

Appendix 8.1: Regional Landscape Character

1.1 Landscape Character Assessment

1.1.1 Scottish Natural Heritage, in conjunction with partner Councils, has undertaken detailed review and classification of various landscape areas and types of Scotland. The study area for The Proposed Development, as illustrated in Figure 8.3, is covered by the Lochaber Landscape Character Assessment (Scottish Natural Heritage Review no. 97, dated 1998) and the Inverness District Landscape Character Assessment (Scottish Natural Heritage Review no. 114, dated 1999).

1.2 Landscape Character Types

1.2.1 The two Landscape Character Assessment documents divide the study area into a total of seven Landscape Character Types (LCTs) as follows:

- Broad Forested Strath;
- Broad Steep-sided Glen;
- Interlocking Sweeping Peaks;
- Rocky Moorland;
- Rolling Uplands
- Rugged Massif; and
- Smooth Moorland Ridges.

1.2.2 These documents provide a description of the specific characteristics and sensitivities relevant to each LCT and outline the key forces for change acting upon these characteristics, providing guidance related to the potential impact of the forces for change on the key landscape characteristics.

1.2.3 LCTs are shown on Figure 8.3 and described below, along with relevant guidance.

Broad Forested Strath

1.2.4 The Broad Forested Strath LCT is described as a gently undulating landform with a predominant land cover of coniferous forest plantation alternating with open land and areas of brown clearfell. This is interspersed with small areas of broadleaf woodland, below sheltered ridges and in deep river valleys, scattered birch extending onto the rough sward and marshy grassland of the strath floor and strips of improved pasture surrounded by post and wire fences and associated with crofts and small farms which are situated along roads which cross the glen floor.

1.2.5 The key characteristics of the Broad Forested Strath LCT comprise:

- 'Broad low-lying straths with rolling relief and sculptural glacial landforms;
- Simple, large scale mosaic of forest ridges, rolling pastures and heather moorland, but dominated by swathes of commercial forestry;
- A comparatively densely settled landscape with villages, houses and sporadic commercial development;

- Quarries hidden amongst the woodland cover;
- Strong communication and service corridors;
- Long distance views from surrounding hills over the glen, which is framed by steep glen sides;and
- Lochs rivers or canals on glen floor have often been engineered or substantially altered by man.'

1.2.6 The Landscape Character Assessment document recognises that this LCT is subject to a number of pressures for change such as housing, industry, recreation and infrastructure, an increase in which, may reduce its diversity. However, the document also recognises that the sensitivity of this landscape to change tends to be low, due to its 'generally robust landscape'.

1.2.7 Guidance for the Broad Forested Strath LCT includes the following:

- To restore damaged landscapes and enhance glacial landform features it is suggested that restoring old quarry workings through restorative earthworks and woodland and restoring drystone dykes and derelict cottages be considered;
- Existing forested ridges could be used to screen mineral workings and clear felling operations on the strath floor;
- Consideration should be given to conserving the diverse mix of land uses which is key to the LCT's character;
- Industrial development should be located within the framework of existing settlements or should utilise the screening properties of existing landform and mixed and plantation woodland to prevent extension into open countryside;
- Communication and services would be most successfully integrated by following landform and avoiding cutting across the grain of the open landscape; and
- The mature and robust landscape structure provides opportunities for landscape change and the dominant woodland character should be maintained.

Interlocking Sweeping Peaks (Lochaber Landscape Character Assessment)

1.2.8 The Interlocking Sweeping Peaks LCT is described as a rocky landscape with high, jagged peaks plunging into deep ribbon lochs and glens, lending the landscape a distinctly 'mountainous' form and experience.

1.2.9 The key characteristics of the Interlocking Sweeping Peaks LCT comprise:

- 'Pyramidal mountain summits with a jagged profile, often appearing as overlapping peaks along glen views;
- Sweeping slopes with screes plunging directly into deep glens or lochs with little or no flat shore-line fringe;
- Sparsely vegetated with few trees;
- Numerous rocky outcrops punctuate the steep, rugged terrain;
- Inaccessible and remote with wildland qualities.'

- 1.2.10 The Landscape Character Assessment document identifies small hydroelectric schemes as one of the potential development pressures for this LCT. Other pressures relate to excessive grazing and recreational pressures and development which interrupts the flow of the landform.
- 1.2.11 Guidance for the Interlocking Sweeping Peaks LCT includes the following:
- Woodland planting or regeneration projects should seek to reflect existing vegetation whereby the extent of existing vegetation decreases with increasing height, emphasising the vertical scale of the peaks;
 - There should be controlled muirburn and careful grazing management to assist the conservation of biodiversity;
 - Minor roads which follow landform are more suitable with minimal signage. Elements such as housing, ornamental planting, formal car parks and lighting are generally inappropriate.
 - Development and maintenance of roadside viewpoints will present good opportunities to experience the wild and uninhabited part of this landscape;
 - There should be careful management of hill walkers and cyclists through signage and provision of information to concentrate pressure along specific routes and avoid more widespread path erosion.

Rocky moorland (Lochaber Landscape Character Assessment)

- 1.2.12 The Rocky Moorland LCT is described as an open LCT of undulating moorland located to the north of Invergarry, featuring rocky outcrops, lochans and forestry, similar to Smooth Moorland Ridges (see 1.2.24 to 1.2.27), but more rugged and extensive.
- 1.2.13 The key characteristics of the Rocky Moorland LCT comprise:
- Rugged, undulating moorland plateaux with textured and crinkled skyline and no distinct summits or peaks.
 - Large patches of commercial coniferous forestry.
 - Uniform expanses of marshy grassland, sedges and rushes, rocky outcrops and stunted trees.
 - Isolated, upland lochans.
 - Infrastructure and engineered structures associated with hydro-electricity schemes such as pylons, dams and sub-stations.
 - Long expansive views.
- 1.2.14 The Landscape Character Assessment document identifies this landscape as being sensitive to change due to its distinct undulating plateau and highly visible open slopes. Particular pressures on this landscape include commercial forestry, hydro-electric power and other resource-based development with vertical elements.
- 1.2.15 Guidance for the Rocky Moorland LCT includes the following:

- Woodland and forest planting can be restructured to enhance landform features and new planting may be accommodated to improve existing woodland and grazing should be kept as the primary land use to retain the distinctive texture of rocky landform;
- In order to conserve traditional landuse patterns muirburn is essential providing the varied character of the moorland. Old or derelict dwellings should be restored and limit the need for new building;
- Electricity pylons can be successfully integrated by avoiding skylines and running along the foot of sloped where the moorland reduces there visual impact, roads can also be integrated by following the natural shape of the landform;
- Long uninterrupted views across open moorland can be maintained by positioning vertical elements at the foot of slopes or in front of ridges to minimise the visual impact.

Rolling Uplands (Inverness District Landscape Character Assessment)

1.2.16 The Rolling Uplands LCT is described as a landscape of large rounded hills with a sense of openness, remoteness and exposure.

1.2.17 The key characteristics of the Rolling Uplands LCT comprise:

- A series of large scale, smooth, rounded hills with summits of similar height which collectively form broad, undulating upland plateaux,
- Views from hill tops and plateau areas are expansive, creating a strong feeling of openness and exposure although there is limited enclosure between the hills and within the straths and glens.
- Dominant heather moorland groundcover with uniform colour and texture accentuating the smooth rounded landforms and the simplicity of the landscape.
- In some areas, the smoothness of the hills is broken by small areas of scree or occasional rocky outcrops which create localised pattern upon upper slopes
- Deeply incised burns cut occasional crevices between some hills, and powerlines occasionally cross hillsides.
- The hill tops or plateaux tend to be spaced far apart and of an even height, and from high points, aerial views reveal the interlocking arrangement of the moorland and hill landform there is also a general absence of elements which indicate scale so that it is difficult to judge distance and size in this landscape.
- Small wind-cut trees and clumps of woodland occasionally line watercourses or are sometimes found in remote glens where grazing has been restricted. However, some grazing pressure is still evident they have an even age structure and there is an absence of regeneration.
- Coniferous plantations tend to occur mainly on the edges of the LCT, although small plantations are found occasionally in sheltered staraths. The colour, texture and shape of these coniferous plantations contrast with the moorland surroundings

1.2.18 The Landscape Character Assessment document notes that this LCT is sensitive to new development which may become highly visible due to the openness of the landscape and simplicity of land cover.

1.2.19 Guidance for the Rocky Moorland LCT includes the following:

- New elements should have a clear relationship with their immediate surroundings. Single features will appear appropriate where they are of a scale which appears inferior to the surrounding landscape and may appear more fitting where sited on lower slopes in relation to their function.
- Multiple features should generally be ordered or concentrated. New elements will appear most appropriate where they consistently relate to existing landscape features or are concentrated or clustered in a group. Sporadically sited elements should be avoided.
- Avoid developing tracks across sensitive ground such as bogs or steep slopes.
- Woodland should be located in order to minimise the need for additional access tracks and fences. Natural regeneration of woodland is most appropriate and areas where woodland is being extended should allow for additional space with regular thinning to maintain a soft edge;
- If fencing is necessary, this should be routed to respect the lie of the land.
- Rationalisation and upgrading of existing infrastructure would be preferable to development of new elements. At a detailed level the impact of infrastructure can be reduced by minimising ground modification, routing over the most stable ground and following landform. Construction disturbance should be restored as soon as possible.

Rugged Massif (Lochaber Landscape Character Assessment)

1.2.20 The Rugged Massif LCT is described as rounded masses of rock with deep narrow gullies and other glacial formed features. The thin infertile soils support little landcover with patchy grassland and heather. On lower slopes and gullies birch woods are found with occasional stands of oak. Few settlements are found in these areas.

1.2.21 The key characteristics of the Smooth Moorland Ridges LCT comprise:

- Rugged character, a crinkled skyline and a landform accentuated by rocky outcrops and glacial debris.
- Large rocky masses drawing the eye upwards to ice-scoured rounded summits.
- Often a transitional landscape with indistinct boundaries with other landscape types.
- Often in remote, unsettled and inaccessible locations which, combined with the rugged relief accentuates the wild character of these areas.
- Thin soils supporting sparse cover of grasses and heather on higher, drier slopes.
- Birch scrub and some oak woodland on lower slopes and within burn gullies and hanging valleys.
- Extensive sheep and deer grazing with stalking and hillwalking as popular activities.
- Plantation forestry occurring over small areas on flatter, lower slopes.

- 1.2.22 The Landscape Character Assessment document notes that this landscape is sensitive to changes which would affect the rugged skyline and remote and uninhabited character with remnant native and ancient woodlands and fragile soils also being vulnerable to loss and erosion.
- 1.2.23 Guidance for the Rocky Moorland LCT includes the following:
- Plantations which maintain a balance between broadleaf and conifer trees and where the edges reflect the rugged nature of the landform will be more readily integrated. Upper slopes and summits should be maintained open to enhance the landscape scale and rugged landform.
 - Restructuring of existing plantations should follow the pattern of decrease in scale and density to appear more natural;
 - Conserving and encouraging the areas of native oak, pie and birch woodland which often exists within the sheltered areas beneath the foothills and reducing grazing these these areas, with additional planting of these species where appropriate;
 - Minimise the adverse impact of built developments by using the landform to screen any developments and using small simple designs with informal carparks associated with native planting.

Smooth Moorland Ridges (Lochaber Landscape Character Assessment)

- 1.2.24 The Smooth Moorland Ridges LCT is described as ridges formed from gently sloping hills with a smooth, undulating topography, reaching 600 to 700m in height. The rounded hills support swathes of heather moorland, interspersed with rough grass and sometimes small areas of pasture on lower slopes. On higher plateaux, the peat surface is often riven into peat hags. Burns and gullies cut through the grain of the ridges and are colonised by scrubby trees, with thicker growth of oak and birch wood on lower slopes and loch edges. Coniferous plantation also occurs on some hillsides and lower foothills.
- 1.2.25 The key characteristics of the Smooth Moorland Ridges LCT comprise:
- ‘Gently undulating hills with smooth elongated ridge profiles...;
 - Simple, large scale landscape pattern dictated by uniform landcover and uncomplicated landform;
 - Plateau summits generally draped in a mixture of grasses, heather and sedges, with exposed peat hags;
 - Large blocks of conifer plantations along the hill sides and lower foothills;
 - Broadleaf woods on lower slopes and along loch edges, often framing crofts;
 - Scattered croft settlements with stone dykes concentrated on lower slopes, particularly along roads and south facing slopes; and
 - Roads and transmission lines following the base of the hills.’
- 1.2.26 The Landscape Character Assessment document identifies this landscape as being sensitive to change due to its smooth, open slopes. Particular pressures relate to changes in land use, such as forestry operations and intrusion by built development and vertical elements such as pylons, poles and masts.

1.2.27 Guidance for the Smooth Moorland Ridges LCT includes the following:

- Woodland and forest planting should be contained on lower slopes to keep an uncluttered ridge profile. Large blocks of forest are better within the large scale landscape and can be softened with deciduous planting up streams and gullies;
- Consideration should be given to land management techniques such as controlled muirburn and well managed grazing regimes, and maintenance of features such as drystone dykes, to maintain the large scale open character and distinctive land use patterns;
- Infrastructure such as roads and powerlines is least obtrusive when kept to glens or natural indentations in the landform;
- Planting associated with built development on the upper moorland slopes can sometimes lead to greater intrusion – a simple design using local materials can achieve the least intrusive result; and
- Elevated views from open moorland roads should be maintained and vertical elements such as telegraph poles, masts and pylons should be placed on lower slopes to avoid disrupting the skyline.

1.3 General Guidance

1.3.1 The Lochaber Landscape Character Assessment document also provides general guidance for various types of development throughout the Lochaber area. Guidance on the following subjects is likely to be of relevance:

Infrastructure - Hydroelectric Schemes

1.3.2 The document recognises the potential landscape impact of large scale hydroelectric schemes including the impact of powerhouses, large dams and, in particular drawdown. The document suggests that developers make use of landform and woodland to reduce impact and incorporate comprehensive mitigation measures into the scheme design. It is also suggested that consideration be given to the grid connection of such schemes.

1.3.3 Generic guidance for 'Infrastructure' which may be of relevance to the scheme includes:

- Development proposals should consider the isolation and lack of development of the existing landscape character;
- New roads should reflect the existing landscape shapes and patterns to improve their landscape 'fit';
- Stepped profiles on rock cuttings are preferred as they are less visually intrusive and enable more rapid revegetation;
- Use of local stone for walls and buildings can help roads and hydroelectric schemes integrate into the landscape; and
- Planting should be considered along the edges of hydroelectric reservoirs to help screen and direct the eye from the effects of drawdown.

1.3.4 Other guidance which may be of relevance relates to the subject areas of 'Mineral Extraction', 'Agriculture' and 'Forestry and Woodland' and includes the following:

- Small scale quarry workings may be screened by landform and coniferous woodland, if located in low-lying locations;
- Consideration should be given to phased reinstatement of workings or restoration of expired workings to reduce visual impact;
- Farm and forestry tracks should be routed along screened alignments or along natural contours to help ameliorate impact;
- A diverse range of species appropriate to the site should be considered for new woodland to reflect natural woodland patterns, although fewer species may be accommodated more readily in a simple landscape character type;
- Irregular felling shapes and woodland shapes should reflect those of the natural landform;
- Woodland should be of a scale that reflects and fits in with both landform and land use; and
- Conservation restoration and management of semi-natural woodlands will maintain the diversity of landscape features.