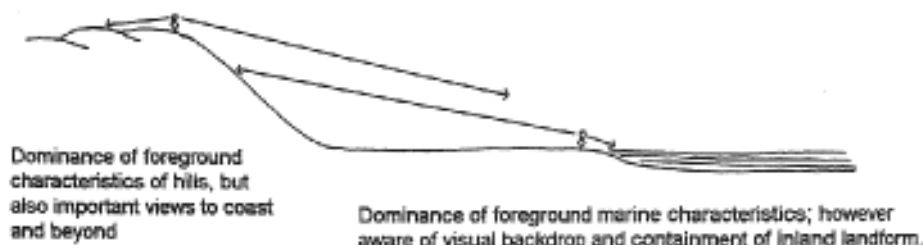
wide fan-shaped plain, representing the past location of a delta. The intersection of these glens tends to be fairly evenly spaced along the length of the coastal shelf, emphasised by the location of **small towns** within them; this creates a **rhythm** as one travels through the landscape. The towns tend to concentrate around a bridging point or harbour, with sparser crofting areas surrounding them.

plan



Between the intersection of glens and towns, the coastal shelf tends to be largely utilised for **agriculture**, the most intensive of farming typically occurring upon the shelf floor, due to favourable drainage and soils. These areas also tend to be occupied by a number of historic structures ranging from churches, castles, and mills to cemeteries and stone walls, which convey a **strong sense of historic influence**; this is linked to the ancient tradition for settlement in these areas, utilising both the favourable ground conditions and a defensive position near to the sea. A **linear arrangement of crofts** tend to line the footslopes of this landscape, with the outby extending up the inland hills; these crofts are now often infilled by newer residential properties.

- As this landscape **encompasses both land and sea environments**, its experience is **dominated by the character of both, and the balance between these**. This varies within different parts of the landscape. To one edge, the coastline is dominated by the character of the sea, such as the distant views to the horizon, the sense of immense openness and exposure, the sound of sea birds, the smell of seaweed, and the taste of salt in the air. However, these areas are also influenced by the visual containment provided by views to the skyline of the inner hills. On the other side, the experience of the inland border of the character type is dominated by it being on the edge of hills, with open and elevated views passing into the interior of Caithness and Sutherland. Here, there tends to be a sense of retreat as the hills are rarely visited; however this experience is also strongly influenced by views towards and across the inhabited coastal shelf and out to sea, the landscape pattern appearing most clear from this elevated side.



transitions

Along its length, this landscape borders the sea on one side and, typically, **moorland slopes and hills** along the other. At intersections and its ends, it tends to be crossed by areas of **small farms and crofts** (many of these containing new houses or local facilities) or a **town**, sometimes linked to the route of a **strath**.

key forces for change and design guidance

General

The character and location of this landscape is very distinct, running along a particular stretch of the Caithness and Sutherland coastline. This means that any change tends to be very noticeable, and may have extensive cumulative impact, particularly in relation to the rhythm of the landscape pattern. This is especially obvious to people as they travel through the landscape from one area of the character type to another.

New elements have the potential to dominate the semi-enclosed character of this landscape, particularly if large or located on the hill slopes, so that they may appear to intimidate the space below. They may also conflict with the distinct linear space and pattern.

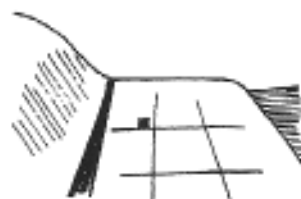


Large element dominates landscape, its combined height with that visible of the slope exceeding the width of the shelf



Large element dominates enclosed space and subdivides shelf

Although it is possible for new elements to be integrated into the distinct pattern of this landscape, it is more difficult to relate the design, location and function of these to the distinct hierarchy of elements which exist within the pattern. To introduce a new element can increase visual confusion, whilst increasing the prevalence of any existing element can upset the balance between the different levels of organisation.



existing



New element, as additional level to pattern, increases visual complexity



Additional elements relate to pattern, but increase dominance of this component within the organisation

Guidance

It is important to plan the overall location of any new elements within this landscape, particularly in order to take into account their cumulative impact and how they relate to the characteristic pattern and rhythm of different characteristics. The impact of any change should be assessed from all directions and perspectives within the coastal shelf: the inland edge, the seaward edge, the traveller's viewpoint etc.

The location of any new elements should relate to the distinct linear space and pattern within this landscape. They can either be directly incorporated into this pattern, or alternatively, be added as a complementing feature; whatever the arrangement, the impact will be reduced where it avoids visual conflict of elements or an upset in the balance of the existing composition.



New development conflicts with linear space and contrasts to existing pattern, resulting in visual confusion



Separation and linear arrangement of elements minimises visual confusion, although original balance of composition is altered

The introduction of new elements into this landscape will affect the sense of history, by adding an extra dimension. New built developments can also conflict with existing historic features, many of which act as landmarks, although this will depend on the image which the new elements portray and their specific location and cumulative impact in relation to the existing artefacts.

Forces for change may affect the experience of this landscape, where they influence the appreciation of both the land and marine characteristics, and most importantly, the balance between these; for example by screening or highlighting one area over the other.

Guidance

The introduction of a new element into this landscape may strengthen its sense of history. However, this tends to only be seen as a positive addition if, like the old artefacts, its design and function relates to a specific place and point in time. A new element will tend to appear most appropriate where it is slightly separated from the historic structures (unless directly related to their function), complementing them as a distinct element, rather than confusing their image or form.



Historic landmark



New element contrasts in form



Separation of elements results in clarity of form

It is important to consider how any change, both individually and cumulatively, will affect the experience of this landscape, especially in relation to the typical balance of land and sea characteristics, and how these link together. For example, structures and planting can screen views to the sea from the foothills, thereby isolating this area as an enclosed inland corridor; alternatively, an increase of traffic along a main road may prevent an appreciation of the distinct shoreline character, distracting attention by its activity, and masking the sound of breaking waves or the call of birds.



Enclosed corridor



Activity and noise

Roads

There may be demand for road development within this landscape character type, particularly the re-routing and construction of new bridges in areas where the main road bends inwards to cross over watercourses, or travels through existing settlements. Although these works may be advisable on the grounds of safety and to allow long vehicles easier access, they will have an impact on the experience of this landscape. This will mainly be by disrupting the distinct rhythm of elements as one travels through the landscape, dividing the linear area and increasing the dominance of the road within the semi-enclosed space; this will depend on the design and route of the road, and its level of activity.

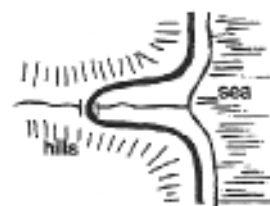
There has been an increase in the amount of services associated with the main road which passes through this landscape. The provision of facilities such as roadside shops, garages, lay-bys and visitor centres often diverts attention from the traditional settlement centres. It can also have a cumulative effect by appearing as ribbon development, increasing the impact of the road within this character type and screening views of the surrounding landscape.



Guidance

It is generally preferable to upgrade existing roads rather than re-routing them; however where this is absolutely necessary, the impact may be limited by directly relating a route and design of the road to the character of the various areas through which it passes, highlighting the differences which contribute to the distinctive rhythm of elements through this character type. As road upgrading or re-routing tends to occur in phases, it will be important to plan this development as a whole in advance.

The planning of roads should ensure that a main road does not gradually attract a clutter of service facilities, as these will extend the impact of the road and may result in it forming an isolated corridor rather than integrating with its surroundings.



Bend in road marks point at which glen intersects landscape



Bypassing reduces appreciation of rhythmic location of glens and towns



Compromised route across glen

New housing

There has been a gradual increase in the amount of new building within this landscape in recent years. This has tended to concentrate around the edge of existing settlements and as infill and expansion of the crofting townships. Although the impact of new buildings will obviously depend on their function, location and design, they may appear to conflict with the traditional character of structures in this landscape, particularly the historic buildings.

The spread of new housing around existing settlements can appear to dilute the concentrated form of these, and lessen the direct relationship between them and the intersecting glens. It may also divert attention away from the centres of the towns, concentrated around the bridging point and harbour, by making their presence less obvious.



Traditional concentrated form of settlement linked to intersecting glen, bridging point and harbour - crofting on surrounding slopes.



Increased residential development creates sprawl so edge of settlement is indistinct. Centre of town may decline as a result.

The development of additional housing within the crofting townships, which run along the foot slopes of this landscape, can create a barrier between the inland hills and the rest of the coastal shelf, affecting the balance between these areas, and diverting additional attention towards the sea. An increase in housing used only as residences (rather than farm or croft houses) can also conflict with the existing character, where houses are directly related to their surrounding inby land and common grazings.



Original linear spacing of crofts, with occasional farm on shelf - balance of inland and offshore views.

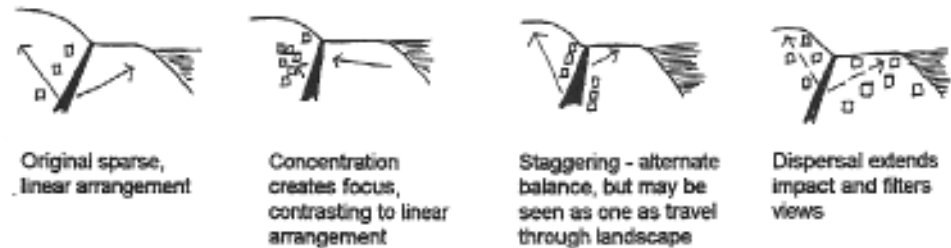


New housing results in linear division. Views are deflected to the sea, disrupting balance of composition.

Guidance

The need for new buildings should be assessed as a whole, as there may be existing buildings within an area which could be utilised or converted for use, rather than building anew. This can also improve the negative image of abandonment which is conveyed within some areas. The planning of new houses is likely to be limited by the capacity of the existing utilities within this character type, and whether employment opportunities exist to make a housing development sustainable. Where new residential houses are necessary (rather than houses to work crofts or farms) they will tend to appear most appropriate if integrated into the existing settlement which intersect this landscape character type. Where located in the open areas or along the main roads, they can appear as sprawl, contrasting to the characteristic pattern of the landscape.

If housing development does occur within the linear crofting townships of the coastal shelf, it is important to consider the potential impact of their servicing, including the need for access from the main road. The planning of this kind of development should consider the potential impact of concentrating, staggering or dispersing properties along the coastal shelf.



Agricultural buildings

There has been an increase in the development of large agricultural buildings within this landscape. This has generally been encouraged through Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants (CCAGs), the minimum building standard required under this scheme tending to discourage the upgrading of existing buildings. The high rate of recent construction works may be linked to it once being thought that CCAGs might cease with the introduction of the Scottish Countryside Premium Scheme (SCPS). As this is now not to happen, the rate of new agricultural building construction may reduce.

The impact of new agricultural buildings within this landscape tends to be greatest where they are located in open or sloping areas, creating a dominant focus and requiring a large, flat site which involves substantial ground works. The use of standard kit designs makes it difficult to relate new buildings to the specific character of this landscape. They usually contrast in form to existing structures, and often seem excessive in scale.

Guidance

It is generally preferable to utilise existing agricultural buildings, rather than constructing anew. However, in order for this to be more financially viable, the grounds for awarding grants will need to be altered, changing the emphasis on standard specifications which may not be appropriate to the character of this landscape and the specific agricultural requirements.

Where new agricultural buildings are planned, particular attention should be paid to the siting and design of these - as structures in their own right, and in relation to existing buildings, especially considering their form, shape, scale, materials, yard area and access. The impact of these new buildings can be minimised where they are located next to existing agricultural outbuildings, and upon sites which require the minimum of ground modification.



New agricultural buildings create foci and are dominant in scale, their standard design inappropriate to the character of the landform



New agricultural building links to siting and design of existing buildings

Visitor facilities

Most of the visitor facilities within this landscape tend to be located in and around the settlements which intersect this character type. However, there is demand for camp sites and B&B accommodation within the agricultural areas.

Camp sites tend to have a significant impact in this landscape by creating a dominant focus and introducing a large amount of activity and colour into the character type in summer. This typically portrays a positive image of dynamism; however, camp sites along the coast may impose pressure upon the habitat, particularly causing the disturbance of vegetation or sand by vehicular access routes and pitch sites. They may also require additional foul water and sewage disposal facilities.

Guidance

The overall provision of visitor facilities within this landscape need to be planned in advance. This should take into account the carrying capacity of this landscape, ie its ability to accommodate visitors without this affecting the character to which people are attracted as visitors, and assess the cumulative impact.

Although the visual impact of a camp site may be excused because of the activity it generates during summer months, which is obviously of great importance to the local economy, its impact tends to be more difficult to accept out of season when facilities can appear obtrusive. The impact of campsites may be minimised, however, where they are planned to utilise existing access tracks or outbuildings, or where facilities are sensitively designed and located next to existing buildings (although this may be less convenient for campers, it will reduce the impact upon the landscape which attracts them in the first place). The impact of campsites may also be limited if they have distinct edges to prevent gradual expansion as people pitch around the far edges of a site.



Campsite dominates landscape - substantial impact of facilities and ground and vegetation erosion



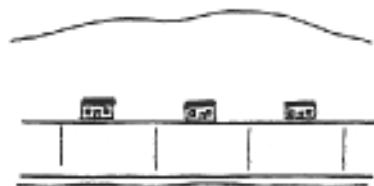
Limits to campsite indicated by marker posts. Impact of facilities concentrated, leaving remaining landscape unaffected

The demand for B&Bs may encourage the adaptation of croft houses and other dwellings within this landscape. The impact of this will depend on the design of the conversions or extensions and the cumulative impact throughout an area of this character type; however, modification of some properties within a township or settlement will affect the consistency of houses, and therefore landscape pattern, within an area. A move from concentrating on agriculture to tourism will affect the management of land, typically encouraging only extensive practices during the busy, summer visitor season.

Guidance

The issues of declining land management due to the growth of the tourist service industry can not be adequately addressed within the scope of this guidance. However, strategic planning and the awarding of grants, should examine the sustainability of this kind of development, to ensure that it does not result in landscape change which reduces the attractiveness of this character type to visitors.

The impact of building conversion to accommodate visitors can be minimised where this is sensitively designed to directly relate to the character of houses within this landscape, and does not dominate the original structure in scale or form. The planning of any accommodation provision should consider the associated impact of details such as signs, lighting, fencing and decoration.



Agriculture

The marginal crofting areas within this landscape have undergone significant agricultural change within recent years. Extensive sheep grazing now tends to be the most prevalent land use within these areas, strongly influenced by the availability of grants through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The high numbers of sheep, however, has imposed pressure on the vegetation and ground conditions within particular areas, sometimes exacerbated by the inadequate control of muirburn. This has led to processes such as peatland erosion on the foothills, the spread of bracken and rushes within the inby, and a general reduction of biodiversity.

Land management and agricultural practice are likely to continue to be influenced by the provision of subsidies and grants through CAP, the Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants (CCAGs) and the Scottish Countryside Premium Scheme (SCPS). It is not quite clear how the different aims of these will be reconciled in the future and what will be the overall impact in the landscape; however, it is expected that they will encourage a greater sustainability of practice.

Guidance

Although it is unclear how the provision of grants and subsidies will affect agriculture and land management in the future within crofting areas, the promotion of more sustainable practice will probably involve improved husbandry; this should principally result in the reduction of sheep numbers, in addition to the increased control of muirburn and weed species, and the improved maintenance of field boundaries and drainage channels. It may also encourage a greater diversity of practice, for example incorporating cropping and small scale woodland. It is important for these practices to relate to the particular characteristics within an area of coastal strath, recognising both favourable and restrictive areas, to be sustainable and appear appropriate to the place.

Wind energy development

This landscape may be favoured for windfarm development, particularly on its higher slopes, on account of the characteristic high wind speeds and the location of high voltage powerlines through many areas.

The location of a windfarm will relate to the exposed and wind dominated character of this landscape, and may appear as a positive and sculptural addition which adds a new dimension to the sense of historic influence in this character type. However, it can also appear to conflict with the existing balance between the inland hills, shelf and sea within these areas, acting as an overwhelmingly dominant focus.

It is very difficult to locate numerous turbines upon the variable slopes of the hills which run along the edge of this character type, without their arrangement seeming confused, especially where this is complicated by the route of powerlines and access tracks, which form dominant lines and portray a distinctly utilitarian image.

Guidance

The impact of a windfarm will depend on its design, location and potential cumulative effect in this landscape character type. Although it is important to directly relate a development to its specific site, the large scale of windfarms will mean that they will tend to appear most appropriate where they relate to the broad composition of characteristics which make up this landscape, particularly the linear space and the spatial balance between the inland hills, the shelf and the sea.



Windfarm appears to dominate lower space by their vertical extension to the hill slopes so that this exceeds the width of the shelf



Windfarm conflicts with linear space and dominates traditional focus



Windfarm relates to linear space and appears inferior in scale to overall composition of coastal shelf

It is important that the scale and layout of a windfarm does not appear to dominate this landscape by disrupting the balance of visual attention between the different areas, by seeming to intimidate the lower areas due to its vertical dimension, or by competing with the existing foci.



Equal balance of attention



Attention directed to sea



Attention separated



Equal attention - foci at detail level of pattern

It is very difficult to locate a windfarm upon the variable sloped hills running along the edge of this landscape without causing visual confusion, due to the varying relationship between the turbines and the landform. However this may be minimised where the turbines are arranged to possess a very clear relationship with each other, for example by being located at equal spacing, in a recognisable form, and upon the skyline.



Although wind turbines relate to site conditions, layout conflicts with broader scale linear space. Confusion of varying relationship to skyline.



Simple layout of turbines - appear as controlled human artefact, related to linear space. Minimal visual confusion, seen as clear sculptural element on skyline.

The planning of a windfarm should consider how these structures would relate to the existing large features in this landscape, as these may indicate the relative scale of the turbines and contrast to their form and image, resulting in visual confusion. This will generally mean that it is preferable to locate a windfarm in an open area, and where it appears logical in relation to its function, ie where would be expected to be the windiest of sites.



Rationale for location of windfarm is clear - utilising the windiest sites



Rationale for windfarm is unclear in relation to function

As an atypical element within this landscape character type, a windfarm will tend to appear most appropriate where it portrays a very positive and sculptural image in the landscape. This will mean that the provision of service facilities linked to a development should be avoided or kept to the minimum wherever possible, as these will generally portray a utilitarian image. The visual impact of facilities such as access tracks, sub-stations and associated powerlines will also be substantial within this landscape, and particularly on the hill slopes, because their construction generally involves vegetation and soil disturbance.



Windfarm appears as sculptural element, with no obvious indication of scale



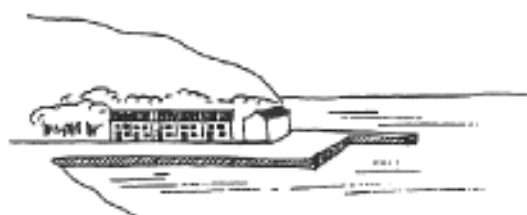
Service facilities increase visual confusion, conveying a negative image of ground disturbance, and leading the windfarm to portray a utilitarian image

11 HARBOUR



landscape character type 11

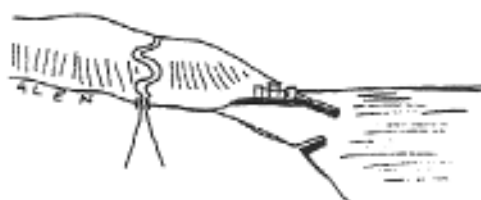
HARBOUR



Although there are many harbours located along the coast of Caithness and Sutherland, this character type applies to an area dominated by these and their associated activity. Harbours create a focus in the landscape - where the sea abuts the land against high harbour walls, and there is a hub of activity.

key characteristics

- The harbour landscape character type tends to form a **focus** within its surroundings, comprising an **area of concentrated buildings** - residential, industrial and service related; these are arranged around **harbour walls** which restrain deep waters. The size and use of harbour areas vary considerably within this landscape character type, ranging from small local facilities to large ferry and shipping ports.
- Harbours are mainly located where a glen intersects the coastline or at the edge of a bay. The slopes which partly enclose them, and the woodland that often covers these slopes, provide shelter and a **favourable micro-climate** (sometimes creating 'sun traps'), and convey a **sense of retreat**.



- Most **activity** within this character type is sea based - the level of this varying seasonally and between different times of the day. However, there also tends to be a close integration of residences and service facilities within harbour areas, extending the range of activity and interest within this character type.

The busiest harbour areas tend to be dominated by their activity, creating constant interest:- boats coming in and out, being loaded and unloaded, nets being hung, lines being unravelled etc. In the smaller harbours, the experience of activity is greater influenced by the surrounding characteristics of the sea.

Some harbours are very quiet, having suffered from the general decline of the fishing industry in the UK. Although these do not possess the dynamism and positive image of more active harbours, the combination of their quietness and relict structures, creates an interesting sense of history suggesting past activity and integration with the sea.

- This character type tends to offer a **rich assortment of experiential characteristics** associated with the combined effect of the sea, land and human activity. This includes the noise and movement of sea birds, the smell of seaweed and fish, the warmth and shelter that the surrounding landform

affords, the echo of distant noises across the water, the movement and noise of people, the bright colour of their clothes and boats, the variable shapes of the latter, and the different colour, pattern and texture of ropes, nets, tie rings and boxes.

The character of all of these is influenced by season and weather conditions and the distinctive ***bright and clear coastal light***. Their balance, and how they interact, is also affected by the character of the ***coastal edge*** which divides the land and sea environments, an appreciation of this depending on accessibility.

- There is typically a ***clear and simple visual composition within harbours at their broadest scale***. There is usually a direct relationship between layout and function; with structures such as houses and boats tending to possess common design properties and being linked by unifying elements such as the sea and the backdrop of land, despite being adorned with a ***complex mixture of details***.



transitions

This landscape character type typically forms the terminal focus to a glen, or is located at the edge of a bay. It tends to be either surrounded by high ground such as provided by ***moorland slopes and hills***, ***cnocan***, ***coastal shelf*** and ***high cliffs and bays***, or it forms a distinct area within, or adjacent to, a ***town***.

Moorland slopes and hills



Cnocan



Distinct edge formed by high cliffs



Sheltered bay

The focal quality of the harbour, and the typical protrusion of its walls or jetty out to sea, tends to result in these areas being highly visible from both surrounding landscape character types and the sea.

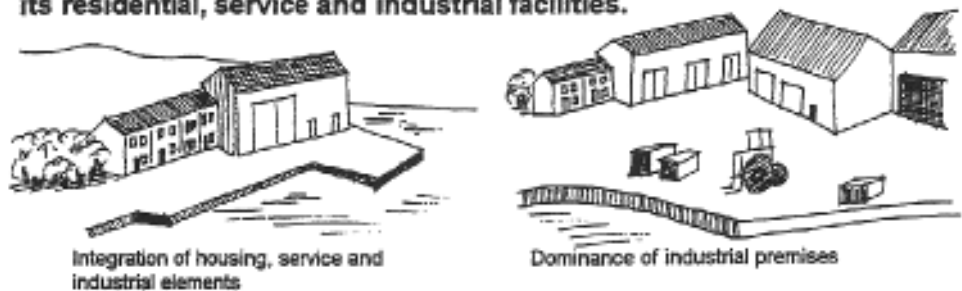
key forces for change and design guidance

General

Key forces for change affecting this character type tend to directly relate to the current pressures on the fishing industry, and the greater emphasis on large scale harbour development linked to storage and shipping, service industries, ferry transportation, and the landing and processing of hydrocarbons.

The decline of some harbours in Caithness and Sutherland may also result in demands for their change of use, especially to allow residential development. This potential may prevent dereliction and finance the improvement of harbour spaces. However, the planning and design of any residential development needs to ensure that this does not result in a harbour losing its intrinsic quality:- integration of use, the activity of people and sea craft, and access to the sea edge.

As harbours often contain a small focal area, they will be influenced by change within surrounding landscape character types, especially access to these areas. Development of particular elements within harbours will potentially disrupt the typical balance and integration of its residential, service and industrial facilities.



There has been a prevailing trend towards concentrating activity, development and servicing within a few harbour areas of Caithness and Sutherland, generally at the expense of smaller and more local facilities. This has frequently resulted from the existence of a particular favourable factor, such as the provision of a main access road, the presence of under-utilised local services, or a proactive company which has striven for expansion. It is also often targeted towards harbours which have adjacent open sites and therefore potential for large scale development, as they are able to meet the space requirements for operating large, modern machinery.

Guidance

Although it is important to explore the diversification of harbour areas in the light of a generally declining fishing industry, the long term implications and knock-on effects of this should be considered, especially as change in response to short term market conditions may not be sustainable. In contrast to primary industries such as fishing or quarrying, service industries tend to be universal in character, not reflecting the landscape characteristics of their specific location. Harbour development will also affect other activities in an area; for example the construction of large, standard facilities may result in a reduced appreciation of the specific quality of a local landscape, discouraging visitors to these places and affecting the tourist industry.

The planning of any new developments should consider how this will affect the characteristic integration of different facilities within this landscape. The promotion of small scale and local development may be aided by developing a variety of different harbour facilities which combine storage, processing and retailing - building upon the typical mixture of land use and activity within this character type.



Mixed activity and integration of harbour functions within concentrated area often attracts visitors



Increased harbour facilities may improve transportation industry; however may result in loss of tourism

Although the concentration of funding and resources within particular harbours may make these more competitive on the national and international markets, the planning of this kind of development should take into account how this will affect the smaller harbours and the overall character of Caithness and Sutherland. Although obviously limited by the capacity of any one particular trade, it may be preferable to promote a hierarchy of harbour facilities within the region, encouraging these to develop a distinct niche, rather than competing with each other.



Hierarchy of facilities. One harbour retains traditional character and encourages visitors - concentration of mixed activity, accessible to pedestrians, retention of intricate scale and shelter. Other harbour dominated by new large buildings - change of character in relation to function.

Harbour space

The creation of large spacious harbour areas, especially where this involves expansion into the sea, will have a substantial impact on the character of this landscape. This mainly results from a reduction in the enclosure and sheltered character of the harbour and the direct relationship to the surrounding landform.

Guidance

The development of harbour areas will tend to appear most appropriate where their layout clearly reflects an hierarchy of use, avoiding the creation of large undefined expanses of open yard space, and alternatively creating a series of different sized spaces as required by various users. The design of these will generally result in greater integration where areas for different users are clearly defined, for example highlighting where pedestrians should move in contrast to through traffic.



Wide expanse contrasts to intrinsic character of harbour and appears 'intimidating' to pedestrians.



Series of spaces with indication of different areas of use.

Harbour buildings

The character of harbours vary, possessing subtle differences which create a specific sense of place. This can be jeopardised by standardised buildings, the use of large and standard kit structures generally conflicting with the traditional buildings in this landscape, and tending to dominate the scale of the harbour space.

Guidance

The location of new harbour buildings will tend to appear most rational where their design indicates their specific function, in direct relation to the landscape character and a particular place. New buildings will also tend to appear most appropriate where they relate to the traditional characteristics of harbour buildings, for example being similar in form, orientation or materials.



Standard large 'kit' buildings contrast to traditional structures and often seem irrational as do not indicate, or relate to, specific function



New buildings relate to traditional structures, despite new demands which result in different details

Harbour activity

New development or abandonment will greatly affect the experience of this character type, as this is closely related to activity within the harbour. The experience will also be affected by any elements which screen, highlight or distract attention, affecting the appreciation of the balance between the different components of this landscape.

Although, an increase in activity from new development within this landscape will tend to appear very positive, this can often be difficult to appreciate at close proximity, as large harbour areas are generally less congenial to visitors on foot than the smaller local harbours. Pedestrian onlookers are also not usually encouraged within the larger harbours due to the possible safety risks associated with the working of large machinery.

Guidance

It may be appropriate to zone new development within this character type, so that some parts of the harbour retain their traditional quality, whilst other areas are able to accommodate more modern facilities. The design of new developments should be planned to contain activity and to provide vantage points at which this can be appreciated by the public at a safe distance.

Visitor provision

Harbour areas tend to attract visitors, their main appeal often linked to their concentration and integration of different activities and services. However, demands for the provision of settlement 'decoration' usually associated with more urban areas, for example brick paving, ornate lamp posts, railings and street furniture, will tend to conflict with the intrinsic character of the harbour areas, so that they become an indistinct service centre.

Guidance

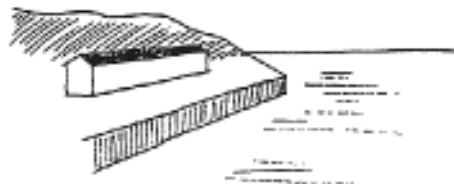
The provision of visitor facilities will tend to appear less dominating where they integrate with the other functions of a harbour area, for example providing parking which is used by both resident and visitor and which also minimises the impact of unused facilities out of season. Where absolutely necessary, settlement facilities will appear most appropriate where they are designed to relate to the distinct character of this landscape (for example having a maritime theme - using ropes, nets, rocks, driftwood or buoys). Rather than limiting the choice of materials and furniture to standard catalogues (often by assuming they are the cheapest), alternative options for local 'one off' design and construction should be explored, the product of which is usually more closely related to a particular place.

Waterfront development

New development within this landscape often occurs along the waterfront. However, any structure which runs along, or crosses the distinct waters edge of this landscape will affect the experience of the harbour area, and may confuse the simple arrangement and balance between land and sea components.

Guidance

Structures built along or into the sea will generally seem more appropriate where they directly relate to the scale and form of the harbour, and the characteristic simple composition of elements, in order to convey a positive image with the minimal amount of visual confusion.



Simple dividing edge between land and sea



Confusing division between land and sea

12 TOWN



landscape character type 12

TOWN



Only a few areas of this landscape character type exist within Caithness and Sutherland, comprising the largest settlements in the region and their surrounding areas. The nucleus of this character type comprises a town centre, typically positioned near to a river estuary or the sea, and marked by a concentration of distinctive old buildings - usually the remnants of its trading or industrial origins. From this core, the settlement gradually reduces in density as it radiates into various land use, which although mixed in character, is linked by prevailing views to the town or the provision of facilities serving it.

key characteristics

- The character of this landscape is dominated by **the built form and human activity and influence**, the nature of this being **constantly in change**. The concentration of activity tends to occur within the town centres, with a gradual reduction of intensity with increased distance from this core.

The high degree of activity partly results from a high resident population; this is fairly evenly divided between the main settlement and a wide distribution of residential houses, farms and crofts in the surrounding area. The high population, which may significantly rise during the tourist season, presents constantly growing demands for the provision and maintenance of services such as shops, roads and leisure facilities.

- This is a **complex** landscape character type, with a mixed **variety of experience**; for example, an assortment of smells, sounds, tastes, and visual lines, colours, textures, patterns, shapes and elements of various scale and proportion. This complexity can often seem quite confusing and overwhelming if an area is unfamiliar; however, the impact of this is lessened where the layout and design of the town relates to a distinct organising feature, such as the coast, a river, or hillside.



The town composition is most clearly illustrated where linked to a distinct organising feature

- Views tend to be **limited within the centre of towns**; however, many of these settlements offer **focused or intermittent views of the surrounding landscape** from their edges, high points or river and sea fronts.
- Although individual towns were once quite distinct, relating to their particular location and resources and function, most areas of this landscape character type are now **strongly influenced by standard service facilities** such as by-passes, shops, traveller facilities, and associated features such as signs, car parks and utilities.
- The **balance of landscape characteristics varies between the town centres and the town outskirts**. Traditionally these areas possessed very different

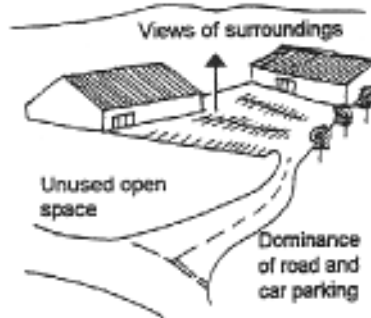
roles, the centre being the concentration of industry, facilities and access, with the surrounding area supporting this with agriculture and other resources. However, in recent years the boundary between these areas has become less distinct, with new development tending to spread across the former edges of the town, whilst some areas within the town centre are neglected. This has resulted in a **mixture of variable land use and spatial enclosure** (and therefore visibility) **within these outer areas**, comprising industrial estates and 'out of town' supermarkets, but also intensive farmland, the occasional croft and woodland, and tourist facilities.

- Within this character type, the **town centres** have a **distinct core of buildings** which tend to directly relate to their traditional function or location, such as a harbour or bridging point. This concentration of buildings typically creates a **sheltered microclimate**, although the route of roads occasionally channel winds from certain directions.



Sheltered central core of town

- The old buildings within the town centres tend to possess a distinct architectural style, which conveys a **sense of history**, by reflecting past prosperity. These buildings are often constructed from local stone, and in a robust style which seems to directly relate to their particular situation, appearing fitting to the 'harsh', coastal climate.
- **Facilities around the edge of town** generally rely on vehicular access, and are usually linked to the presence of open level sites. The buildings tend to be more spaced out than in the town centres, often in order to incorporate a complex arrangement of access roads and car parks. The open spaces between buildings sometimes offer distant views of the surrounding landscape, but are very exposed.



transitions:

This landscape character type tends to border other areas of traditional settlement, such as the coast and **straths**. Comprising the largest settlements in Caithness and Sutherland, these towns tend to be located in areas where the surrounding agricultural land is of a high quality, such as areas of **open, intensive farmland** or **mixed agriculture and settlement**, gradually reaching out to areas of **small farms and crofts**.

key forces for change and design guidance

General

This landscape, like most settlement centres, possesses a dynamic quality which means that it is constantly undergoing change. However, the traditional forces for change such as industry have typically depleted to the point that provision for housing, services and light industry provide the main driving forces behind landscape change and development.

Although demands for change within this character type are similar to most towns, the provision of standard services are typically unsatisfactory due to particular conditions and character of Caithness and Sutherland, especially the northern location, and the fact that these towns contain only a small population relative to the size of the wider area which they serve.

Guidance

It is important to consider the cumulative impact and knock on effects of any development within this landscape character type, particularly because of its dynamic quality which means that there may be many different forces for change affecting the town at any one point in time. If these are not considered collectively, the town may develop in a non cohesive and ineffective way, with excessive facilities competing with each other whilst others are lacking.

The design of new developments should directly relate to the specific character of the town and its distinct location; this will avoid the development of an indistinct service centre, and will encourage a pride of place derived from a strong sense of identity.

The distinct character of a town may be emphasised by relating new development to the landscape features from which it developed, for example the coast or river, although land use may no longer actually rely on these features as they did in the past. Linkage to these distinctive features, by for example a framework of pedestrian access routes and the retention of views, can aid the integration of a town and also encourage the use of outdoor spaces.

The design of new buildings should relate to the traditional structures of the town, particularly their scale, orientation, shape and materials. However, they should also reflect their specific location, function and the present day, so that they appear appropriate to a place and represent contemporary design. This treatment should extend to the design of all the associated facilities and details of new developments, for example access roads, car parks, pathways and building materials.



Original town and recent development relates to distinct landscape features



New development contrasts to traditional features

The outskirts of towns are under particular pressure for new development, with the consistent demand for green-field sites, especially for large 'out of town' shopping centres, tourist facilities, light industry and housing estates. This trend tends to result in the haphazard sprawl of elements around the edges of towns, whilst the centre becomes increasingly abandoned and neglected, and with an ever greater reliance on vehicles creating its own demand for additional access route and car parking development.



Concentrated core of original form



Gradual sprawl of town edges and abandonment of centre

Guidance

It is important to strategically consider the relationship between forces for change in town centres and their outskirts. Although the potential for large scale development in town centres is often restricted, it may be possible to adapt existing facilities for a new use, for example developing a derelict riverside warehouse for a sports centre, or a riverside yard as a park; in practice, this kind of development will probably require financial incentives (possibly via the local enterprise group), the tightening of development control on green-field sites and the relaxation of some building conventions.

The new utilisation of old buildings will be particularly valuable as so many of these possess historic value and are located at key sites within the town. Dereliction results in a negative image and loss of pride in place; this means that if structures are unable to be utilised at the moment, it may be appropriate to either actively maintain their outer shell until a time exists where there is an increased demand for such facilities, or alternatively to demolish ruined buildings in order to create a temporary green space until new construction may occur in the future.

The development of new buildings in towns or their outskirts should avoid the creation of large open areas of roads or car parking, as these will tend to be exposed and seem 'inhospitable'. Instead, developments should explore the possible sharing of facilities, such as car parks linked by pedestrian routes; these areas can also be designed to incorporate shelter and the subdivision of spaces, for example by the use of planting, walls or screens.

Upgrading of services

There may be demands for the upgrading of infrastructure and utilities within this character type, particularly because of the dynamic nature of the town and the trends for gradual expansion. This will usually involve the construction of new roads and bypasses, bridges and also water and waste disposal facilities. However, as the towns within Caithness and Sutherland tend to be fairly small in size, the development of some of these services can appear to dominate the character of the landscape in which they are located.



Small town with minimal services and utilities



Town character dominated by services and utilities

Guidance

The provision of additional services within a town and its surrounding area should be planned as a whole, to avoid haphazard development which may lead to a substantial cumulative impact, or the development of some facilities which may counteract the efficiency of others.

It is important that the development of infrastructure is designed and located sensitively to relate to the traditional character and experience of the town, and especially its distinct landscape features. Particular attention should be paid to scale and design of any roads, their entrance points into the town, and associated features such as pavements and road islands and barriers. These elements should be designed to relate to the character of the town which is essentially part of a rural region, and should not create excessively open areas which will be very exposed and appear 'inhospitable' in poor weather conditions.



Compact and simple layout of town. Aware of distinct landscape features such as river



Dominance of road space and associated features

The route of any new infrastructure should be planned to ensure that it does not bisect or isolate areas within the town by creating physical as well as visual barriers. It should also not be used as the prime reason for further development, which will only be suitable if located and designed to specifically relate to a place in own right.

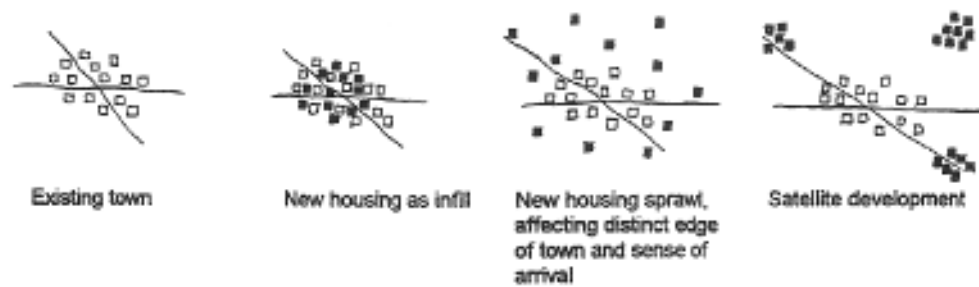
Housing

There is usually a demand for additional housing within and surrounding this character type, particularly for low cost dwellings in small estates around the town edges, and for isolated houses within the neighbouring farmland and along the coast. There is also a demand for improvements to the existing high density housing estates within the towns.

Guidance

It is typically most appropriate to incorporate new housing into the existing limits of the town, to occupy areas which are under utilised or have been abandoned. In this way, the central core of the town is reinforced, and the concentration of buildings provides a sheltered microclimate and a hub of activity, whilst also avoiding an increased need for access routes and car parks. However, if this new housing can not be accommodated within the existing town, it may alternatively be developed as isolated satellites near to the edges, in an attempt to avoid increased sprawl or

corridor development which affects the distinct edge of the town and the sense of arrival.



The layout and design of new housing should relate to the traditional and distinct character of the town, particularly its orientation, concentration, scale and link to distinct landscape features via access routes and views. The design of this new housing, and the upgrading of existing estates, should aim to minimise the creation of open spaces which will have no specific use, as these tend to be exposed and appear bleak in poor weather conditions. Alternatively, the layout and design of outdoor spaces will tend to appear most inviting where they are subdivided and incorporate structure planting and the inspired use of night lighting. It is particularly important that building and landscape works utilise high quality materials which will withstand the testing climatic conditions of Caithness and Sutherland, so that these do not develop an image of neglect due to excessive weathering. Bright white or coloured structures may also aid the portrayal of a positive image in these conditions, particularly when complemented by the coastal and northern light conditions.

Town centre facilities

There may be pressures for the provision of landscape works within the town centres of this character type, such as pedestrianisation and the provision of street furniture, public conveniences, signs and green spaces.

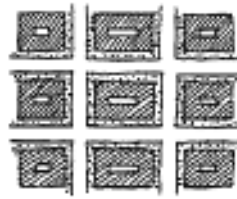
Guidance

It is imperative that the provision of facilities relates to the distinct siting and character of a town, to avoid the development of an area indifferent in style. This will usually mean that elements such as standard street furniture will appear inappropriate, whereas locally designed and constructed features will incite greater pride of place.

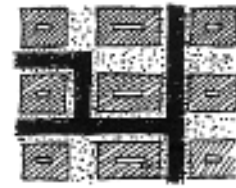
It will be preferable to avoid the development of large urban open spaces, as these tend to be exposed and can appear bleak in poor weather conditions. Alternatively, it may be more appropriate to develop a series of different spaces which can link together, incorporating both central areas, where there is a concentration of activity and built development, and the landscape features and corridors which lead through and out of the town, such as the river or coast.

It may be desirable to plan the pedestrianisation of some streets within the town centre, especially if existing roads are used by heavy through traffic. However, these vehicles are partly responsible for the integration and activity of people within the town centres which can be exciting and appealing, especially at times when the town centre might otherwise be quiet. The diversion of this traffic may also concentrate

pressure along other routes, thereby merely diverting the problem or creating greater barriers between areas.



Equal dispersal of traffic and pedestrian movement



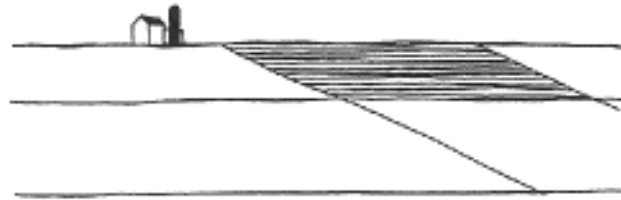
Pedestrianisation concentrates traffic within certain streets, these effectively becoming barriers to pedestrian movement as a result

13 OPEN, INTENSIVE FARMLAND



landscape character type 13

OPEN, INTENSIVE FARMLAND



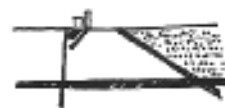
This landscape character type is found in only a few areas of Caithness; here, the scene is dominated by a wide plain of rich agricultural land, lying beneath an immense expanse of open sky. Despite this landscape being simple and ordered in composition, its experience constantly changes in response to different weather and light conditions.

key characteristics

- This character type is dominated by its *openness* and *flat or gently sloping landform*, which combine to result in *extreme exposure and extensive visibility*.
- The appearance of this landscape is strongly influenced by the characteristics of northern, coastal light in Caithness; this creates an *extreme clarity of light*, and is often seen to spread a warmth of colour and variety of sharp shadows across the landscape, resulting from the low sun angle at certain times of the year and day. The character of the sky, particularly its colour and movement of clouds, constantly changes, as weather systems are often seen to rapidly pass across and around areas of this landscape.



Variable shading



Low light creates shadows



Bright light

- At the broadest level, this landscape possesses a *simple composition of elements*, principally comprising *sky* and *agricultural land*, and a *smooth, simple skyline* dividing them. As the landscape is open, and contains only a few built structures of known size, it is typically *difficult to discern its scale*.

At a further level of detail, the landscape contains an *ordered pattern of land use*, mainly comprising large, regular shaped fields. Occasional concentrations of farm buildings or houses form focal points within the landscape, especially when encircled by a shelter belt of trees, contrasting to the surrounding flat and open land. Roads also create lines which reinforce this pattern; these tend to follow the field and property boundaries, running straight and then swinging around sharp corners.



Simple composition at broadest level



Ordered pattern of colour, line, points and texture at detailed level

The **pattern** of fields within this character type is delineated by the route of fences, dykes or hedges, and highlighted by a **variety of different crops**, the character of which changes throughout the year. **Flagstone fences** are a particularly distinctive feature within many areas of this landscape, characterised by their repetition of regular shaped, thin, stone slabs, which create low, sharp edges to fields - the route of the fences often emphasised by the shadows which they project.



Flagstone fences create sharp edges

- Typically encompassing the richest areas of agriculture within Caithness, this landscape possesses a long tradition of occupation, with many **historic features** situated on hills within, or adjacent to, this character type. These features convey an **acute sense of history and changing cultural influence** and range from chambered tombs dating back to around 3800BC to crofts abandoned in the 17th century and still to the present day. This character type retains a fairly evenly spread population, the **activity of people and machinery** tending to add a positive image to the landscape.
- This landscape character type includes many **large commercial farms** and **estate properties**. These often possess quite distinct characteristics such as a particular design of boundary wall or gateways, and often include concentrated blocks of estate houses or outbuildings. The main estate house tends to create a dominant focal point within these areas, and is often surrounded by a small patch of mature woodland. These typically form a dense and compact stand, being severely wind pruned which results in sculptural-looking shapes.
- Within this flat landscape, it only takes a subtle variation in landform for the drainage characteristics to be markedly different. **Wetlands** and **lochs** occupy many of the hollows and shallow valleys within, and bordering, this character type. The location of these create a distinct habitat, the experience of which is dominated by the activity and sound of birds, and the nature of this changing between seasons. In other areas, intensive agriculture practises rely on the use of land drains to prevent reversion to this habitat type.



Slight depression creates wetland

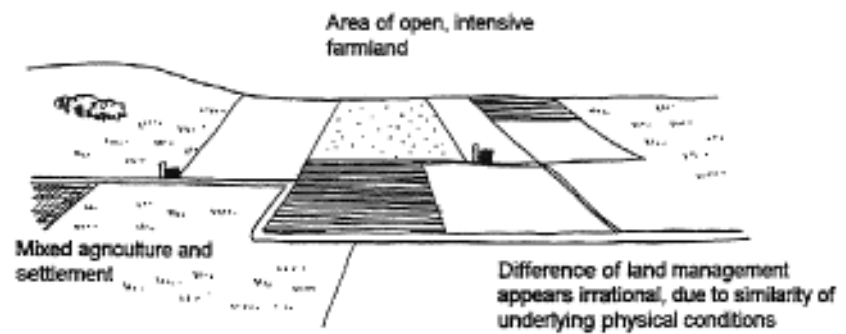
transitions

This landscape character type tends to border other agricultural and settlement areas, such as the **mixed land use and settlement** type or a **town**. It is also often located next to the coast, where the characteristics of clear light quality, exposure to extreme weather conditions and extensive views are further augmented.

This landscape character type tends to occur in the areas of most favourable agricultural land in Caithness; however, the border between this type and less intensive farming areas does not always directly relate to physical factors. This

open, intensive farmland

is often affected by land ownership and management practices, which determine differences of land use.



key forces for change and design guidance

General

The key considerations of forces for change within this character type concern its openness, simple composition and landscape pattern.

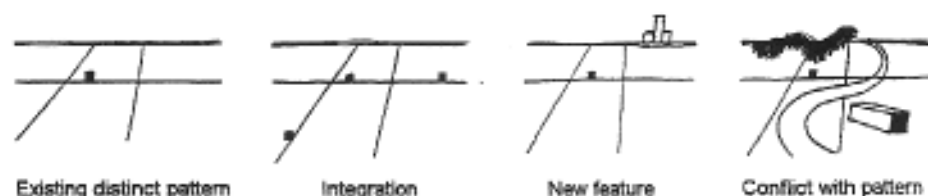
The openness of the landscape means that change or development tends to be clearly visible, especially if highlighted by the distinct northern coastal light; however, the openness of the landscape and the neighbouring sea also means that new elements tend to appear minor in comparison to its large scale.

The character and situation of this landscape is very distinct, occurring in only a few locations near to the coast and main settlement centres of Caithness. It is particularly valued for its rich agricultural land and as an area of open space; however, its situation also means that it tends to be under high pressure for development from neighbouring areas.

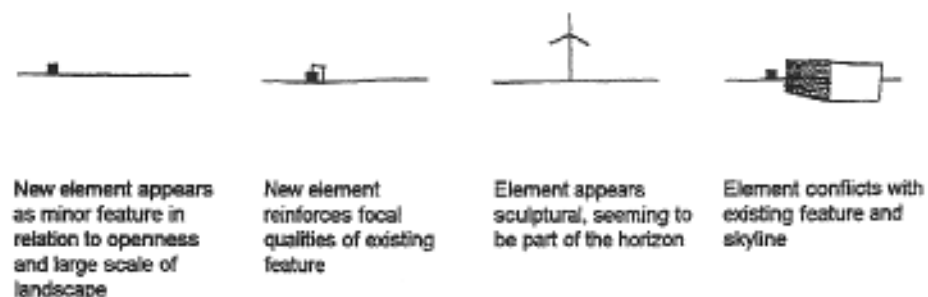
The location of new elements within this landscape may have an impact on the existing foci and historic structures.

Guidance

Although additional elements are likely to appear highly visible within this landscape, they can be located in order to relate to the distinct pattern and simple composition of the landscape. The dispersal of elements will have an impact over a larger area; however, concentration may create dominant foci.



New structures will generally appear most appropriate where they are located either within the wide open spaces of this landscape, where they are difficult to scale, or next to existing features where they reinforce the existing pattern. New elements located on the skyline often appear more a part of the wide skies than the land, and take on a sculptural image within the simplicity of this landscape.



New elements tend to appear most appropriate where they are designed to relate to the simple composition of this landscape, as this tends to clearly show off their design, and particularly their shape and form. Simple forms usually appear most

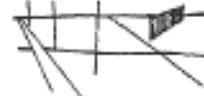
suitable, with elements possessing a clear relationship to the landscape and each other.



Simple composition



Simple addition



Confusing addition with no obvious rationale for location

It is important to consider the potential impact of new elements in relation to distinct climate and light within this landscape, and how this constantly changes and applies pressures on structures. It is important that building and landscape works utilise high quality materials which can withstand the testing climatic conditions of Caithness, so that these do not develop an image of neglect because of excessive weathering. The use of bright white or coloured structures may help to portray a positive image in these conditions, particularly when they are complemented by the coastal and northern light.

It is important to maintain the existing setting of historic structures and foci within this landscape. New elements will tend to appear most appropriate where they relate to the old structures in location and design, and possibly utilise similar sites, forms, proportions and materials etc. They should not appear as a pastiche, but alternatively respect the traditional structures, whilst appearing distinct in relation to their own specific function and point in time, in this way extending the sense of history.



Historic feature



Setting and focal qualities affected by new elements



Balance of features

Agriculture

This landscape comprises some of the best agricultural land in Caithness; this means that it will generally be under less pressure for change than in other areas. However, agricultural practice will continue to be strongly influenced by the availability of subsidies and grants through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and programmes such as the Scottish Countryside Premium Scheme (SCPS), in addition to short term market forces. It is difficult to determine how these will interrelate to affect the character of this landscape in the future; however, it is expected that they may encourage a greater sustainability of practices.

There has been some amalgamation of smaller farming units into larger farms within this landscape in recent years. This results in less distinction between specific places, as entire properties are managed in a similar fashion, influenced by economies of scale, and thereby increasing the simplicity of the landscape pattern.



Various character of individual properties



Amalgamation into larger units results in unification

The agricultural land within this character type is predominately managed for arable production. However, recent concern over BSE in cattle has resulted in many farmers decreasing their cattle stock, or changing over to sheep, thereby reducing the need for local cereals and straw. In the long term, however, it is hoped that an increased demand for home-grown, high quality beef due to the BSE scare will reverse this trend and result in more cattle, which will need to be supported by an additional amount of arable cropping to provide feed and bedding.

Guidance

As farming properties expand, there tends to be a loss in the diversity of characteristics within this landscape and the features which comprise the landscape pattern, such as field boundaries. Although this may merely heighten the simplicity of the character type, there is likely to be a reduction in the sense of place which responds to the specific conditions of a location. This means that it will generally be preferable to reinforce or highlight the distinct landscape features, for example boundary walls, hedgerows, or woodland, helping to identify distinct places.



Distinct landscape pattern



Amalgamation of properties and increased cropping reduces need for elements such as flagstone fences, leading to neglect and less sense of place.

Although it is unclear how market forces and the provision of grants and subsidies will affect agriculture in the future, the promotion of more sustainable practice will probably result in a greater diversity of crops and improved husbandry; in some places, this may principally involve greater maintenance of field boundaries and drainage channels, and increased management of existing woodlands, possibly with a slight decrease in the intensity of cropping.

Agricultural buildings

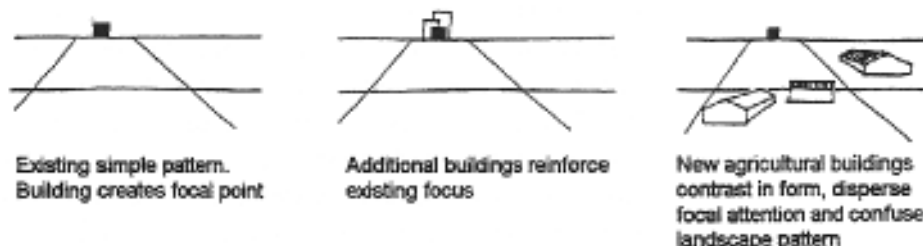
There has been an increase in the development of large agricultural buildings within this landscape. Some of this has been through the Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants (CCAGs), the minimum building standard required under this scheme tending to discourage the upgrading of existing buildings. However, the high rate of recent construction works may be linked to it once being thought that CCAGs might cease with the introduction of the Scottish Countryside

Premium Scheme (SCPS), and as this is now not to happen, the rate of new agricultural building construction may reduce.

The impact of new agricultural buildings and silos within this landscape tends to be greatest where they are isolated within wide open areas so that they create a new focus, and where their construction involves substantial ground modification or new access routes. The new structures may also contrast in form and scale to the traditional buildings.

Guidance

Particular attention should be paid to the siting and design of new agricultural buildings, so that these structures appear simple in form and relate to the existing structures within the landscape, especially considering their form, shape, scale, materials, yard area and access. The impact of these new buildings can be minimised where they are located next to existing agricultural outbuildings, to reinforce the focal qualities of these, and upon sites which require the minimum of ground modification.



Housing

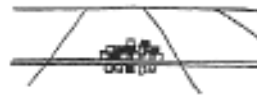
There is a demand for new isolated houses within this landscape (especially near to the coast) and for small housing estates near to the settlements bordering this character type. The development of new housing will tend to be particularly noticeable within this landscape, as vertical structures are typically highlighted by the coastal and northern light at certain times of the year and day.

The development of new housing will reduce the openness of this landscape and may conflict with the typical landscape pattern. It may also change the image of the character type from an essentially agricultural landscape to that of a residential area.

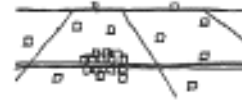
Guidance

It is difficult to locate additional housing within this landscape without this affecting the simple agricultural character. It may be most appropriate to cluster new housing next to existing dwellings, so that it merely reinforces the focus of these; however, there will be a limited capacity for incorporating new houses in this way, before these focal areas change in character to being seen as a distinct settlement.

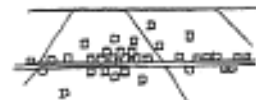
It is hard to accommodate new housing near to the settlements bordering this character type, as this can easily appear as sprawl or corridor development, and thereby affect the distinct edge of the character type and neighbouring settlement, and their sense of arrival.



New housing concentrated within existing feature within the open landscape.



New houses cumulatively convert image of landscape from being agricultural to residential, and create distributed foci which reduces the sense of openness and simple pattern.



New houses cumulatively appears as sprawl and creates a barrier and corridor at the border between this character type and a neighbouring town.

The layout and design of new housing should relate to the traditional buildings within this landscape, particularly their scale, orientation, form and design details. It is particularly important that building and landscape works utilise high quality materials in order to withstand the testing climatic conditions of Caithness without developing an image of neglect due to excessive weathering.

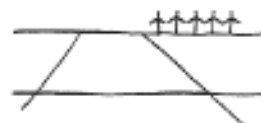
Wind energy development

This landscape character type may be favoured for wind energy development on account of its typically consistent and high wind speeds, and its open space and fairly flat landform. A windfarm will relate to the exposed, wind dominated character of this landscape, and can appear as a spectacular, futuristic-looking and sculptural addition. However, as only a few areas of this character type exist, and these tend to be fairly small in size, the development of a windfarm may seem to affect an entire area of the character type, becoming a key characteristic and effectively changing it in the process.

Guidance

A windfarm will tend to appear most appropriate where it is located within the wide open areas of this landscape character type, so that the size of the turbines appear inferior to the scale of the surrounding space. A windfarm should aim to portray a simple and sculptural image within areas of open, intensive farmland, and appear either as an isolated feature within the distinct landscape pattern, or attempt to integrate as part of it.

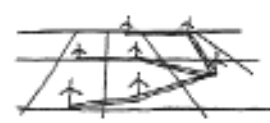
As this landscape has been clearly modified by humans, the layout of a windfarm will tend to appear most rational where it is arranged in a simple and ordered manner, as a unified and concentrated group. It is important that the facilities associated with a windfarm, such as access tracks or a substation, do not dominate or conflict with the landscape pattern of this character type. Any buildings will also generally appear most appropriate where they relate to the design and scale of other structures in the landscape.



From a distance, windfarm is seen as sculptural element within large scale and simplicity of landscape and sea beyond.



Windfarm seen as simple, ordered feature, incorporated into distinct landscape pattern.



Dispersal of wind turbines affects entire area of character type. Rationale for layout is unclear. Access tracks seem excessive in network and conflict with landscape pattern.

14 MIXED AGRICULTURE AND SETTLEMENT



landscape character type 14 MIXED AGRICULTURE AND SETTLEMENT



This landscape covers much of north and east Caithness. It is vast and open - a simple landform covered by a confusion of characteristics - physical, cultural and experiential. The landscape is highly influenced by the activity of people, the extreme nature of the weather and the unique light conditions. It is a landscape in constant change.

key characteristics

- This character type broadly comprises a **wide open landscape**, generally dominated by a **horizontal emphasis**, with the occasional location of a hill or woodland defining spaces at a more detailed level.

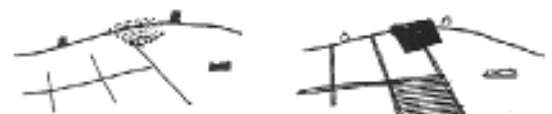


The landscape is **extremely exposed**, and it always seems bracing and invigorating - dominated by the clarity of light and air, the sound and feel of the wind, the smell of peat and grasses, the sight of lichen on stone and the apparently endless, open space and skies.

- This landscape possesses an extremely **complex visual composition**, with no obvious hierarchy. Lines form key elements within this visual composition, mainly comprising the skyline, powerlines, field boundaries and roads. Points are also important; these are formed by, for example, houses, castles, aeries and woodland blocks. The arrangement of these different elements appears clearer in certain weather and light conditions, for example when particular structures are highlighted by low light, against a dark sky backdrop.



Complex visual composition



Composition appears clearer when particular elements are highlighted and a hierarchy is apparent

- Most areas of this landscape character type possess a **gently sloping landform**, the nature of this tending to be most clearly illustrated by the lines of field boundaries and the skyline.

In some places slopes rise up to form **low hills**, or dip to create **basins** and **shallow glens**, these areas tending to be covered by rough grass or moorland vegetation. At times of clear visibility, the hill tops offer spectacular views of the surrounding complex landscape pattern - these open vistas generally edged by the distant horizon of the sea or distinctive profiles of far away hills. The shallow basins and wide glens typically contain wetland, and sometimes a river

or loch; these habitats tend to be particularly valued by birds, the activity and noise of which, creates great seasonal interest.



Spectacular views from hill tops. Often dominated by distant mountain profiles



Very gently sloped glen, containing shallow and meandering river and loch

Historic features are located throughout this landscape character type and its neighbouring areas, and are particularly noticeable on many of the hills and in many of the glens. These artefacts range from Neolithic chambered tombs, dating back over 4000 years, to ruined croft houses abandoned during the 'Clearances' and more recently up to the present day. These features portray a **rich sense of history and cultural change**, often emphasised by their distinctive Norse place names.

This character type has a **mix of land use** which tends to be a fairly evenly distributed. The complex arrangement of this varies in appearance between different seasons, and is particularly emphasised by the colour and texture of arable fields contrasting with grassland and moorland.

The pattern of land use can sometimes be linked to subtle differences in ground conditions, for example rough grazing occurring within a wet basin, with arable ground upon the slopes. However, there is **sometimes no visible rationale for variations in land use**, for example intensive cropping immediately adjacent to moorland. This tends to result from different land owners managing their land in alternative ways.



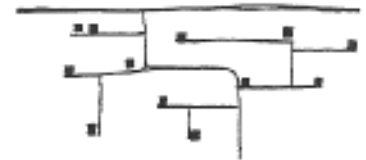
Link between land use and physical characteristics



No obvious rationale for land use

A greater intensity of past land use is indicated in some areas, for example, containing **ruined crofts, drainage channels and field boundaries, with patches of neglected grassland and rushes and bracken**. Some of this is the result of a general decline in areas of farming within fringe areas, which particularly occurred during the 'Clearances'. However, large numbers of people in Caithness were also displaced off the land in the 1950s to work at Dounreay, often moving to housing provided for them, especially to Thurso. Some of the remnants of more intensive agriculture can also be linked to past Government incentives. These encouraged the growth of crops around the 1950s and 60s which were often not suitable to their specific location and relied on large inputs of labour, drainage and fertiliser; as a consequence, as soon as these incentives were withdrawn, the land was left to degenerate.

- Those not familiar with a particular location of this character type will tend to find its complex arrangement of land use, settlements and individual properties very confusing. This may be increased by the typical route of roads around field boundaries so that they often abruptly change direction. There also tends to be **no distinct division between different townships or areas**, one gradually blending into the next.



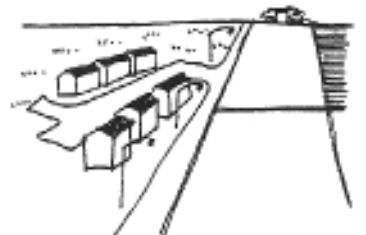
Confusing arrangement of dwellings and roads. No distinct edges to separate communities

The unpredictability of the weather increases the landscape complexity and excitement, and the sense of orientation is greatly confused in conditions of low cloud or rain, due to limited visibility. In alternative conditions, clear skies allow some sense of direction to be gained from the distinct character of the light in the north and close to the sea.

- Several small **estates** are located within this character type. These tend to be characterised by fairly rich agricultural land, a large estate house which form a focal point, areas of mature woodland, and groups of 'estate worker' houses and farm buildings. These elements are often linked by stone dykes, hedges or flagstone fences which extend the distinct historic character of the estate house into the surrounding landscape.



- In addition to isolated farm and croft houses, there are a few **isolated housing estates and villages** (some of which have industrial roots). These tend to form minor foci within the landscape on account of their dense form contrasting with the open surroundings. The new housing developments tend to contrast to older buildings by relating to access routes rather than to the location of favourable landscape characteristics for settlement. Often, there is no obvious rationale why this kind of new housing is located where it is, but frequently it is because it has resulted from social or political factors, for example housing people who work many miles away at Dounreay.



In addition to the concentrated housing settlements, this character type possesses a fairly even spread of new 'kit' houses. These tend to appear as isolated, individual structures, which do not usually relate to, or integrate with, the surrounding landscape. The consistent dispersal of houses and small settlements throughout this landscape results in a fairly large population; this is mainly serviced by the towns which lie in adjacent areas.

transitions

This landscape borders a variety of different character types, mainly on account of its mixed composition of land use, landform and vegetation, linking to neighbouring areas. These character types include **sweeping moorland, small farms and crofts (especially fringe crofting and historic features), open intensive farmland and towns**. It also runs along stretches of the Caithness coastline, edged in some places by **high cliffs and bays or long beaches, dunes and links**.

key forces for change and design guidance

This landscape contains a complex mix of characteristics, the composition and balance of which have changed over many years, and continue to do so. A multitude of historic features highlights this dynamic quality. This evidence of past change means that many areas of this landscape character type are able to accommodate new changes without their intrinsic quality being marred. However, it is difficult to locate any new elements in this landscape, as there tends to be no distinct pattern or organisation to which these can relate so that their location often appears irrational.

Although the relationship between the different characteristics within this landscape is often not obvious, the presence of all the various components, and their relative dominance, does influence its character. This means that this landscape may be altered by the addition or removal of any particular element within the composition.



Existing



Dominance of buildings



Loss of field boundaries

Despite the particular appeal of this landscape character type, its exposure, presence of abandoned buildings and land, and accumulation of utilitarian elements often portrays a negative image. This means that some people see any new development or change as a very positive force. However, the introduction of new elements will tend to confuse the existing complex composition of landscape characteristics; they may also create foci, both individually and as a group, emphasised by the openness of the character type, and particularly visible from the hill tops.

Guidance

Change or development within this landscape character type should be planned to take into account potential knock-on effects and cumulative impact. This is particularly important within this landscape character type on account of the complex arrangement of characteristics, these often being in a process of change.

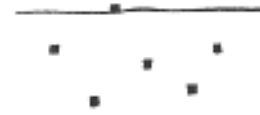
Although it is difficult to introduce any new elements into this landscape without adding to the visual complexity, the impact of this may be limited where new elements directly relate to the specific characteristics of a site, or are arranged to create an identifiable pattern and order of their own. The most appropriate way of achieving this will vary between different locations, and in relation to the design and function of a development; however, it should generally be consistent within an area of this landscape character type to minimise visual confusion.



Element directly relates to landform feature



Concentration of elements - create order of their own

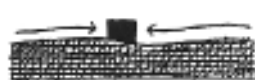


Dispersal - no obvious rationale for location

New vertical elements will be particularly noticeable within this open landscape because of its dominant horizontal dimension. However, the degree of visibility will tend to relate to the mass of the elements as well as their height, as tall thin structures often appear to blend into the wide skies of this landscape, where a bulky object can obstruct visual movement along the skyline, becoming a dominant focus which may also divide and define spaces.



Elements appear as part of wide open sky



Bulky object obscures visual movement



Elements divide and define spaces

The introduction of any new structures into this landscape may potentially conflict with the existing historic features. However, as the character of this landscape tends to suggest a strong sense of change and evolution over time, a new element may complement the old; this will depend on their relationship, particularly in respect of design, location and function.

The forces for change within this landscape have the potential to affect how its distinct character is experienced, by for example screening views or sheltering the wind. The visual impact of any element will vary considerably in different weather and light conditions.

Guidance

It is important to consider the most appropriate design and location of a new element, particularly in respect of its scale and form, and in relation to the skyline and spatial characteristics. This is especially important as any new element is likely to be highly visible within this character type - unable to be hidden.



New feature crosses skyline. Differential visibility across this increases visual complexity, especially as this varies in different weather and light conditions



Simple design and 'elegant' proportions of element



Complex, bulky and unbalanced form

The introduction of a new element may strengthen the sense of history in this landscape. However, this tends to only be seen as a positive addition if, like the old artefacts, its design and function relate to a specific place at a point in time. A new element will tend to appear most appropriate where it is seen as being distinct from its older counterparts (unless directly related to their function) - complementing them, rather than confusing their image or form.

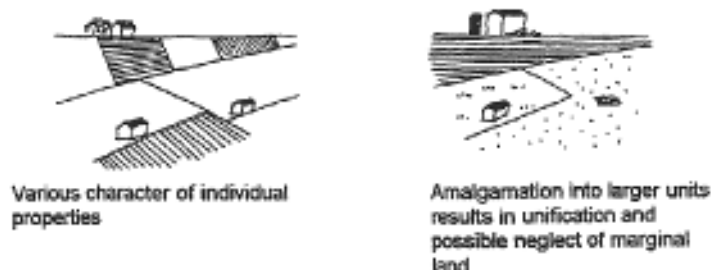


It is important to consider how any change, both individually and cumulatively, will affect the experience of this landscape, especially in relation to the balance between its different components and in various season and weather conditions.

Agriculture

The pattern and practice of agriculture within this landscape character type is, and will continue to be, strongly influenced by the availability of subsidies and grants through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and programmes such as the Scottish Countryside Premium Scheme (SCPS), in addition to short term market forces. It is difficult to determine how these will interrelate to affect the character of this landscape in the future; however, it is expected that they will encourage a greater sustainability of practice.

There has been a trend in recent years, for the amalgamation of small farming units into larger farms within this landscape character type. This often results in less distinction between specific places, as entire properties are managed in a similar fashion, influenced by economies of scale. As larger farms typically concentrate on large scale production, there may be a tendency for marginal agricultural land to suffer from insufficient management or abandonment.



In recent years, there has been a growing predominance of sheep grazing, although numbers for subsidy are limited by quota. Recent concern over BSE in cattle has generally resulted in a reduced demand for beef. In the short term, this may result in farmers holding onto or

reducing their cattle stock, or changing over to sheep; however, long term demand for home-grown, high quality beef may result in more cattle being kept within this landscape, supported by an additional amount of arable cropping to provide feed and bedding.

The moorland and rough grass areas of this landscape character type are often under pressure from the heavy grazing of sheep. The selective nature of this grazing can result in ground erosion and poaching, the spread of bracken and rushes, and a general reduction of biodiversity in places. These processes may be exacerbated where the practice of muirburn is insufficiently controlled.

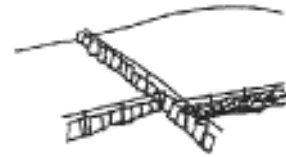
There may be pressure for additional enclosure of land, as owners demand apportionment of common land, whilst many existing dykes, hedges and flagstone fences are neglected and replaced by wire fencing. This neglect can portray a negative image and also changes the distinctive landscape pattern.



Existing dykes and flagstone fences (may not be sufficient to restrict sheep)



Neglect and replacement



Compromise - reinforce dyke and flagstone fence with top wire to restrict sheep

Guidance

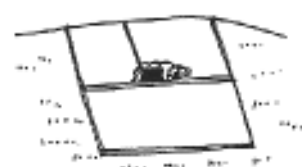
As farming properties expand, there tends to be a loss in the diversity of characteristics within this landscape. Although this may reduce the degree of visual confusion, unification will contrast to the variable nature of characteristics within these areas. It is generally preferable for land use type to directly respond to the specific conditions of a location; however, where this is not possible, the reinforcement of features which are distinct to a particular property, for example boundary walls or hedgerows, will help to identify it as a distinct place.



No obvious rationale for landscape pattern



Land use relates to landform



Although land use does not relate to specific physical characteristics, obviously linked to land ownership

Although it is unclear how market forces and the provision of grants and subsidies will affect agriculture in this landscape in the future, the promotion of more sustainable practices will probably result in a greater diversity of crops and improved husbandry. In some places, this should principally involve the reduction of sheep numbers, whilst in others, the increased control of muirburn and weed species, and the improved maintenance of field boundaries and drainage channels will be advisable.

Different forms of agriculture and woodland, both as new practices and as determined by management changes, will tend to appear most appropriate where they directly relate to the landscape pattern and physical characteristics of a place. Although land use activity is heavily influenced by economics, it can be suggested that land is either actively managed, or it is left to regenerate as a 'natural' habitat - as a compromise, neglected land portrays a very negative image.



Ruins within moorland - acute appreciation of the past in contrast to current remoteness



Positive image of intense management - implying prosperity of population



Negative image of neglected agricultural land

Active management portrays an image of prosperity and care which may result in a greater pride of place, and therefore further appreciation of a landscape's value. This may be partially achieved by promoting a greater awareness of the potential cumulative impact of negative elements on the landscape, for example stressing how the location of waste and neglected buildings and fences can affect visitor attraction, and therefore the tourist industry.

Built structures and woodland

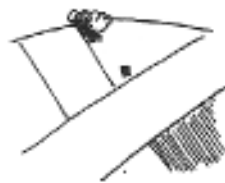
Within this landscape, there tends to be a fairly even demand for new buildings such as housing, agricultural structures, aeries, utilities and wind energy development, in addition to new woodland. It is very difficult to accommodate these elements, on account of there being no distinct pattern within this landscape to which they can directly relate. This means that, although their impact will vary in relation to their specific function, location and design, their cumulative impact and potential to confuse the complex arrangement of landscape characteristics remains a major consideration.

The creation of new woodlands is likely to be closely linked to the financial incentives offered through the Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS) and the Scottish Countryside Premium Scheme (SCPS) in compensation for payments for stock through the Common Agricultural Policy.

Guidance

It is important to consider the ability of an area of this landscape character type to accommodate new structures or woodland without its intrinsic character being changed, although this is inherently transient in nature. Elements will tend to appear most appropriate where their function and design directly relate to the specific character of a location, including the experiential characteristics, so that it appears as a rational addition.

It may be appropriate to integrate new features into the existing arrangement of components or, alternatively, to concentrate them as a distinct group in their own right. Whatever the most suitable treatment, new elements should appear as a positive feature, being designed to be as simple and visually balanced as possible, and minimising visual confusion.



Existing composition



Additional elements increase visual complexity; confusion occurs where their relative location appears irrational



Concentration or expansion of existing elements

Woodland is greatly valued within this exposed landscape due to its provision of shelter and richness of biodiversity. However many of the existing mature woodlands, which mainly occur upon estate lands, are in need of active management to ensure a more diverse age structure and thereby promoting regeneration. There is the potential for a large expansion of new woodland planting within this landscape on account of the decline of agriculture in some locations.

New woodland may either integrate, divide or unite the existing landscape pattern; either way, it is likely to increase the definition of space within this landscape by introducing vertical edges. The planning of new woodland should consider how it will be managed over time, so that it retains a diverse age structure and is able to undergo thinning without high risk of wind throw.



Existing open landscape with mixed pattern



New planting very broadly relates to existing woodland and field pattern



New planting divides spaces

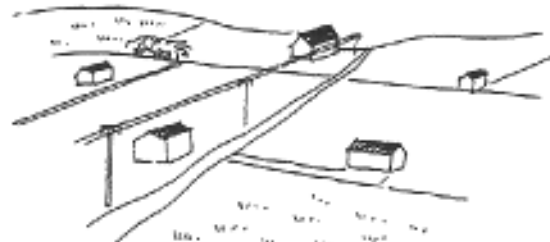


New planting becomes dominant characteristic - unifying area and changing nature of character type

15 SMALL FARMS AND CROFTS



landscape character type 15 SMALL FARMS AND CROFTS



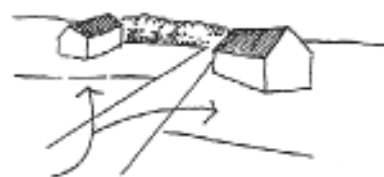
This landscape character type mainly occurs along the coast and straths of Caithness and Sutherland. In its simplest form, it represents a traditional form of crofting and farming land use, closely tied to the intrinsic qualities of the landscape, with integration of people, settlements, land and sea. However, the inclusion of five subtypes within the description of this character type portrays how these areas have changed, and continue to do so, in response to different pressures.

key characteristics

- The character of this landscape is dominated by the **occupation and activity of people**, who are responsible for a **complex variety of different land use characteristics**; this results in a range from clearly ordered crofts, to open and fairly rich, small farms and areas of marginal moorland and ruined properties, with a multitude of variations in-between. These differences tend to reflect both the physical and social characteristics of a place - particularly land ownership.

This landscape character type typically comprises a number of **common elements** despite the variation in their arrangement; for example houses, outbuildings, a pattern of fields depicted by fences or walls, access roads, powerlines, remnants of woodland or clumps of trees and machinery.

- The **extent of visibility tends to be limited** within this character type because of the screening affect of buildings, woodland and barriers, and the typically sloping landform. This typically results in a semi-enclosed landscape, where the **scale of spaces are fairly small** so that they seem quite **intimate** and views are directed towards foreground details.



The various characteristics of this landscape create a **complex visual composition** of different spaces, edges, points, colours, shades, textures and lines. This **diversity** tends to appear very interesting, although often confusing; however, the overall composition may seem clearer in certain weather conditions, when differential highlighting and shading emphasise only certain elements.



Complex visual composition; however, close examination can identify different layers related to specific landscape characteristics. This effect may also occur in particular weather conditions

The arrangement of landscape components also appears clearer in locations where there is a distinct and limiting feature, for example a river, the coast or a strath floor. This results in elements being ordered in direct relation to this feature, creating a repetition of pattern which typically appears reassuring in its consistency.



Clear organisation of land use elements in relation to dominant physical landscape characteristic

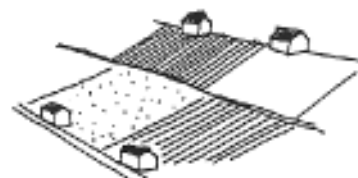
- The land use within this character type is mainly **agricultural**, with local variations utilising specific resources.

Many areas of this landscape character type contain a large amount of **new housing**. This is not usually linked to the working of the land in which it is located, and mainly comprise 'kit' structures which do not relate to the intrinsic character of this landscape.

Many areas of this character type also contain **small villages** and **local facilities** such as shops, parking areas and schools, many of these features also serving the visitors to these areas.

Some areas of this landscape contain small **fragments of broadleaf woodland**, these being mainly located within the steep glens and along the coast within this character type. Although many of these woodlands have traditionally been managed, they often represent only a remnant of their past extent, typically as a result of recent neglect and grazing pressure.

- In areas where active management and maintenance occurs, this character type tends to portray a **close relationship between evenly spaced houses and the pattern of land division**, sometimes emphasised by various cropping practices. However, many areas of this landscape character type are now only used for extensive **sheep grazing**, so that the boundaries between different properties are indistinct.



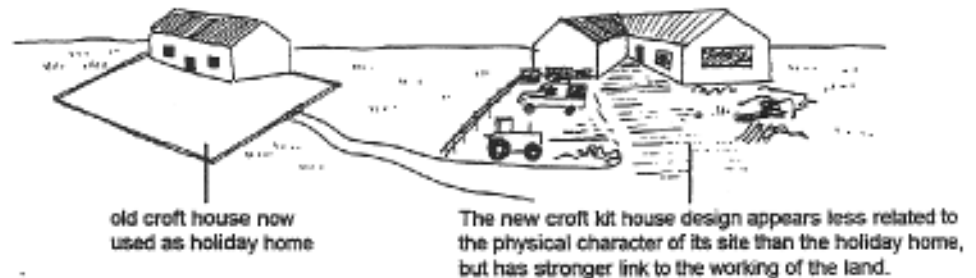
Close relationship between buildings and land division



Sheep grazing throughout area. Pattern is less distinct.

- Many areas of this landscape contain **ruins** of crofts, field boundaries and drainage systems. These represent a decreased intensity of land use, and also depopulation over the last 250 years, and tend to portray a negative image of prosperity, especially since the abandonment of old crofts continues in some areas to this day whilst the demand for new house building grows in others. This partly occurs as a result of people continuing to move away from crofting, which is widely considered at the edge of economic viability, towards alternative employment, particularly in service and tourist industries which are concentrated in and around the settlement centres.
- Many areas of this landscape character type lie adjacent to the Caithness and Sutherland coast, the nature of the sea and the coastline strongly influencing these areas. The land division within these small farms and crofts tends to directly relate to the coastal edge - often forming a very ordered pattern with linear repetition. The experience of the landscape is also strongly influenced by the sea, particularly its clarity of coastal light, and the activity and sound of the waves, frequently strong wind and sea birds.

- Many crofts houses are used as **holiday homes** in coastal areas (sometimes with the crofter living in a new house built within the same holding); these tend to appear less connected to their surroundings, by not possessing a distinct link to the management of the surrounding land, and often appearing uncharacteristically tidy in contrast to the working crofts and farms.



- Areas of coastal small farms and crofts are often found near to a **harbour**, as crofting was, and still is occasionally, combined with fishing as a means of income.

transitions

As this character type tends to be located in marginal areas, and often utilises very small areas of good quality land, it frequently borders **sweeping moorland, cnocan, moorland slopes and hills**, and runs along the coast, linked to **high cliffs and sheltered bays** and **long beaches, dunes and links**. It also borders other agricultural areas, **such as mixed agriculture and settlement**.

This landscape character type includes **five subtypes**:

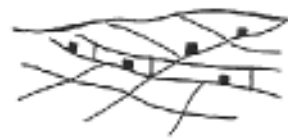
- 15a dispersed farms and crofts;
- 15b small farm and crofting areas with local facilities;
- 15c small farm and crofting areas with new housing;
- 15d area of small farm and crofts surrounded by woodland, and
- 15e fringe crofting and historic features.

The key characteristics and main issues of forces for change within these subtypes are described within the following section. These subtypes share the same key characteristics as this main character type; however the balance of these, and the forces for change acting upon them, are slightly different.

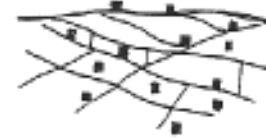
key forces for change and design guidance

This landscape contains a 'melting pot' of different characteristics, the local character of a place being determined by which are dominant and their relationships to each other. These characteristics are directly influenced by human activity, so as the nature of this changes over time, so the character of the landscape does. The main challenge to planning and design within these areas is enabling this change to take place, whilst retaining some of the intrinsic qualities derived from the balance between the different components.

It is very difficult to incorporate new elements into this landscape without this confusing the existing composition of characteristics by adding a new layer of complexity. Additional elements can also disrupt the balance between components, as one element becomes more dominant than the others.

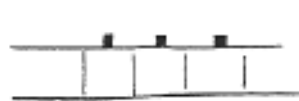


Existing complexity



Addition of element increases dominance

It is generally easier to accommodate new elements where there is a distinct pattern or organising feature within this landscape to which these can relate. Although, even in these locations, additional development can appear as uncharacteristic concentrations or sprawl.



Existing ordered arrangement



Concentration limits extent of impact, but focused



Expansion may create appearance of sprawl

It is very difficult to integrate new elements into this landscape where there is no distinct pattern, or where this is linked to past social factors which no longer apply. In the absence of any distinct organisation or vernacular style, the random location of elements appears irrational, as these seem unrelated to a specific place.



Guidance

Any change or development within this landscape character type should be strategically planned in order to consider potential knock-on effects and cumulative impact. This is particularly significant on account of the close relationship between the individual characteristics, and because these areas are often in a process of change. It is imperative that any guidance for development is not studied in isolation, but considers how an individual force for change will affect the relationship and balance between the different components of the landscape

Although it is difficult to introduce new elements into this landscape without this resulting in visual confusion, the impact may be limited where new elements either directly relate to the specific characteristics of a site, are concentrated to create an identifiable pattern of their own, or are located as expansion or infill of existing elements. The impact of these various methods will differ between areas; however, it is essential that whatever growth is considered most appropriate to a certain place, and for a particular force for change, this treatment is planned to be consistent within a landscape character area, in order to minimise visual confusion.



Location of element relates to specific characteristic



Identifiable group

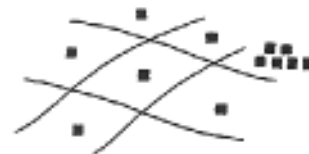


Confusion of various relationship to landscape

It may be preferable to separate or concentrate new elements within this landscape, in order to avoid them seeming to conflict with the existing characteristics. However, this may result in the new elements within an area of small farms and crofts becoming dominant foci, often extending their impact over a large area and distracting attention away from the established characteristics of the landscape.



Existing dispersal related to land division



New concentration creates dominant focus

The main forces for change influencing this landscape are the provision of new houses, local settlement and tourist facilities (from new industrial units to leisure centres, pavements, lighting and public conveniences), and changes of land management and agriculture.

Housing

There is a demand for new housing within many areas of this landscape character type, especially within the main settlements. This results from a general trend of decreasing household size, but also

because old houses are often being replaced; in some cases, these are adapted to become visitor accommodation, and in others, they are abandoned, or used as outbuildings. Most housing proposals are for individual dwellings, however there is some demand for housing estates, especially within some of the existing settlements.

It is very difficult to incorporate new housing within this character type without changing the relationship of landscape characteristics. For although the variety of existing house styles means that a new house does not tend to form a dominant focus, the lack of any distinct vernacular tends to result in a multitude of different designs - none of which relate to each other, or the landscape, resulting in visual confusion.



Visual confusion results from variety of building styles - no one relates to another or a particular landscape characteristic



Building extension and associated facilities (eg for B&B) disrupts repetition and sense of cohesive group.

Guidance

As the introduction of any new houses will affect the character of this landscape, it is generally preferable to utilise or adapt existing facilities wherever possible, for example repairing or converting unoccupied or ruined buildings. This will tend to convey a positive image of change, linking the traditional character of the landscape to the present, and seeming less 'disrespectful' than abandonment and replacement.

It is important that where new buildings are introduced into this landscape, that these do not conflict with the distinctly rural character of the small farm and croft areas. Conflict may arise from the use of 'urban' details, for example the provision of street lights, pavements or barriers such as ranch-type post and rail fencing or concrete walls.



Simple, rural character - closely related to landscape.



Dominance of 'urban' elements

Although it may seem more appropriate to disperse new housing within this character type, this should be strategically planned to consider its relationship to the overall agricultural character of the landscape; the dispersal of properties may also require an extension of service facilities such as access tracks, powerlines and sewage disposal, which may have a significant landscape impact of their own.

Although it may be easier to introduce a new housing style to this landscape, rather than attempting to relate to the variable character of traditional houses, this may

increase visual confusion as houses appear as disorganised individuals rather than part of an identifiable group or community .

Agricultural buildings

There has been an increase in the development of large agricultural buildings within this landscape. This has generally been encouraged through Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants (CCAGs), as the minimum building standards required under this scheme tend to discourage the upgrading of existing buildings. The high rate of recent construction works may be due to it once being thought that CCAGs would cease on the introduction of the Scottish Countryside Premium Scheme (SCPS). As this is not now the case, the rate of agricultural building construction may ease off.

The impact of new agricultural buildings within this landscape tends to be greatest in open areas or upon sloping ground. Here, these buildings tend to create a dominant focus, often involving substantial earthworks to create a large, flat site. Standard kit designs do not typically relate to the specific character of this landscape, and usually contrast to the form of existing structures, often seeming excessive in scale in relation to their specific function.

Guidance

It is generally preferable to utilise the existing agricultural buildings within this landscape, rather than constructing anew. However, for this to be financially viable, the grounds for awarding grants would need to be altered, the emphasis on standard specifications changing to accommodate the particular characteristics of buildings and requirements of agriculture in this character type.

Where new agricultural buildings are planned, particular attention should be paid to their siting and design, so that they appear appropriate to the specific character of a place as an individual structure, as well as cumulatively in relation to existing buildings. Of particular consideration will be the form, shape, scale and materials of the building, and also the design of the yard area and access route. The impact of new buildings will be reduced on sites which require the minimum amount of ground modification, and may appear most appropriate when located next to existing agricultural outbuildings.



New agricultural building creates dominant focus and contrasts in scale



New agricultural building relates to siting and design of existing buildings

Settlement facilities

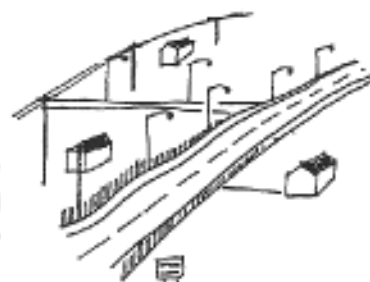
The settlements within the small farms and crofting character type tend to be fairly dispersed, buildings being separated by agricultural land - essentially rural in character and directly relating to the physical characteristics such as landform and drainage. However, there are now demands within many of these settlements for the provision of facilities which have been more closely associated with urban areas in

the past, for example visitor centres, pavements, roadside barriers, play areas, car parks, lamp posts and large signs. These elements contrast to the traditional rural character of this landscape and may create visual confusion.

Guidance

It is important to strategically plan the provision of facilities within this landscape character type, to avoid replication, and therefore competition of some services, whilst others are lacking. Visual confusion can also arise from the excessive provision of signs competing for attention.

The development of 'urban' facilities within settlements contained by this character type should generally be avoided if possible, as these will have a cumulative effect on the predominantly rural nature of the landscape. These elements tend to appear particularly dominant within dispersed settlements as they have to link across large, fairly open areas.



Where absolutely necessary, facilities will appear most appropriate where they are designed to relate to the distinct character and scale of this landscape. It is imperative to consider the potential impact of the design details, as even the most minor of these can result in an inappropriate image - individually or cumulatively; for example, the location of smooth grass verges, concrete walls, large litter bins, plastic grit containers, signs and kerbs within a parking lay-by will all contrast to the character of this rural landscape.

It is preferable to explore the options for commissioning local 'one off' design and construction for new facilities; this usually results in features which are closely related to the character of a particular place and encourage local pride and care. This is infinitely preferable to limiting the choice of structures and materials to standard catalogues (often under the mistaken assumption that these are the cheapest option).



'Urban' facilities dominate character of place

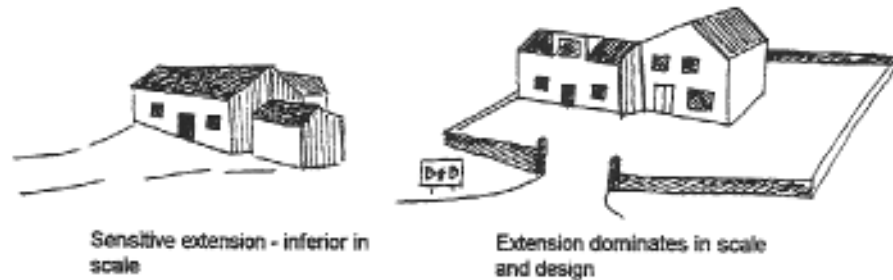
Visitor facilities

Most of the visitor facilities within this landscape tend to be located in and around the settlements, although there tends to be a high demand for accommodation throughout all areas. This demand may encourage the conversion of croft and farm houses, the impact of which will depend on the design of the extensions and the cumulative impact of this recurring throughout an area. It can, however, potentially disrupt the pattern of properties, and affect the nature of land management in summer, as the seasonal demands of tourism may often encourage extensive sheep grazing instead of more intensive practises such as cropping.

Guidance

The issues of declining land management due to the growth of tourism is outwith the scope of this guidance. However, the planning of visitor facilities within this landscape needs to take into account the potential cumulative and knock-on effects of this kind of development; this should ensure that its carrying capacity is respected, so that visitors can be accommodated without this detracting from the intrinsic character of the landscape for which they find these areas so attractive.

The impact of building conversions to accommodate visitors can be minimised where these are sensitively designed and relate to the characteristics of the house which they are part of, particularly in terms of scale and form. The planning of any accommodation provision should take into account the associated impact of details such as access signs, lighting and 'decoration'.



Land management and agriculture

Agriculture within this character type has undergone significant change within recent years. Extensive sheep grazing is now the most prevalent land use within these areas, strongly influenced by the availability of grants through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). High numbers of sheep, however, impose pressure on the vegetation and ground conditions within particular areas of this landscape, sometimes exacerbated by the inadequate control of muirburn. This has led to such processes as ground erosion, the spread of bracken and rushes, and a general reduction in biodiversity.

Land management and agricultural practice is likely to continue to be influenced by the provision of subsidies and grants through CAP, and the Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants (CCAGs) and Scottish Countryside Premium Scheme (SCPS). It is not quite clear how the different aims of these will fit together in the future and what will be the overall impact in the landscape; however, it is expected that they will encourage more sustainable practice.

The presence of many abandoned crofts in this landscape, in addition to the general extensive nature of management, results in many parts of this landscape portraying a negative image of decline and neglect. This can often result in these areas being subject to further abandonment, and dumping of unwanted elements such as old machinery and spoil.

Guidance

Although it is unclear how the provision of grants and subsidies will affect agriculture and land management in the future within crofting areas, the promotion of more sustainable practice will probably result in improved husbandry; this should principally involve the reduction of sheep numbers, the increased control of muirburn and weed

species, and the improved maintenance of field boundaries and drainage channels. There may also be a greater diversity of practice, for example small scale woodland and cropping. It is important for these to relate to the particular characteristics within an area of small farms and crofts, recognising both its assets and limitations, in order to be sustainable and appear appropriate to the place.

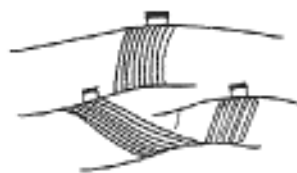


Land use relates to landscape conditions



Land use contrasts to conditions

Although the activity of farm and croft land is often heavily influenced by economic issues, active land management should be encouraged wherever possible to portray an image of prosperity and care which tends to result in greater pride of place, and thereby further appreciation of landscape value. This may be partly achieved by promoting a greater awareness of the potential cumulative impact of negative elements on the experience of this landscape, for example, stressing how the location of waste and neglected structures can affect visitor attraction, and therefore tourist industries.



Active agricultural practice



Abandonment and replacement

Peat extraction

The hand cutting of peat for fuel has traditionally occurred within some areas of this landscape - mainly at the moorland edges. This has usually taken place at a sustainable rate; however, it is suspected that this may not be the case for mechanical peat extraction which is increasing in use. This tends to either involve the removal of peat 'sausages', or peat briquettes with a digger, and the full effects of this kind of peat removal over long periods of time is unknown. It is likely that it has the potential to affect drainage regimes and water levels, and removes peat at a rate which will have knock on effects for the biodiversity of the landscape.

Extensive areas of peat extraction will have a visual impact in the landscape often introducing lines and patterns. The nature of this relates to the specific character of the place, the scale of operations, and the need for facilities such as tracks, and storage and loading areas.

Guidance

Until a time exists when the potential effects of mechanised peat cutting is fully understood, it is prudent to urge this to only proceed with great caution. Any form of

peat extraction will have an impact on the landscape; however, this may appear less disruptive where it relates to the traditional pattern of extraction and where the extent of works do not appear to dominate the landscape scale. The impact of operations may also be reduced by strategically planning phases which will allow gradual regeneration of vegetation, although this may never occur in some areas due to the sensitivity of the habitat. In such places, it may be more appropriate to encourage the reversion to another habitat type, such as wetland.

Woodland

The existing fragments of broadleaf woodland within this landscape tend to be under pressure from grazing, particularly from sheep. This has often resulted in the gradual development of a single age structure with little regeneration.

There may be a growing trend for new woodland planting within this landscape character type, utilising the current availability of grants, particularly now crofters are able to own woodland which they plant. The introduction of woodland may potentially subdivide areas of this landscape and affect intervisibility by obstructing views. It may also add another layer to the existing composition of characteristics within this landscape; however, if extensive in scale, it can also unify an area.

Guidance

Most existing broadleaf woodlands within this landscape character type are in need of active management, as they are often over-mature or affected by sheep damage, increasing their susceptibility to fungal attack or disease. Although ideally sheep numbers should be reduced to a point at which they do not adversely affect the woodland, in the short term this will probably involve fencing.

Despite the enclosure of a woodland creating a contrived character, the visual impact of this may be minimised by locating fences to follow the lie of the land, and designing woodlands so that they appear to sit within the landform.

New woodland planting will generally appear most appropriate where it directly relates to the landscape pattern and scale of enclosure within this character type. This may also be aided by links to existing woodland, the proximity of which may aid natural regeneration by providing an adjacent seed source. It is important to consider the potential cumulative impact of new woodland to add to the visual complexity of this landscape character type, or divide or isolate spaces which may in turn fragment the sense of identity of a place and therefore cohesion within a community.



Woodland subdivides area, but positive effect of increased shelter and biodiversity



Character of landscape changes. Dominance of woodland and isolation of some spaces

15_a DISPERSED FARMS AND CROFTS

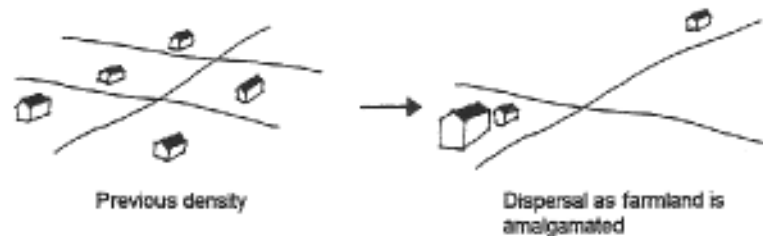


landscape character subtype 15a dispersed small farms and crofts



Key characteristics in addition to those within the main landscape character type

- This landscape character subtype contains a very **dispersed layout of buildings**. This has frequently resulted from the abandonment of some crofts and farms, their land being incorporated into the remaining properties in-between.

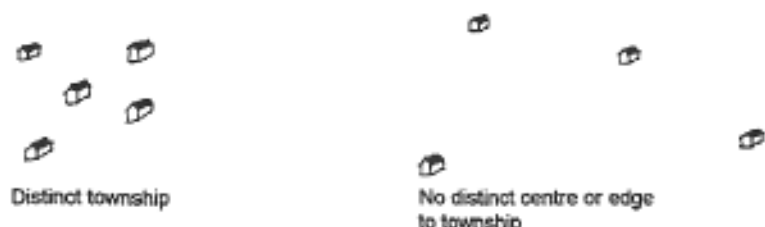


As the remaining land tends to be managed on a larger scale, this adopts a more **unified character**. This, in combination with a reduced number of buildings, tends to result in the landscape appearing more **open**. As a consequence, it is typically very **difficult to discern the pattern of land ownership and the size of properties** within this landscape, and often makes the **edges of different townships indistinct**.

- Land use practice tends to closely relate to the individual management approaches of an owner or tenant**, rather than the specific characteristics of the landscape, typically affected by economies of scale. This can vary from fairly intensive cropping, to extensive rough grazing, these contrasting treatments sometimes occurring immediately adjacent to each other.

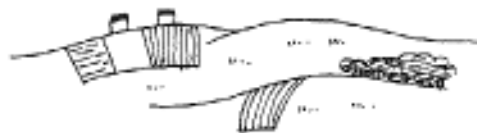
Key issues of forces for change

- It is important to consider the strategic implications of further development within this landscape, as each area will have a carrying capacity to accommodate additional elements, after which the intrinsic character of the landscape will change.
- As townships become less distinct, there is often a reduction in the sense of place and therefore community distinction; this may result in less pride of place, social integration and sense of responsibility.



small farms and crofts
subtype - dispersed small farms and crofts

- The variation of land use and design in connection to specific landscape characteristics generally seems irrational, with a weakening of the landscape pattern and an increase in visual confusion.



No obvious rationale for variation of land use

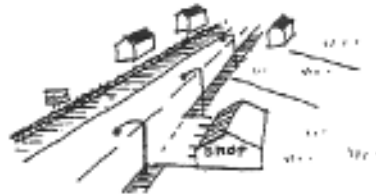
- The abandonment of land and buildings will tend to portray a negative image of prosperity and care.

Refer to main landscape character type for further guidance - pages 209-220

15^b SMALL FARM AND CROFTING AREAS WITH LOCAL FACILITIES

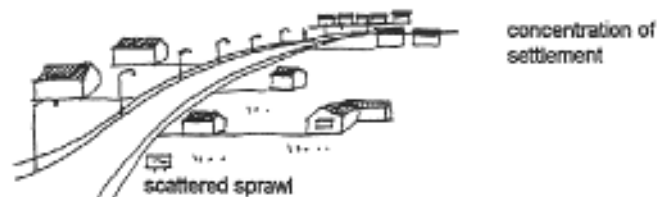


landscape character subtype 15b small farm and crofting areas with local facilities



Key characteristics in addition to those within the main landscape character type

- From a distance, this landscape may appear as the standard crofting type. However, within the settlements or townships, **the character of these areas is strongly influenced by the provision and design details of local facilities** such as lamp posts, pavements, highways storage, toilets, parking areas, electricity and telephone lines and posts and aerials.
- Some areas of this character subtype include **a number of crofting settlements**. Although these are linked, by features such as roads, pavements, and linear housing development, the fringes of the original townships tend to remain sparse and unordered; this can result in the **sprawl of new elements**.



Some areas of this character type contain **housing estates**; these tend to possess urban features, such as lighting, playgrounds, pavements, parking areas, etc, required by the concentration of people. These elements contrast to the traditional rural and dispersed character of the crofting township (service areas, such as lay-bys and parking places are sometimes used to store machinery and aggregate, rather than their intended function).

Key issues of forces for change

- The development of local facilities should be strategically planned to minimise provision which can affect the intrinsic character of these areas. This is especially important within this subtype, as many areas rely on visitors being attracted by the particular character of the landscape, which if changed, may discourage them.
- The cumulative impact and knock on effects of locating facilities should also be considered; for example the location of pavements, barriers and street lighting which separate pedestrians from a road, may actually encourage drivers to travel faster as the risk of collision appears reduced; this may then result in a need for traffic calming measures further on etc.

- The suitability of providing certain facilities within these areas should be examined; for example it generally appears inappropriate to locate street lighting within rural locations as this will affect the characteristic experience of these places, especially at night when there is the formation of an orange haze within the night skies (which prevents clear visibility of stars and the aurora borealis).
- The impact of local facilities within this landscape will depend on their location and design. They will tend to appear most suitable where they relate to the specific characteristics of an area. This means that standard elements, such as catalogue street furniture, tends to appear inappropriate.
- It is important to avoid the development of sprawl within areas of this character sub-type; this may occur when facilities are extended across the borders of an area, and may reduce the distinct sense of place, and possibly community cohesion, within a settlement.

Refer to main landscape character type for further guidance - pages 209-220

15c

SMALL FARM AND CROFTING
AREAS WITH NEW HOUSING



landscape character subtype 15c small farm and crofting areas with new housing



Key characteristics in addition to those within the main landscape character type

- This landscape character subtype comprises many **new residences**, often located near to a settlement with local facilities (which also often coincide with areas of good agricultural land). It contains a **mix of both active and ruined crofts and farms**.
- The **new houses within this landscape tend to contrast greatly to the older house style**, generally being of a standard 'kit' construction. The houses are typically very large, and often do not directly relate to the physical conditions of their specific location, appearing as if they have been 'smacked' down onto the landscape surface. The impact of this is often extended where they possess driveways, parking areas and are surrounded by concrete walls.

New houses tend to be fairly equally distributed within the landscape; however, the proportion of houses to crofts and farms is typically greatest in areas near to towns or a main road.

Where new houses are built in close proximity to abandoned croft houses, a **negative image of disrespect for the traditional character of the landscape** may be portrayed (although, to some, the new houses may represent a modern style of local development - 'the Highland vernacular').

Key issues of forces for change

- It is important to consider the carrying capacity of this landscape to accommodate additional housing, as the character of these areas will change if that capacity is exceeded.



Balance of houses and agricultural land



Balance retained with a few new houses



Dominance of houses in landscape

- New housing will have a cumulative impact, screening and dividing spaces within this landscape; where dispersed, this may appear as sprawl.

It will be important to strategically plan the location of any new structures in this landscape, as these may increase visual confusion, particularly if of various design, function, and relationship to the landscape.

Dispersed sprawl of new housing tends to result in there being no distinct centre or edges to an area, possibly resulting in a reduced sense of place or community.

- The planning of new houses within this landscape should consider the individual and cumulative need for facilities, for example access, powerline linkage and sewage disposal (many areas of this character type are unable to accommodate additional numbers of these without adverse knock on effects, for example septic tanks causing ground pollution due to inefficient soakaway).

It will generally be preferable to only develop areas where the existing infrastructure has sufficient capacity, or is able to be easily added to without adverse effects.

It is important to consider the cumulative impact of all facilities within this landscape, as those above ground will exacerbate visual confusion within this landscape.



Impact of housing is minimal



Impact of associated services -
increase of visual confusion

- To avoid the negative image created when new buildings are constructed immediately adjacent to abandoned or ruined properties, the potential to restore, adapt or expand existing structures should be explored.

Ideally, it will be preferable to discourage any new house building where existing abandoned or ruined houses exist which are able to be restored or adapted. This would involve redirecting existing grant assistance for this purpose.

If new houses are to be built, they will appear more appropriate where they directly relate to the character of the landscape - not as a pastiche to older buildings, but as an element which appears appropriate to a particular location, function, point in time and other structures in the landscape.

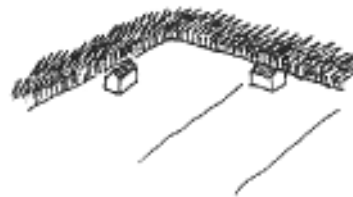
Refer to main landscape character type for further guidance - pages 209-220

15d

AREA OF SMALL FARMS AND CROFTS
SURROUNDED BY WOODLAND



landscape character subtype 15d areas of small farms and crofts surrounded by woodland



Key characteristics in addition to those within the main landscape character type

- This landscape character subtype contains a **fairly even mix of open agricultural land and woodland**, the landscape being **semi-enclosed and with limited visibility**.
- **Buildings tend to form focal points** where located on the edge of the pockets of open land which are surrounded by woodland, as their location is highlighted by the dark vegetation and vertical edge of the backdrop.
- The **shelter** afforded by woodland often results in a greater richness of the agricultural land in these areas, allowing the growth of high grade **arable crops**, the character of which changes through the year to result in **seasonal interest**. The favourable microclimate and rich land has also encouraged the development of a **fairly dense distribution of houses** within these areas, especially as this subtype tends to be located near to large settlements.
- The semi-enclosed character of this landscape creates **surprise as one travels through an area**. Where visibility is screened, attention tends to be directed to the foreground details, until an opening in the tree cover allows focused and distant views outwith the area.

Key issues of forces for change

- It is important to consider how new development or change may affect the balance between open land and woodland within this landscape, and how this may be phased.

Each area of this landscape character type will have a capacity to accommodate new elements, before the balance of open and enclosed space is affected.

It is important to consider how the balance between open and enclosed space is experienced within this landscape, and between different areas of the character type, to ensure that the location of numerous elements, even if not directly visible from each other, do not cumulatively change the character.

Agricultural change and woodland restructuring and management may influence this balance, also affecting the sense of containment by changing the nature of the edges.



Balance of open and enclosed space



Dominance of open space



Partial clearance weakens edges of spaces

- As a semi-enclosed landscape, it is important to consider the scale of any new development, to ensure that this does not appear to dominate the open spaces. A new element will tend to appear most appropriate where it either appears as an isolated focus within a space, or sits within the shelter of the edges.



Focus to open space



Element sits at edge of open space, highlighted by its contrast of colour against the dark backdrop



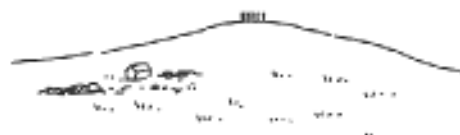
Large element dominates scale of open space

Refer to main landscape character type for further guidance - pages 209-220

15^e FRINGE CROFTING AND HISTORIC FEATURES



landscape character subtype 15e fringe crofting and historic features



Key characteristics in addition to those within the main landscape character type

- This landscape contains only **sparse habitation**, with a proliferation of croft ruins and ancient structures, often occupying prominent and slightly raised sites. These create a **very strong sense of history and cultural change**.
- The open space and dominance of sky within moorland and coastal areas often results in **ancient and ruined structures being highlighted**, particularly by the clarity of the northern and coastal light. A sense of the past can also seem particularly acute in moorland areas, as their typical quietness, remoteness and absence of midground and distant detail tends to encourage an appreciation of the experience of this landscape, including the aura conveyed by historic structures.
- Even where historic structures are not obvious, **the location of ancient or recent archaeological features tends to be highlighted by improved areas of ground** - often evident as bright pockets of grassland.
- A **negative image** can be portrayed by the presence of the ruined crofts and ancient structures in this landscape. However these relics may **also appear extremely interesting** - indicating past land use and activity in strong contrast to the existing remote experience of the landscape.
- Most areas of this landscape character type are **not actively managed**, resulting in **many buildings being in a state of disrepair**, and with once improved agricultural land reverting to rough grassland; this is mainly grazed by sheep where utilised at all.
- This landscape character type often forms a **transition** between moorland areas and more intensive crofting and settlement types, typically in areas on the edge of agricultural economic viability, for example where it is very exposed, or there is poor soil or limited access. It also occurs in locations which would have been particularly important in the past, for example possessing a defensive position, which are no longer especially valued.

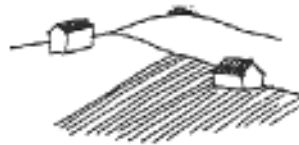
Key issues of forces for change

- The character of this landscape depends on the image of past activity. This tends to appear most positive and exciting where the landscape either displays interesting structural relics within a quiet and remote moorland setting, or alternatively contains a continuing 'story' of utilising old and new features. This latter scenario generally portrays a more positive image.

It may be preferable to either leave areas of this character type unaffected, to gradually decay or revert over time, or alternatively to introduce new elements where demand exists. However, it is advisable to avoid a combination of both treatments, as this can portray a disrespectful image of the landscape.



Ruins indicate past activity. Quality able to be closely appreciated in quiet, remote setting



Evidence of both past and present occupation. Positive image conveyed by current, very active management.



Negative image of neglect despite obvious need for buildings conveyed by new house.

- The introduction of new structures into this landscape may change the existing character of the landscape. Although this may affect the existing appreciation of these typically quiet and remote landscapes, this may appear as just another addition to the strong sense of history and cultural change.

It is important to consider how any new structure relates to the existing historic features within this landscape. New elements will generally only be seen as a positive addition where, like the old, their design and function relates to a specific place at a point in time.

A new structure may appear most appropriate where it is slightly separated from the existing historic features in this landscape (unless directly related to their function), complementing them as a distinct element, rather than appearing to confuse their image or form. This also provides space to allow the different experience associated with artefacts of different ages in the landscape, to be appreciated without confusion.

Refer to main landscape character type for further guidance - pages 209-220

THE WAY FORWARD

The description of landscape character within this report provides only a broad base from which to explore the potential impact of landscape change in Caithness and Sutherland. The full implications of this on the intrinsic quality of a particular place can only be determined by fully examining what the detailed characteristics of that place are, and how, and by whom, they are experienced and valued.

The following section lists a number of questions; these explore the range of issues which need to be considered in addition to the information provided by this study.

WHAT IS BEING EXPERIENCED?

1.1 What is the extent of the landscape character types?

The character of a place will be influenced by the extent of the landscape character type in which it is located, i.e. how large it is in area compared to neighbouring landscape character types; for example a narrow peninsula is usually dominated by the extensive characteristics of the sea which surround it.

1.2 What is the nature of the landscape character type boundaries?

Places which are located within, or close to, the transition between different landscape character types, will be influenced by them all. One character type will affect the experience of its neighbour across this transition, such as when views pass between them. Some landscape character types possess gradual boundaries, for example between a moor and low hill landscape, whereas others possess an abrupt edge, such as that dividing mountains from the sea.

1.3 What is the relationship between adjoining character types?

i.e. the nature of their transitions, relative dominance and sequence. Although this is complex, some trends do occur within the district (seen as the prevalence of some colours within certain areas of the map of landscape character types at the end of this report).

Similar combinations of different landscape character types can occur in various locations. If these do not possess locally distinct landmarks or features, it can be difficult to identify a particular place or distinguish it from another. The overall shape of the land, orientation and its relationship with the sea, also influences the character of the landscape, for example affecting the microclimate and the settlement of people.

The sequence of character types and the way they link together may also influence how they are experienced, for example passing through a narrow, enclosed valley in order to reach the exposed expanse of a plain. A repeated sequence of character types can create rhythm and therefore certain expectations of what will follow, such as occurs with the repetition of sea lochs penetrating an indented coastline.

Some landscape elements may link one character type to another by passing between them, for example a road or watercourse. This may mean that the border between character types is less marked in these locations. Some landscape character types may also be associated with each other by containing the same individual landscape characteristic, for example a type of settlement or woodland.

HOW IS THIS PLACE BEING EXPERIENCED?

2.1 How and when are the senses activated by the place?

The sensory experience of a place is usually dominated by its visual character through views. However, an appreciation of our environment also depends on the other characteristics of sound, smell, touch and taste; these are peculiar to a particular place, although not necessarily dominant enough to be identified within the description of a landscape character type.

The experience of a landscape is strongly affected by the season, weather conditions and time of day. It is also influenced by the nature of the stimuli, for example whether views are panoramic or focused, or whether sounds are low or high in volume, or piercing or tonal.

2.2 How are people moving through the landscape?

Travel through, within, or to a landscape influences how it is experienced in relation to specific places or points. This varies with the character and distance of a route, and the speed and mode of travel; for example, the exhilarating experience of driving along a road through a narrowing, winding and descending valley contrasts greatly to that gained when walking along a narrow track at the base of a mountain.

The nature of the route provision, and whether it is circular or 'dead end', will also affect the experience of moving through a landscape. For example an indirect winding pathway tends to encourage slow movement, whilst a straight main road tends to result in fast travel, and random passage often comes from there being no defined route at all.

Movement is also affected by certain landscape features. For example, focal points at a variety of scale encourage people to stop or slow up within a landscape, such as when arriving at a lochan or settlement. Edges also have an effect on our movement through a landscape, and often mark the entrance or exit to an area - sometimes further highlighted by 'gateways'.

WHO IS EXPERIENCING THIS PLACE, AND WHY?

3.1 Who is in the landscape?

Although sensitivity to the experiential qualities of a place differs considerably between individuals, there tends to be very distinct and recognisable responses to a landscape within a particular culture or by a certain type of person. This is influenced by their age and background, their familiarity with the landscape, what they are looking for, and what their expectations are. People are often attracted to and collect at certain locations; in this way, they may become a key element of the landscape themselves, creating further interest as a result.

3.2 Are people familiar with the landscape?

Familiarity tends to result in a place being particularly valued, especially when linked to the home, community, recreation, vacation, or along a route through which one often passes. People familiar with a particular landscape will have gradually formed their values and impressions of a place, encompassing all the variations of season and time.

3.3 Are there local residents?

The sense of place that local people experience will depend on how long they have lived in an area, and why they are there, such as for family reasons, work, or perhaps to live within a particular landscape type which they find attractive. Some local

people may see the landscape primarily as a resource, and therefore mainly value it for the contribution it makes to their living.

3.4 Do visitors come to this landscape, and why?

First impressions of a place are very important to the visitor, whose expectations tend to be closely related to how an area has been portrayed to them - mainly by personal recommendation, literature, television, film, or tourist publicity. The image given to them will have influenced why they have visited the landscape, for example in search of active recreation, wild land qualities, or for botanical, historical or social interest.

3.5 What are the social, political or administrative factors influencing the landscape?

The different political or administrative characteristics of a landscape will have an influence on its experience; for example, a certain region may have a policy to locate signs directing people to particular locations, or to promote certain land uses within development plans, or provide special grants or designate particular areas. The ownership of a place will also influence its experience, by determining accessibility and affecting attitudes to change in relation to perceived security of tenure and prosperity. Historic elements are also greatly valued in a landscape; they indicate a sense of change over time, although they may also remind people of past events which have negative connotations, for example land clearances and abandonment.

PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

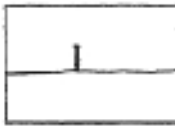
The following section summarises some of the principles of design important to landscape character assessment, many of which are referred to within this document. These are arranged alphabetically as listed below:

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1 Clarity and Harmony	iii
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14 Shape	viii
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17 Visual movement	ix

A key reference for the information contained within this section is Ching, D.K. 1996. *Architecture. Form, Space, and Order*. Van Nostrand Reinhold.

1 Clarity and harmony

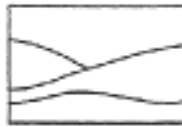
The eye seeks clarity in a view; that is it desires an image to be distinct and free from doubt or confusion. Harmony relates to a sense of restful completeness, creating a feeling of balance where opposite forms and forces compensate.



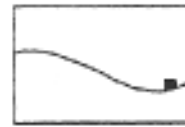
Clarity - composition of image is obvious



Confusion of image



Harmony - balance of opposite forces



Imbalance of elements - inharmonious

2 Colour

Colour has symbolic meaning in relation to the distinct landscape character of a location, particularly in relation to its culture, light, geology, vegetation and tradition of built structures. Within the British culture, colours such as white tend to portray a neutrality and purity, whilst colours such as black and red have sinister and dangerous associations, and muted colours may suggest compromise or indecision compared to these. Reds, browns, yellows and greens often give a warmth of image, whilst greys, black, white and blues generally appear cold. Variations in colour also indicate different spaces, edges and pattern.

3 Dynamic image

Landscapes are not static systems, but constantly change in relation to various processes. Some landscapes appear particularly dynamic, for example where there is active movement of the sea, people or traffic, or where the land cover or landform changes because of cropping, erosion or subsidence. Dynamic images may be stimulating, but also threatening as a result of their instability and unpredictability.

4 Dimension of visual composition

The visual composition of a landscape will affect how the properties of distance, scale and dimension are perceived. Landscapes can appear two dimensional where there is no depth indicated within a view.



Simple horizontal arrangement of elements with no indication of distance or scale creates two dimensional image.



Highlighting of landform and indication of distance by elements of known size illustrates three dimensional depth to landscape.



Projection of shadows and reflections seems to give the landscape an added dimension, constantly changing with the weather and time of day.

5 Form

Form is the shape and structure of something as distinguished from its substance or material. Regular forms are those whose parts are related to one another in a consistent and orderly manner, for example the sphere, cylinder, cone, cube and pyramid. Irregular forms have parts which are dissimilar in nature, related in an inconsistent manner, and are generally asymmetrical.

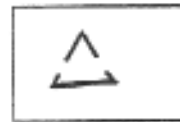
People tend to search for regularity and continuity in the forms which they view, so that if any parts are hidden or seem incomplete, our mind tries to visualise the form as if it were whole.



Regular forms

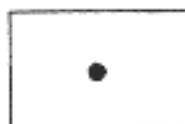


Irregular forms



Attempt to see an entire form

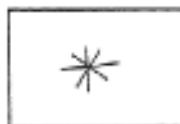
Additive forms result from the accretion of discrete elements which can be characterised by their ability to grow and merge with other forms. The combination of elements must occur in a coherent manner in order for additive groups to be perceived as unified compositions.



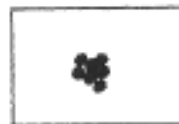
Centralised form



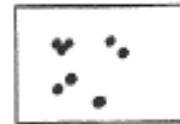
Linear form



Radial form



Clustered form



No coherence as additive forms

6 Hierarchy

Hierarchy can be defined as a system arranged in a graded order. Elements often seem to form a hierarchy within a landscape as a result of their varying visual dominance at different levels.



Hierarchy of spaces



Hierarchy of lines



Hierarchy of points

7 Order

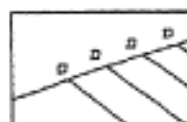
Order can be defined as a state in which everything is arranged logically, comprehensibly or naturally. It is achieved when the visual forces within a landscape can be clearly discerned or when there is no doubt about the relationship of elements to each other, and it can create a reassuring expectancy. Order without diversity can result in monotony, and yet diversity without order can produce chaos; this means that a sense of unity with some variety is often the preferred option.

Order within an image can indicate a rationale for the visual composition, and it occurs in a variety of ways:



Cluster or group

A cluster or group relies on physical proximity or similarity of elements to each other. It often consists of a repetitive, cellular or ordering device such as symmetry or an axis, and is usually a non-hierarchical organisation.



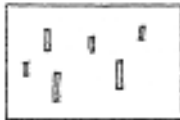
Rhythm and repetition

Rhythm refers to the regular or harmonious recurrence of lines, shapes, spaces, forms or colours. Repetition is one of the most effective arrangements in creating unity in a composition, its predictability providing reassurance.



Grid

A grid generates a network of points and lines, encouraging the viewer to divide their attention equally over an entire surface. The order of a grid results from the regularity and continuity of its pattern which establishes a constant field of reference points.

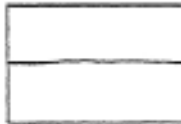


Disorder

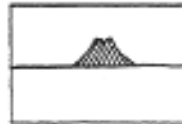
A disordered arrangement generally possesses no visual rationale for the existence or location of elements. This may result in visual confusion.

8 Orientation

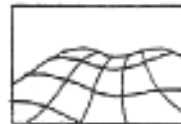
The visual composition of a landscape will affect how direction and location is indicated to a viewer, by the presence of landmarks and reference elements. A sense of orientation is generally reassuring, although in the absence of such indicators, the feeling of freedom can be heightened within a landscape.



No distinct orientation



Distinct landmark indicating orientation



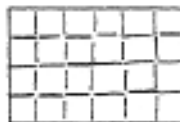
Reference lines and points



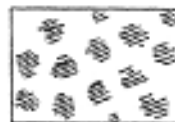
Reference lines

9 Pattern and texture

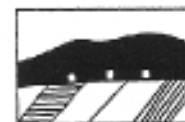
Pattern can be defined as an arrangement of repeated or corresponding parts. This may or may not be as a formal layout, but will possess some distinct relationship between elements.



Formal pattern

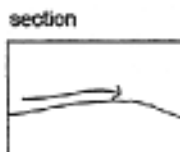


Random pattern, although formed by similar relationship of elements

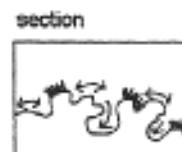
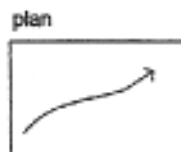


Pattern of land use accentuated by contrast with backdrop

Texture can be defined as the surface of a material. The texture of a landscape may be directly related to its pattern. Smooth surface texture tends to encourage sweeping visual movement in the absence of visual interruption or differential attraction which occurs over a rough textured surface.



Smooth texture, for example fine 'grain' of short grassland ground cover, does not limit visual movement

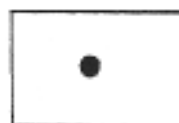


Rough texture disrupts visual movement, for example, contrasting coarseness of rock and bracken cover.

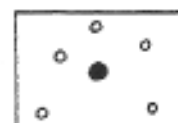


10 Points and lines

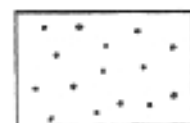
Points mark a position in space. They have no length, width or depth and are therefore visually static, directionless and centralised. Points often form landmarks within a landscape as a visually dominant feature; this means that surrounding elements are often located in direct relation to them.



Dominant focal point

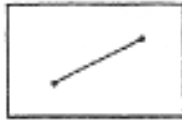


Hierarchy of dominant and secondary foci



Numerous points distribute focal attention, with a visual relationship between each

A line indicates the path of a point in motion; it often links and intersects other visual elements, describes edges, or gives shape and articulation to the surface of planes. The most dominant lines in a landscape are typically the skyline or coastline, whilst midground horizons, roads, powerlines and rivers typically indicate lines of secondary importance. Vertical linear elements such as columns, obelisks and towers have been used throughout history to commemorate significant events and establish points in space. The varying visual dominance of lines at different levels often seem to form a hierarchy.



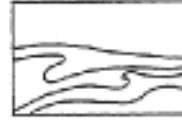
Two points describe a line that connects them



Dominant skyline

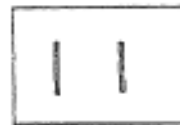


Numerous lines create patterns and define spaces by indicating boundaries



Hierarchy of lines

Parallel lines describe a plane by having a visual relationship to each other. The closer these lines are, the stronger the definition of space.



Weak definition of space



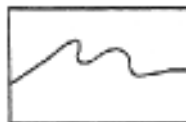
Strong definition of corridor space with linear character

11 Scale and proportion

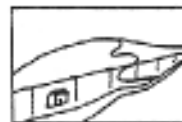
Scale alludes to the size of something compared to a reference standard or to the size of something else. In contrast, proportion refers to the proper or harmonious relation of one part to another or to the whole; this relationship may be one of magnitude, but also of quantity or degree.

Visual scale refers to how small or large something appears to be in relation to its normal size or to the size of other things in its context, rather to its actual dimensions. Something which is monumental in scale makes us feel small in comparison, whilst intimate scale describes an environment in which we feel comfortable, in control or important.

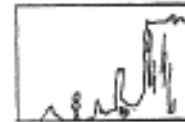
Human scale is a measure based on the dimensions and proportions of the human body, although as these vary from individual to individual, this is not an absolute measurement. If a space or feature does not actually have edges which can be physically touched, we rely on visual rather than tactile clues to give a sense of the scale of a space. Many features have sizes and characteristics which are familiar to us and which we use to gauge the size of other elements around them. These are often referred to as 'scale indicators', for example trees, cars, a house or a person.



Scale of landscape is unknown with no comparable elements of any fixed size or distance. To some, this creates an intimidating and exciting image of the unknown.



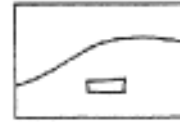
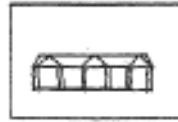
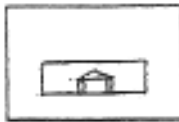
Elements of a known size can act as 'scale indicators'. These indicated the scale of the surrounding landscape with direct comparison of relative size.



Human scale of landscape - indication of its scale due to close proximity, allowing relative comparison of landform with human size.

Our perception of the physical dimensions of proportion and scale is imprecise - distorted by the foreshortening of perspective and distance, and by cultural biases. However, a number of

theories of proportion have been developed in the course of history to explain our aesthetic response to images, mainly based on the Pythagorean concept that certain numerical relationships manifest the harmonic structure of the universe. Proportion refers to the equality of ratios so that underlying any proportioning system is a characteristic ratio which establishes a consistent set of visual relationships between the parts of a structure or space, and the whole. Although these relationships may not be immediately perceived by the casual observer, the visual order and balance they create can be sensed, accepted, or even recognised through a series of repetitive experiences.



Different forms of structure created from various height, numbers and width of proportions

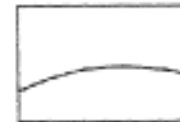
Various relationship of structure with landscape due to different scale and proportion

12 Simplicity, complexity and visual confusion

The simplicity of a landscape refers to the ease with which it may be understood. Landscapes which are simple in their visual composition tend to portray a very clear and strong image which appears reassuring in its predictability.

In contrast, a complex visual composition typically comprises an overlap of elements. A viewer will usually try to sort these elements into some kind of order, so that there is a rationale for their arrangement. This is often achieved by separating the various layers of components, by perceiving a hierarchy, or by selectively focusing attention.

As a result of the great variety in which a complex landscape can be viewed, it typically results in constant visual surprise and interest. However, this in itself can be visually demanding so that a viewer may gradually divert their attention to foreground details in an attempt to avoid the wider complexity.



Simple composition of elements



Complex composition



Hierarchy of attention - varying dominance of elements at different levels



Selective attention to skyline, avoiding foreground confusion



Separation of elements to enable concentration on one at a time

In contrast to visual complexity, where there is some order, hierarchy or rationale to the arrangement of complicated elements, visual confusion refers to an image which is bewildering and unclear. This occurs where there is no obvious rationale for the combination of elements, often resulting from these possessing no order and being located haphazardly or unthinkingly, with no direct visual relationship to the landscape or to each other.

12 Spaces and edges

Lines often form edges which in turn indicate spaces. The proximity and distinction of edges will determine the degree of space enclosure and their resulting characteristics of shelter, visibility extent and perception of security.



Weak edge, open space and exposure providing no security, but perception of freedom as open visibility with no confinement or threat of obscured surprises.

Strong edge contains space, providing security and yet also vulnerability due to restricted visibility and exit.

Strong edge provides background security, although open outward views suggests slight vulnerability.

Strong background edge, combined with outward views, provides secure, semi-enclosed space.

Variable spaces. Some semi-enclosed, with linkage routes, offer security of edge, yet allow movement.

14 Shape

Shape is the outward form of an element produced by its outline. Simple shapes have a structure which is easily comprehensible to the eye and easily remembered, with a clear order of parts, angles and directions. The more vertical or horizontal the position of a shape, the more static it will appear, whilst if a shape lies on a diagonal, it will seem to be in motion or temporary. A conflict of various shapes can result in visual confusion, the dominance and visual impact varying with the proportion of the shape in relation to its surroundings.



Simple shape sits upon landscape - relationship easy to comprehend

Varying proportion results in shape either appearing to perch or sit heavily within landscape

Shape appears precariously perched upon landscape, seemingly unstable

Contrast of shape - rationale for foreground shape is unclear

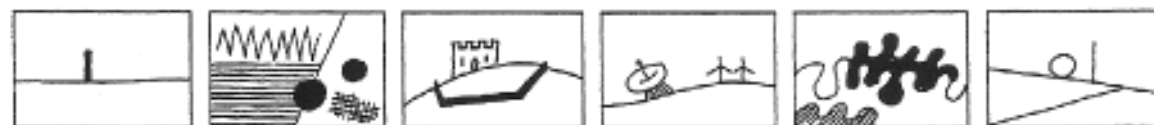
Numerous elements can collectively create shape

Recognisable shape in relation to location and function

Regular or geometric shapes generally appear absolute, uncompromising, devoid of style and universally understandable. Irregular shapes have no distinct parameters and can appear random or unpredictable with a lack of visual consistency.

15 Symbolic image

A symbol can be defined as representing something. Landscape elements often portray a symbolic image in what they indicate to a particular culture by their visual composition or by representing a moment in time.



Simple image

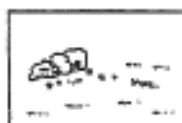
Complex image

Historical image

Futuristic image

Mysterious image - no distinct function

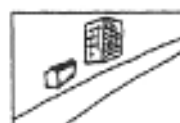
Elements can, by association, portray a positive or negative image. Similar opinions occur within certain groups or societies, although the judgement of this will vary to a certain degree between different individuals, and this depends on whether something is seen to represent, for example, good or bad, care or neglect, progress or decline and damage.



Negative image of past abandonment and neglect, although positive wildlife habitat



Negative image of utilitarian elements dominating landscape character, although to some, positive image of service provision



Positive image of new development to some, negative image of excessive construction to others



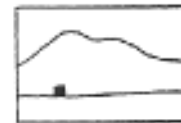
Positive image and pride of place to some, resulting from activity, negative experience of being noisy and busy to others

- **Wilderness**

A landscape may appear to epitomise the image of a 'wilderness' where there is little or no evidence of human impact, and where there is an associated perception of remoteness and 'freedom'.

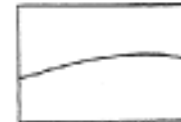
- **Human impact**

Although evidence of human impact within a landscape can compromise its perception of remoteness, it may heighten its appreciation by indicating the scale and form of the landscape in comparison.



16 Utilitarian image

A landscape can appear to portray a utilitarian image where it contains human artefacts, the appearance of which seem to be purely determined by their function and with no consideration of aesthetics. The description of a landscape as depicting a utilitarian image is not necessarily negative; however, this image may be particularly significant within landscapes which portray no distinct land use function or are perceived as being remote apart from the location of these elements.



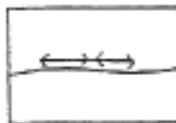
No obvious function to landscape



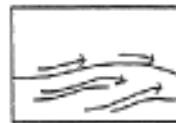
Utilitarian image

17 Visual movement

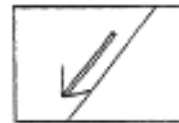
In contrast to a point which is static, a line expresses movement and direction. Consequently, lines affect visual dynamism, dependant on their character and angle.



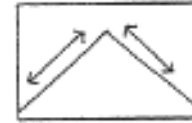
The eye oscillates back and forth across a horizontal line. In the absence of a terminal or dominant focus, it finally rests in a state of visual stability.



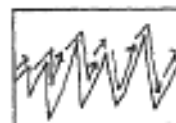
Slow, sinuous and sweeping visual movement creates relatively stable visual movement due to gentle slope of line.



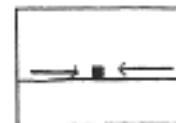
Fast dynamic visual movement down steep slope.



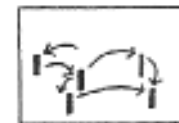
Steep slopes result in dynamic movement which terminally rests on top or at base of dominant focal point.



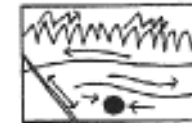
Dynamic movement up and down steep slopes in the absence of a dominant focus; this results in visual instability.



Points are static and obstruct visual movement.



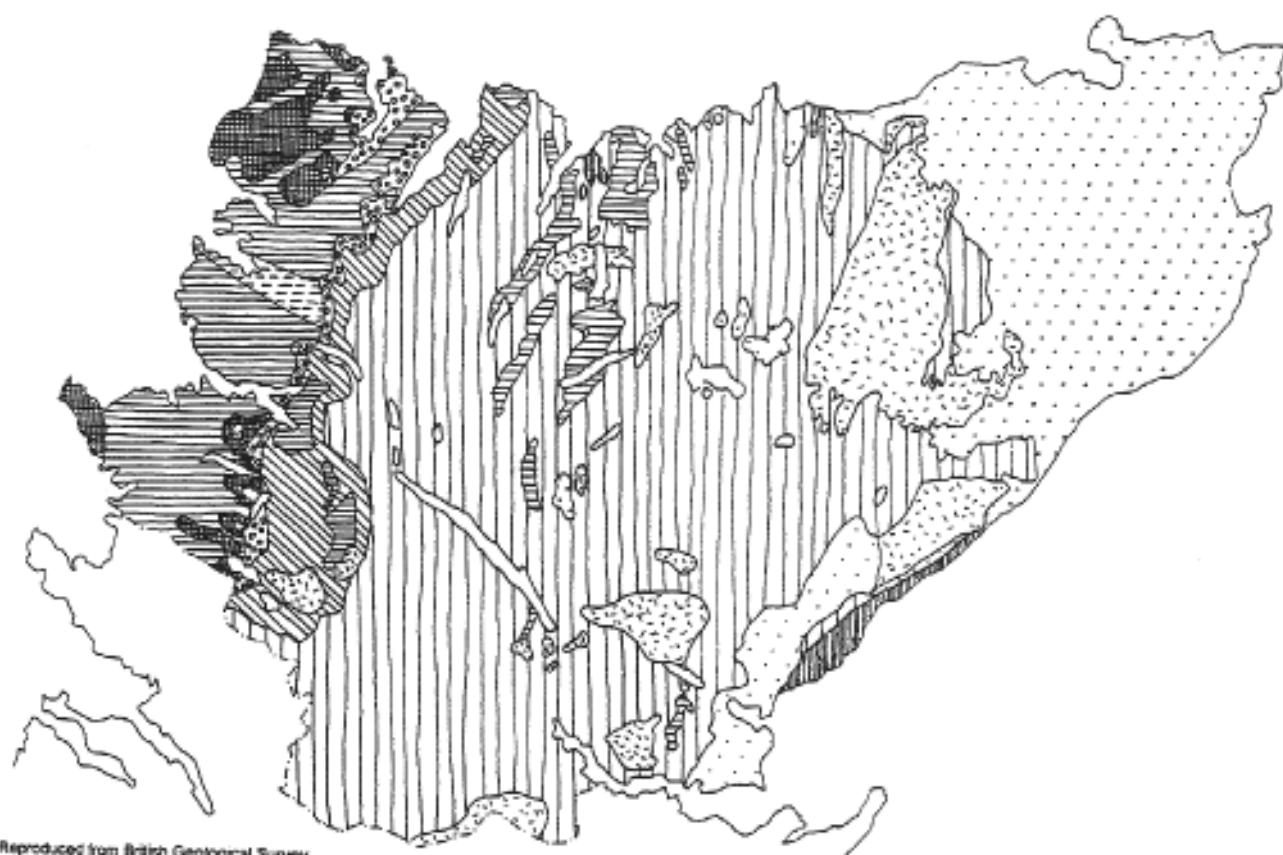
Numerous points linked by lines result in erratic and jumping visual movement.



Visually demanding image results from complexity and confusion of visual movement.












BACKGROUND INFORMATION



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Geological map of Caithness and Sutherland

-  Lewisian Gneiss
-  Lewisian Granite
-  Torridonian
-  Moinian
-  Cambrian and Ordovician
-  Moine Thrust Zone
-  Old Red Sandstone
-  New Red Sandstone and Mesozoic
-  Igneous Intrusions

0 10 20 30 40 km

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MAPS

1:50 000

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LIST OF CONSULTEES

The steering group for this project consisted of:

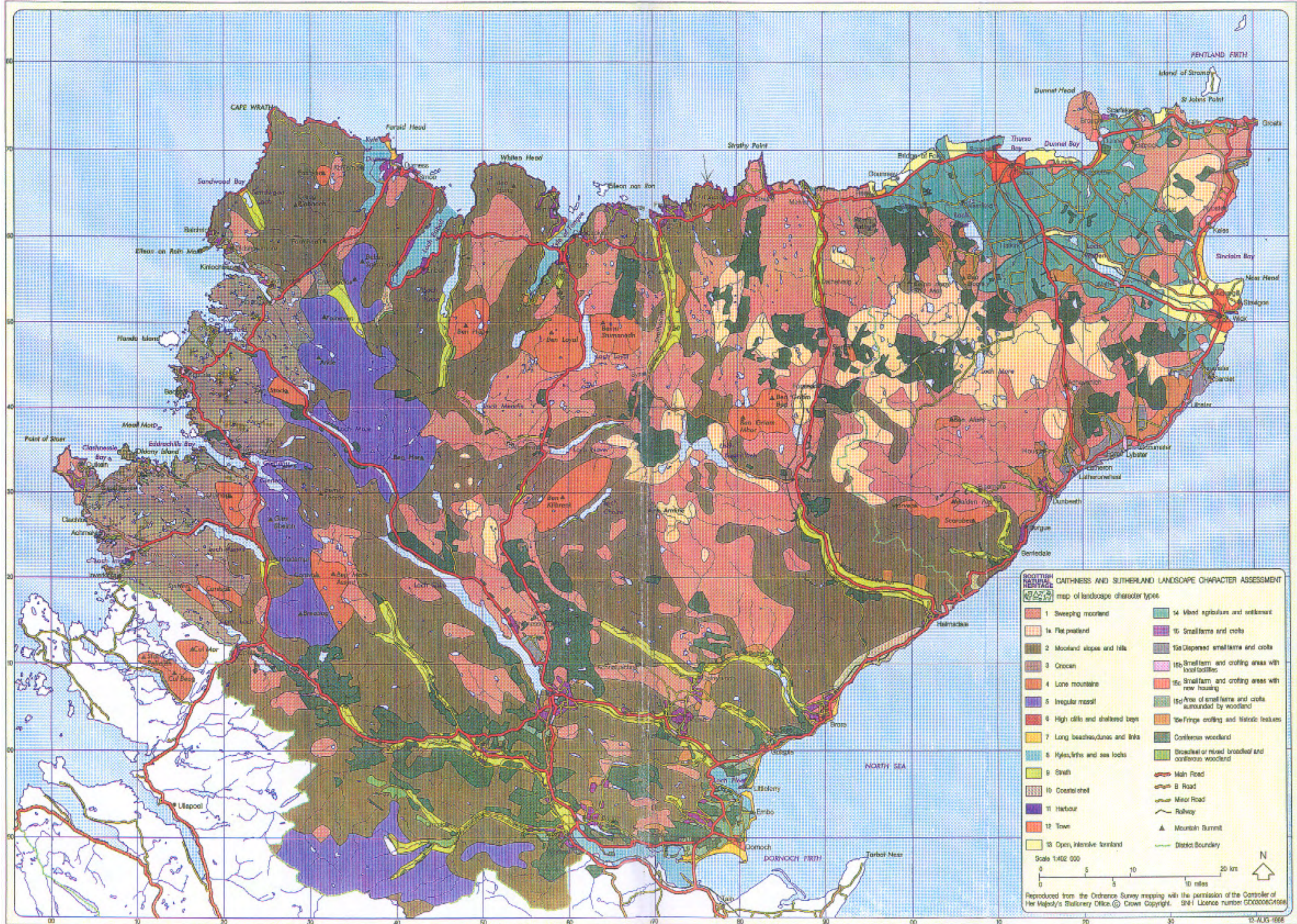
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Valerie Wilson	Area Officer, SNH
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Barbara Bremner	SNH Area Officer, North Caithness
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Maggie Gilvary	Landscape Architect, Forest Enterprise
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Mrs Sutherland and the pupils of Reay Primary School, Reay, Caithness	
John Wood	Regional Archaeologist, Highland Archaeology Service, Inverness

Sincere thanks is conveyed to all the above individuals and organisations for their assistance with this study,

Caroline Stanton.



SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE

Scottish Natural Heritage is a government body established by Parliament in 1992, responsible to the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Our task is to secure the conservation and enhancement of Scotland's unique and precious natural heritage - the wildlife, the habitats, the landscapes and the seascapes - which has evolved through the long partnership between people and nature.

We advise on policies and promote projects that aim to improve the natural heritage and support its sustainable use.

Our aim is to help people to enjoy Scotland's natural heritage responsibly, understand it more fully and use it wisely so that it can be sustained for future generations.

