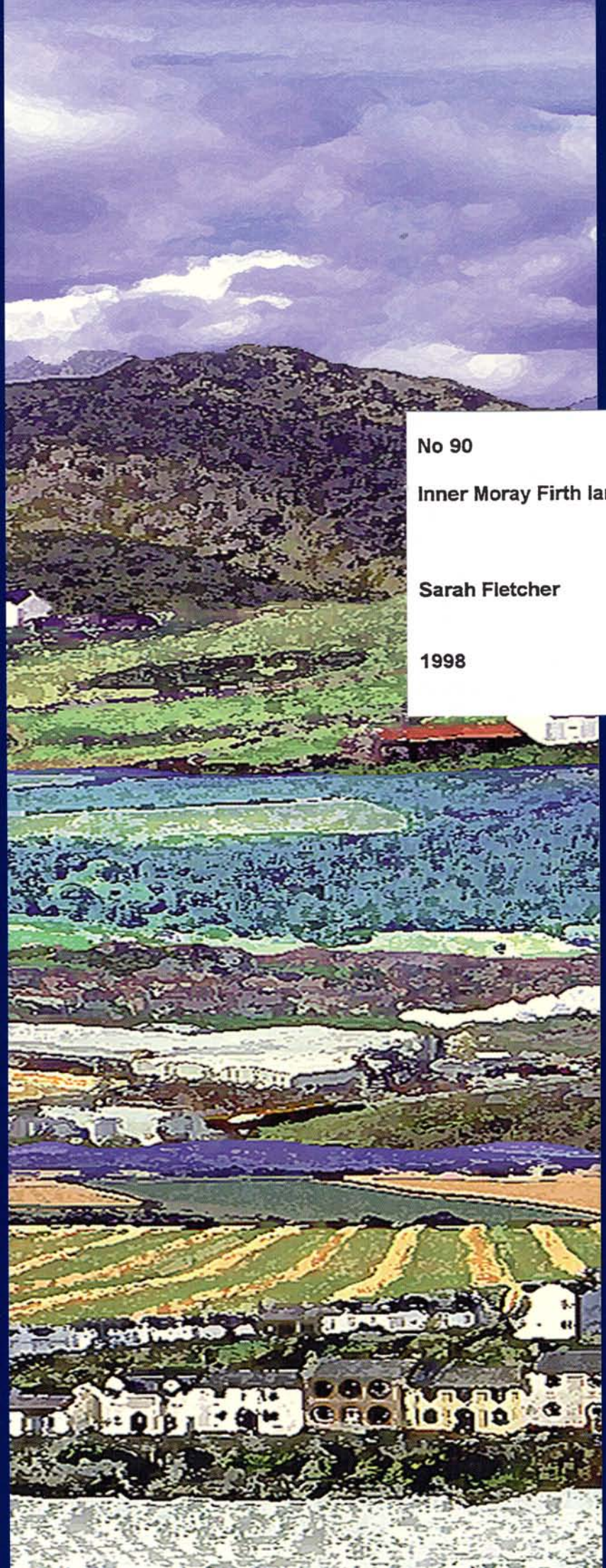

SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE

No 90

Inner Moray Firth landscape character assessment

Sarah Fletcher

1998

SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE

REVIEW

No 90

Inner Moray Firth landscape character assessment

Sarah Fletcher

1998

Sarah Fletcher, 43 Errol Road, Invergowrie, Dundee DD2 5BX

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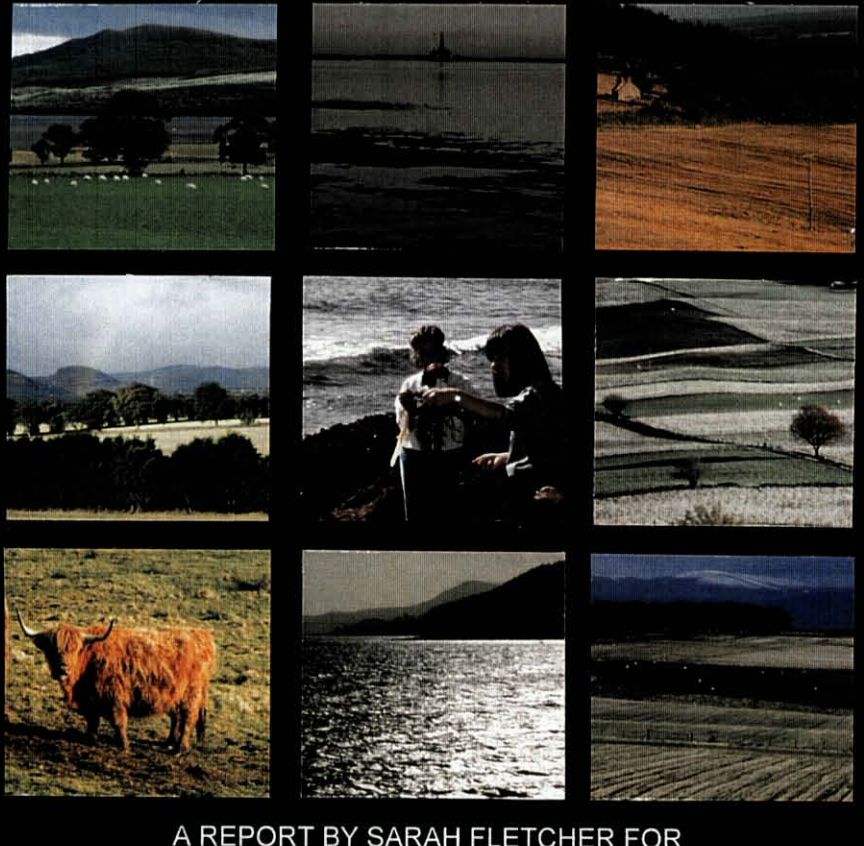
INNER MORAY FIRTH
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT



A REPORT BY SARAH FLETCHER FOR

SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE

FEBRUARY 1996

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 character of the Inner Moray Firth. 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 Moray and Highland Councils in the production of their local and structure plans.

The opinions contained within this report represent those of the consultant, Sarah Fletcher, and do not necessarily reflect the policies and views of the sponsors.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For their contributions and guidance during the production of this report, I am grateful to the members of the Moray Firth Landscape Assessment Steering Group:-

Frances Thin SNH NW Inverness

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For additional photographic material:-

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Frances Thin.

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

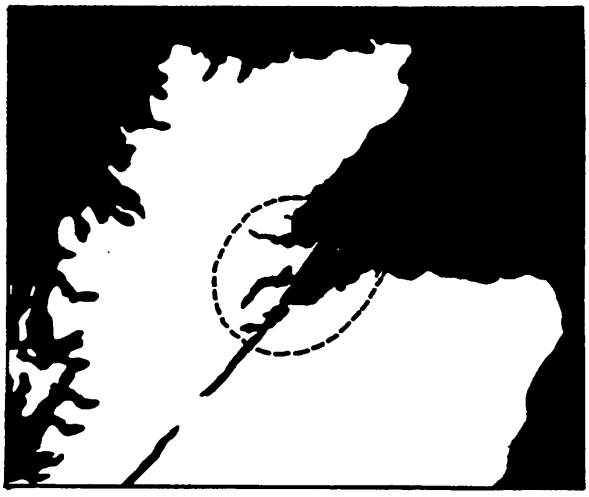
1.1 Purpose and Aims

This report is one of a series of documents being produced under a National Landscape Assessment Programme being carried out by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). A primary purpose is to contribute to SNH's Focus on Firths initiative, which aims to promote the integrated management of Scotland's major firths, and to increase an understanding and awareness of their importance for the natural heritage.

Prior to this report, Phases 1 and 2 of the Moray Firth Landscape Assessment Project were undertaken by consultants for SNH during 1993 to early 1995.

The aim of the Phase 3 report is to build upon the work carried out in the two previous studies, to set out clearly the key characteristics of each landscape character type within the study area and to give guidance on sensitivities and principal forces for change.

The area of study encompasses the Inner Moray Firth, from Lossiemouth to Brora, extending inland 15 or 20 miles beyond the heads of the Dornoch, Cromarty and Beauly firths, to the visual containment of the hills.



Inner Moray Firth Basin Area

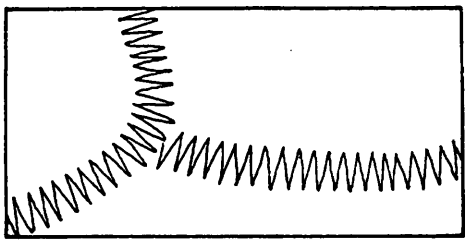
1.2 Landscape Character Types

The classification of the landscape into types involves the identification, analysis and explanation of the complex relationships between the physical, ecological, cultural and aesthetic elements of the landscape, and the human response to these.

From this assessment, ten different landscape character types were identified, in each of which, these landscape elements and processes occur in a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern. These are delineated on the map (contained in the back of this document) and are described by a series of simple statements that define what is important in that landscape - **the key characteristics.**

The distribution of these landscape character types is mapped, which allows a greater understanding of the overall picture of the Moray Firth landscape. Care

though must be taken not to assume that the lines drawn define clear boundaries on the ground. Indeed these lines generally delineate a transitional zone between neighbouring types, where the landscape characteristics are less distinctive. Even the relatively defined boundary of the firth shore should be treated in the context of this study as a transitional zone.



Boundary lines indicate where the key characteristics found within the 'core' of the character type are diluted and influenced by those of the surrounding types.

1.3 Landscape Character Assessment

Defining landscape character types involves the process of establishing what makes a landscape distinctive - **what is important in this landscape and why?** Knowing this gives a greater understanding of how the landscape is evolving and enables one to assess its sensitivity to change and test the effect of introducing new features or uses into that landscape. Design guidance has been proposed which suggests how development and change might be achieved in a way which maintains and enhances the distinctive character of that landscape type.

1.4 Structure of Report

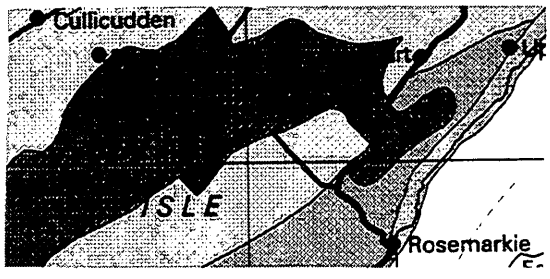
Chapter 2, the Landscape Evolution section, describes the main factors of coastal and terrestrial geomorphology, and the influence of man; key factors which contribute to the distinctiveness of the character types within the Inner Moray Firth.

Chapter 3 of this report describes the 10 landscape character types. For each character type the key characteristics are described using photographs, diagrams, and text. These include a description of the settlements that occur within and/or adjacent to that character type.

Given the strong cultural history of the Moray Firth, it was felt that any approach to classifying the landscape character should involve some analysis of the range and nature of settlements in the area. Therefore characteristic and larger urban settlements are described and recorded as follows.

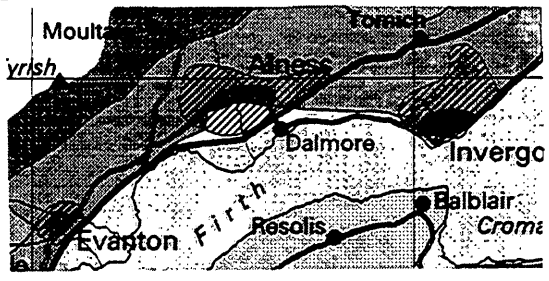
CHARACTERISTIC SETTLEMENTS

The location and growth of the settlement is in response to the landscape character and therefore recorded as being part of the character type.



LARGER URBAN SETTLEMENTS

The scale and nature of the expansion of a settlement periphery is no longer in response to the underlying landscape character; the expanding urban periphery is highlighted using hatched lines.



For each character type the development issues that are recognised to be the key forces for change are discussed and analysed as to their likely effects on landscape character. From this, design guidance is then suggested, which seeks to retain and reinforce the key characteristics where these are seen to be positive attributes, and improve those which are not.

The prominence of the mountainous edge, and its proximity to the Moray Firth basin, brings a highland quality which pervades the area. In recognition of this quality, the report contains a short section which discusses the importance of the Distant Mountainous Backdrop as a feature of all character types.

The methodology is described within Appendix 1 and a bibliography of references is located at the back of this document.

1.5 Using the Report

This is a landscape character assessment, which identifies landscape character types and forces for changes at a regional scale. The assessment report should be used in conjunction with the map which is to be found in the rear pocket. For the purposes of a site specific development, a further assessment is recommended at a more detailed scale.

Checklist

This section consists of a checklist to act as a series of prompts when considering the location and design of proposed development within the Moray Firth landscape. Due to the range of different issues that can arise, not all of the points in this checklist will necessarily apply.

Planning and Background Information

- Check Local Plan and Structure planning framework - where is development proposed?
- Environmental Assessment - does the development require an environmental statement?
- Are there designated areas such as NSAs or SSSIs that could restrict certain types of developments?
- Are there other landscape studies available at a greater detail, to use as further reference documents?
- Relating to the firth edge, are there any coastal management reports or surveys that it would be worthwhile to check?

- What are the infrastructure requirements? - can development be related to the existing infrastructure?

- Are other design guidelines available which provide a greater depth of information for specific developments, such as forestry guidelines or planning notes from the planning authority?

Specific Landscape Considerations

- Does the development respond to the key characteristics of the landscape type?

- At the strategic level, how does the development respond to overall trends within the landscape?

- What is the scale of the landscape in terms of views, spaces and existing features?

- Is the inter-visibility of the site understood; the significance of views from within, and back into, the character type? What are the visual characteristics; dominant point features, rhythm of landscape patterns and geometric forms?

- If built forms are being placed into the landscape, how do these relate to the existing pattern and distribution of the built environment? Do they follow the existing built form for design cues in considering shape, size and building materials, or should the building respond to the shape, scale and fabric of the landscape?

- Does the settlement have a recognisable or characteristic visual setting? It is important to recognise the character of the urban setting; this should be thoroughly understood before attempting to change the urban periphery for development.

- Is there any local distinctiveness in the urban form?

- Has the possible change in microclimate as a result of the proposed development, been considered?

- Is there sufficient understanding of the dynamic systems in the landscape? What are the possible knock-on effects of making a change?

- Does the proposal recognise and consider the use of the area by people (tourists, locals) and the seasonality of this use?

- Management of development; consider the programme of management which would be required to maintain and enhance the key characteristics of the landscape for the future.

- Is there an opportunity to enhance the existing key characteristics by strengthening the existing patterns or elements of the landscape, such as tree lines or using the indigenous tree species?

- Is a further level of landscape detail required? Suggest implementing a smaller scale landscape assessment for more specific areas.

- Does the proposal extend over more than one character type or into a transition zone? It must seek to respond to differing landscape character by using different design guidance but also aim to attain a unity of design in the development. It must consider what the relationship of the character types is to each other and the nature and balance of the key characteristics within this transitional area.

2.0 LANDSCAPE EVOLUTION

2. LANDSCAPE EVOLUTION

Surrounded on three sides by a mountainous landscape, and with the sea to the east, the landscape of the Moray Firth is a balance between land and water in which arms of land interlock with arms of the sea. Superimposed upon this a wealth of natural and cultural elements come together to produce a diverse and complex landscape. How the physical, ecological and cultural factors have changed over time, and how they influence the landscape character of today is the subject of this section on landscape evolution. It does not present a summary of the terrestrial and marine environment of the Moray Firth; for such information it is recommended that other texts such as the Moray Firth Review[1] and the Coastal Landforms[2] report be consulted. Together these describe in detail the physical, ecological, environmental and cultural attributes of the Moray Firth, and include discussion on their distribution, importance, sensitivity and protection. To include information of this nature within this report would only replicate what is already covered more comprehensively elsewhere. Within this section only those aspects which are considered most important in their influence on the Moray Firth landscape are covered.

The processes, which have been and continue to be fundamental to the development of the Moray Firth landscape, its evolution and complexity, are discussed under the headings of glacial, coastal and cultural influences.

2.1 Glacial Influences

In the Caledonian mountain building period (approximately 470 million years ago), it has been suggested that a large hollow formed in the region of the Moray Firth basin as a result of movement within the earth's crust. This ultimately produced the Great Glen Fault which runs through Fort William to Inverness, and can be recognised in the steep, straight, eastern coastline of the Black Isle and Tarbet Ness.

Many of the recognisable landforms of today's Moray Firth landscape had their beginnings before the last ice age, some 2 million years ago. In the period that followed (Pleistocene), the ice moved along existing lies of weakness in these landforms, and so began the development of many of the distinctive topographical features of the Firths.

The main ice sheet was centred over the northern mountain spine which ran from Altnaharra to Rannoch Moor, from whence it spread westwards to the Minch and Inner Hebrides, and eastwards into the Moray Firth. The ice scoured out areas of weakness along existing valleys, and formed deep basins such as those in the Beauly and Cromarty Firths. On meeting the main Scandinavian ice sheet, this ice was diverted east and north along the coast, moving material from the floor of the firth up onto the land.

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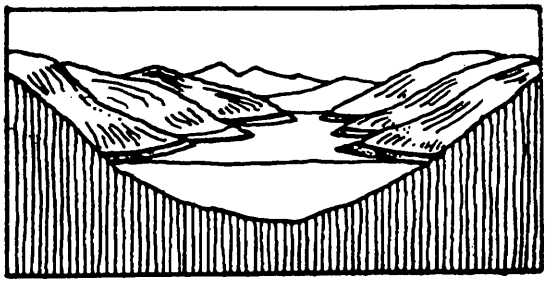
[1] Harding-Hill, Rachel (1993) The Moray Firth Review.

[2] Institute of Estuarine and Coastal Studies, University of Hull (1994) Coastal Landforms, Processes and Management Options.

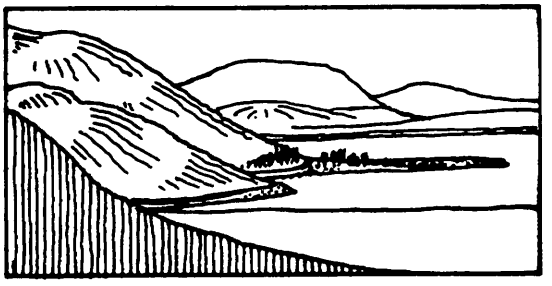
The ice began melting around 10,000 years ago and the firths were formed by the drowning of the glaciated valleys. Later, as more ice melted and the weight upon the land became less, the land lifted up revealing the firths and large deposits of sand and gravel which are still locally important features today (Cluny Hill at Forres and the Inverness and Dornoch eskers). Differential erosion by the ice produced a range of distinctive valley cross-sections associated with the firths. These distinct differences in geomorphology are reflected in the levels of human influence on this landscape today.

The greater the scouring of the glacier, the deeper is the firth channel. When submerged in the water the pronounced U shaped valley, has steep sides with a narrow coastal edge. Here the relationship between land and sea is sharper, giving an acute sense of enclosure and shelter. The lack of low-lying land associated with the coastal edge, forces the main communication routes down to the shore, giving one the added experience of tidal change.



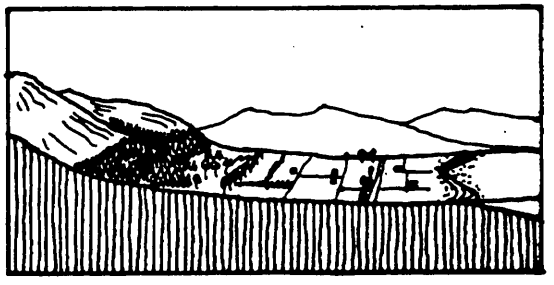
Pronounced U-shaped firth

The irregular coastal features around the Dornoch, Cromarty, Beauly and Inverness firths are glacial sand and gravel deposits left by outwash streams, and later dissected by rivers flowing down the steep valley sides. These narrow firth edges and deltas provide a basis for land use and settlement.



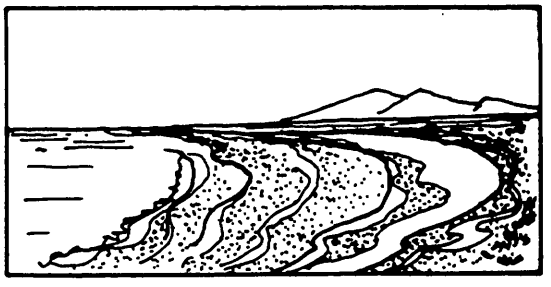
Irregular coastline

Further east the ice flowed over the lower land, rather than being confined, as it was within the more pronounced valleys further inland. This resulted in a shallower glaciated basin, with smoother, concave slopes, and provided a greater amount of land suitable for settlement and cultivation, close to deep, natural harbours.



Flat glaciated firth edge

Often the coastline is bounded by later depositional landforms, where extensive infilling at the edges of the firths produced a gently shelving interface between the land and sea, these are now the tidal mudflats along which expansive views can be gained inland towards the hills.



Gently shelving tidal mudflats

Meltwater from the glaciers produced a range of small depositional features such as the winding ridges of sand and gravel, which abound along the lower lands of the Moray Firth.

The uplifting of the land as the ice receded, revealed an abundance of shoreline features, such as raised beaches and terraces. Further deposition by glacial rivers was responsible for the sands and gravel which are an important source of sediment for the present day beaches, dunes, spits and bars which are characteristic features of the dynamic edge of the outer firth.

2.2 Coastal Influences

The diverse coastline of the Moray Firth is still in the process of active change. The differing dynamic qualities of these coastal landscapes are greatly emphasised by the changing interactions between the land, sea and people.

Within the Inner Moray Firth basin two distinct patterns of coastal processes emerge due to the differing actions of the wind and waves.

Outer Coastline

This extends from Helmsdale to Dornoch and then Ardersier to Spey Bay, east of Lossiemouth. Here one finds major sand and shingle beaches, including large areas of raised beach, such as the extensive accumulation of fine sands and shingle at Culbin.

In comparison to the inner firths, strong coastal winds lead to an increased movement of material by both wave and wind. The development of spits and bars along the southern shores of the Moray Firth is an example of the continuing migration of sediments by wave, and typifies the characteristically dynamic qualities of the outer firth. The transport of sediments over land by wind gives a wider dispersal of fine sediments and creates a flat open landscape, such as that at Morrich Mor.

This highly mobile, dynamic landscape can be experienced not just visually, but by the smell and taste of salt, the movement of sand beneath the feet and the sound of the waves and sea birds.

Inner Firth Coastline

This coastal edge extends around the Dornoch, Inverness, Beauly and Cromarty Firths, with smaller inlets at Findhorn and Loch Fleet. In comparison to the outer coastline, these inner firths are considered to be relatively stable as they are not exposed to so much wind and wave action. This is due to the greater shelter afforded by the high relief inland and the reduction in the coastal currents over that experienced in the outer firths. In the estuarine inner firths, sediments are thought to be actively accumulating. The tidal range can be up to 3 metres which, over the

shallow estuarine areas at the heads of the firths, exposes vast stretches of mudflats twice a day.

2.3 Cultural Influences

In many parts of the Moray Firth the landscape character is distinctive because of the man-made patterns which are superimposed upon the natural ones. The nature and diversity of settlement and land use to be found within a relatively small area, point to the strategic importance of the Moray Firth basin, as an oasis of relatively flat and fertile land within a largely mountainous landscape.

A variety of archaeological finds and artefacts around the Moray Firth, although relatively slight in their physical imprint on the landscape, indicate that this landscape was inhabited from as far back as 5,000 years ago (the Neolithic period). Possibly the most noteworthy and mysterious archaeological legacy are the concentrations of early sculpture stones within the Moray Firth area which are indicative of its one time importance to the Pictish people. Pictish settlements such as Dornoch and Burghead date from 300 AD. Five hundred years later, in 800 AD, the firths in particular were subject to invasions by the Vikings, who noticeably left their mark in the place names, eg Dingwall.

The dominant patterns of land division which exist to the present day stem primarily from the 12th century, when the system of infield and outfield was established. Throughout this were dispersed 'fermtoun' building clusters, many of which persisted relatively unaltered until the 18th century periods of agricultural improvements. Both historically and in the present day, the system of land holding in Scotland (with relatively large areas of land often being held by a few individuals) has a dominant influence on the evolution of farming technology and agricultural land use, and thence on the resulting landscape patterns.

From 1780 - 1880 a period of estate improvement coincided with the Highland Clearances, both of which produced very distinct landscape patterns which often relate to specific types of terrain. The estates tend to be situated on the flat, valley bottoms associated with the river flood plains and at the heads of the firths. Agricultural improvements for the estates meant, in part, the planting and managing of lines of deciduous trees enclosing the fields, and policy woodlands around the large houses.

Crofting as a land use within the Moray Firth is relatively sparsely distributed on the poorer, steeper terrain of the valley sides. Although the soils are thin, they are also free draining, though much stone often had to be cleared to produce workable land. Many of the croft holdings are arranged in a strong geometric pattern, specifically planned to accommodate those who were 'cleared' from the inland straths. As such the crofting areas tend to have a highly populated appearance with a scattered abundance of croft houses and other buildings. The contrast between the two lifestyles of the crofter and estate owner is almost tangible in the contrasts of these two landscapes; the mature trees, large fields and big houses as compared to the rough, highly diverse nature and intimate scale of the crofting landscape.

Within the Moray Firth the presence of large scale forestry plantations is characteristic of many upland and coastal locations. Although much of this relates to the formation of the Forestry Commission at the beginning of this century, and their large areas of pre- and post-World War II plantings; there are also considerable areas of longer established estate woodland. One of the main features of these plantations is the predominance of exotic conifers which are capable of withstanding exposure and growing successfully on poor acid soils. As such, their distribution tends to be on the upland areas of peat, on rocky slopes and on heaths associated with the dune systems, where forestry was originally introduced to curb coastal erosion.

It was as early as the 12th century that agricultural development favoured the growth of small urban centres to act as trading market places. These burghs continued to be formed, creating a hierarchy of settlements, up to the 17th century, after which urban growth began to stabilise. In contrast, from then until the late 19th century, fishing settlements experienced a period of pronounced growth, in response to the herring fishing industry.

The presence of the whisky distillery (using the peat filtered water from the surrounding hills and the good barley ground) as a recognisable architectural feature increased after the 1814 Act of Parliament. This defined a certain production capacity in an attempt to stop illicit trade.

Since that time the wartime (WW2) military presence, the establishment of RAF facilities, the building of the Invergordon aluminium smelter and the discovery of oil in 1976 (in the Beatrice oil field clearly visible at 22 km off the mainland coast at Helmsdale) can account for the most rapid and visually dramatic growth of settlements and industrial areas in today's landscape.

Patterns of settlement establishment and growth are strongly correlated to the growth of communications and none more so than in the Moray Firth basin where people travelling south and west along the coastal lowlands and east through the east-west glens met in a natural cross-roads. There was also the importance of the sea as a means of communication, with the growth of small tightly knit settlements crowded round harbours at strategic coastal locations. Later, settlements became associated with the crossing points of the firths, with bridges at the heads and ferries at the mouths. The 1745 Rebellion lead to the frantic period of road building by General Wade, which extended the road network considerably into the highland glens and up to the Moray Firth area most notably, the Dunkeld to Inverness and Fort Augustus to Fort George routes, and thence across the Black Isle and westwards through Contin. Further additions to Moray Firth communications were the engineering structures of Thomas Telford, including the bridge at Bonar in 1813 and, 3 years later, the Mound between Strath and Loch Fleet.

In the latter part of the 20th century, with increased car ownership came, arguably one of the most significant changes to the communication system, the eventual spanning of the three firths of Inverness, Cromarty and Dornoch. The importance of

these bridges and causeways as an instrument in directing and focusing development, has radically changed the location of pressure for new housing and industry. Possibly less obvious, is the impact they have on the way people experience the firths. Although dramatic views can be gained from the Kessock Bridge, much of the complexity and qualities of scale and interaction with the firths, themselves are lost in taking the shortest and quickest route.

3.0 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES

Contained in this chapter are the descriptions of the 10 landscape character types that have been identified within the Inner Moray Firth landscape, within each of these landscape elements and processes occur in a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern. The classification of the character types, identifies areas of broadly similar character, which are described using text, diagrams and photographs.

As each character type has reasonably consistent characteristics, its sensitivity to change can be tested; these sensitivities are described and analysed in the sections titled 'Forces for Change'. Design guidance is given for each of the principal development pressures, suggesting how change can be achieved in a way which maintains and enhances the distinctive character of that landscape type.

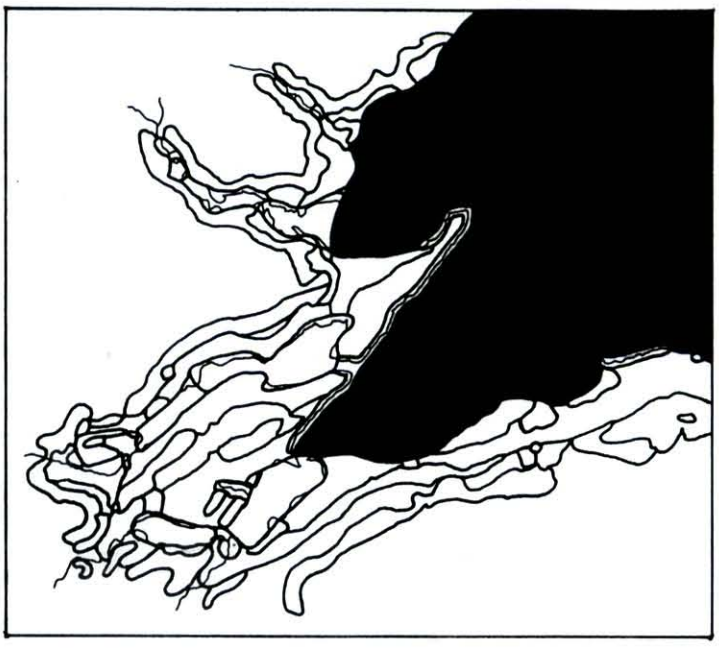
In the context of this report, the process of landscape assessment does not seek to provide value judgements in the descriptions of the character types. Instead it aims to highlight how and why one landscape is different from another.

The character types are delineated on the map contained in the back of this document. Lines drawn generally delineate a transitional zone between neighbouring types, rather than defining clear boundaries on the ground.

Also identified on the map and in the report are the larger urban settlements and the Distant Mountainous Backdrop, which are included as important features of this landscape.

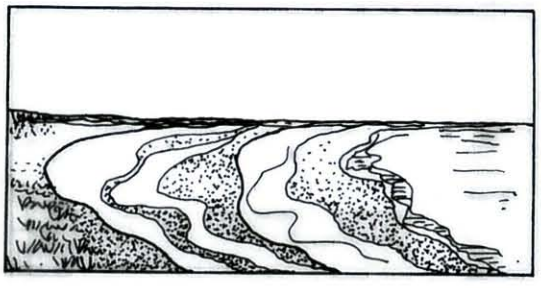
3.1 OPEN FIRTH

The Open Firth character type extends outwards from the mouths of the land-locked firths and along the coastline from Brora south to Tarbet Ness, inland to Fort George and east along to Lossiemouth.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- A flat to gently undulating coastal edge gently shelving into water, with tidal changes exposing vast stretches of sand and shingle beaches.



- Wide panoramic views, with a dominance of the sea/sky horizon and a lack of prominent visual foci.

- A natural landscape pattern predominates with subtle changes in texture and colour occurring parallel to the coastal edge.

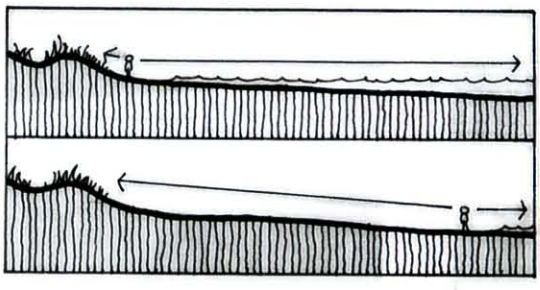
- The characteristic vegetation is low-lying and tolerant to salt and water inundation.

- Low angle views foreshorten the expanse of sea with the opposite coastline appearing as a pale band receding into the sea/sky horizon. There is a sense of great space and distance.

- The reflective quality of the water and the ephemeral skies can show dramatic changes on a daily and seasonal basis.

- The dynamic quality and sensitivity to change are emphasised by tidal changes, shifting sediments and migrating birds.

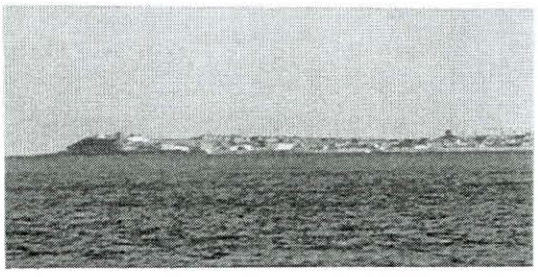
- This character type is normally experienced from the edge looking into the Open Firth. The sense of scale increases noticeably when on an exposed beach or boat.



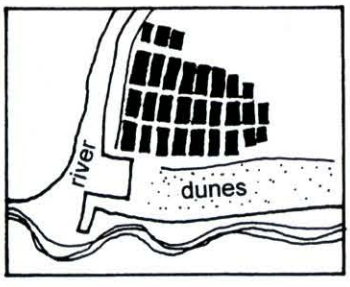
- Tangible qualities; picking up shells, the smell and sounds of the sea and birds, are experiences synonymous with this landscape character type.

- The absence of built forms increases the experience of isolation and openness.

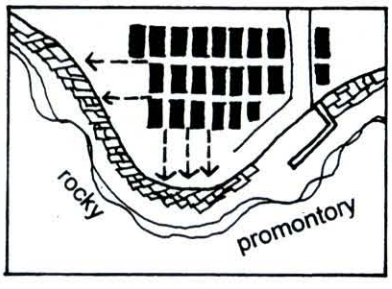
- Settlements clustered on rocky promontories and stable headlands, emphasise the openness of the mobile edge which is unsuitable for building.



- Settlements are located on stable back dune systems, at river mouths, or on rocky promontories where there is access to relatively deep water for a natural harbour.



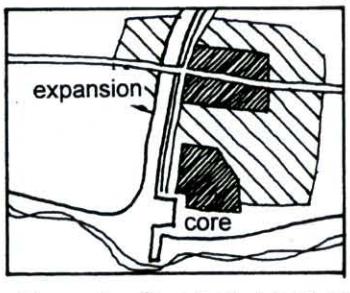
Tight grouping of houses providing sheltered micro-climate within settlement



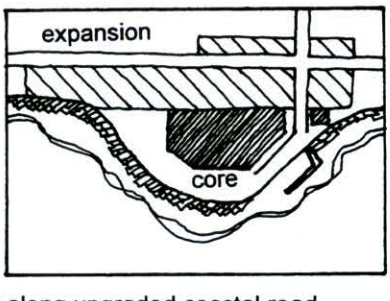
Views framed along narrow streets increase connection to sea

- All settlements show a characteristic and recognisable core landscape of narrow streets and low cottages set perpendicular to the coastal edge; a response to the openness and exposure of the harsh environment.

- In the larger urban settlements expansion has gone beyond the topographical setting of the characteristic core settlement.



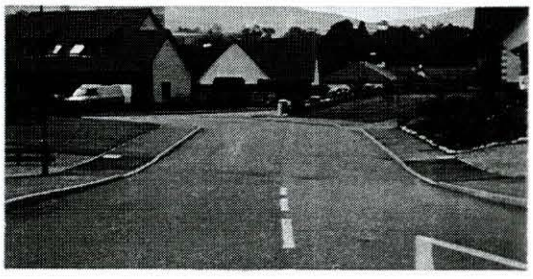
Expansion from both inland and fishing settlements amalgamate



Sprawl of houses along upgraded coastal road

- The pattern of urban expansion reflects an aesthetic and recreational relationship with the sea, with houses arranged parallel to the coastline, facing out to sea.

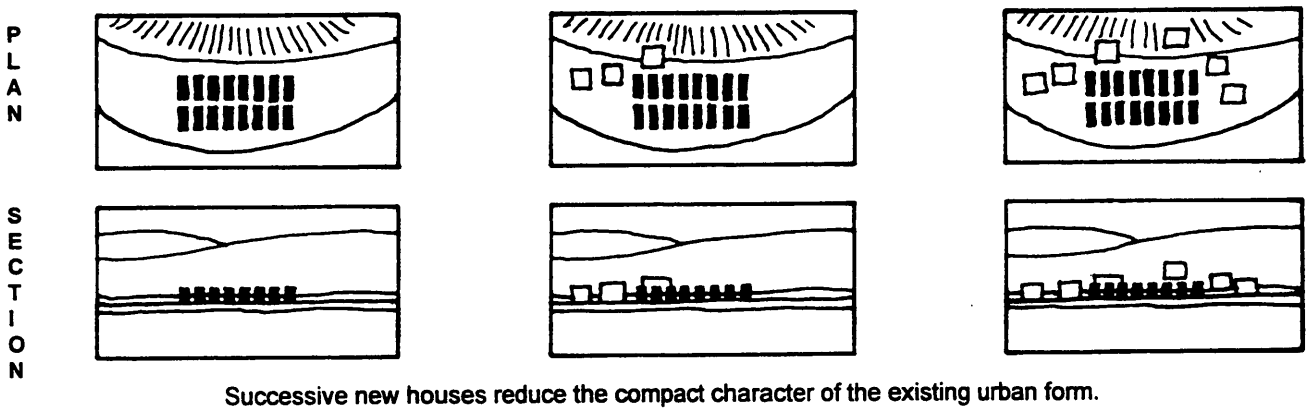
- New dwellings exhibit a greater range of shape, size and building materials. The needs of the car necessitate wider roads which dominate the urban form.



SINGLE RURAL HOUSING/URBAN EXPANSION

Forces for Change

Due to the nature of the predominantly mobile coastal edge, with unsuitable ground conditions for building, and a lack of existing infrastructure, this kind of built development tends to be placed on the periphery of an existing settlement, or falls into a neighbouring character type. In this latter case the visual impact of housing on the Open Firth landscape can still be one in which the built form dominates as a ribbon sprawl along a roadside. This contrasts strongly with the compactness of the settlement. Dereliction and individual house extensions dilute the cohesion of the urban fabric in the core area, affecting the unified character of the settlement, its intimate scale and vitality.



Successive new houses reduce the compact character of the existing urban form.

New blocks of amorphous housing extend beyond the tight periphery of the core area but on a larger scale than is characteristic. Trees and garden shrubs planted in an attempt to reduce the impact of the coastal winds, can soften the strong, hard character of the built core. New roads and housing cut across the linear coastal patterns, and often lie uncomfortably on the landscape.

Guidance

Where housing is placed within the neighbouring character type, the guidance relating to that character type should be considered. However, particular care should be taken, using a visual analysis, to ensure that any visual impact on the Open Firth, which often has this characteristic of pronounced 'inter-visibility', is minimised.

The design and layout of new housing development can respond to the uniform and strongly urban landscape of settlements within this landscape character type without resorting to the pastiche. In particular the original height of older dwellings should be respected, with account taken of the scale and nature of the external spaces characteristic of these settlements.

If housing has to expand along the coast and becomes prominent, the newer urban fabric can imitate the low character of the existing dwellings, built to reduce the impact of the wind. The planting of trees for shelter can create incongruous features when set against the low lying, salt tolerant dune and heath vegetation.

A sense of place is more likely to be preserved if original buildings, where possible, are reused before building new ones. This is important for reinforcing the local character and attracting new investment as it can promote a feeling of prosperity.

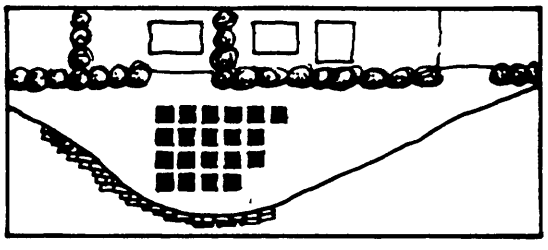
INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION

Forces for Change

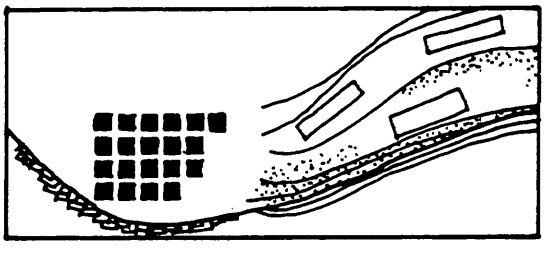
Industrial units, placed on the flat land on the outskirts of the settlement, form obtrusive big blocks; often these are made more obvious by their own formal 'landscaped' surroundings. Most industrial expansion tends to fall inland where there is more room to expand and it is nearer to transport routes, as a result impacts are primarily on the surrounding character types, rather than directly on the Open Firth (eg, pipeline assembly at Morrich Mor).

Guidance

Larger industrial units are often out of scale with the typical character of the core settlements. As such they would become prominent features on the edge of the settlement where their size is emphasised by the contrast with the low indigenous dwellings. Growth might be encouraged in an adjoining character type where vertical landscape features can be accommodated more readily to help create a setting. Otherwise, if it is necessary to locate industrial units in the more natural areas of the Open Firth, they should be low and long in their dimensions, painted in muted colours to blend in with surrounds, and placed in response to the pattern of the landform.



Development placed in adjoining character type. Trees and scrub create structure prior to development.



New industrial units designed for and placed according to the natural pattern of the coast. Architecture of industrial units takes on a squat form to reduce drawing attention.

TOURISM

Forces for Change

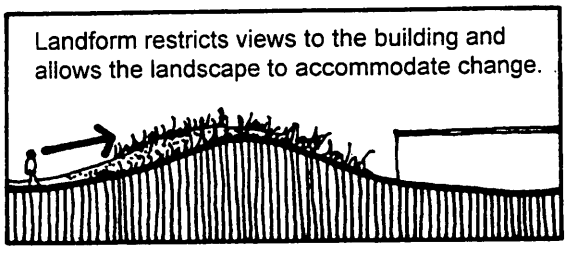
As far as the Open Firth landscape character type is concerned, tourism tends to mean an increase in informal recreation, access down to water's edge and a demand for more infrastructure, roads, paths and car parking. On the shifting surfaces typically found in this character type, this may mean land reclamation or stabilisation and the introduction of regular hard shapes and edges into the soft and variable coast, with visually intrusive roads and dark surfacing cutting across the natural patterns of the coastal edge.

With an increase in informal recreation there will be more visible activity in this landscape with concentrations of people around visitor centres, interpreted sites and viewpoints. Car parking can be particularly intrusive; the cars themselves in high season and the open visual scar of the car park itself in winter. Accommodation too can have a significant effect, especially self-catering units where the positioning of chalets and caravans is critical in retaining the open and expansive character of this type. The often anomalous architecture of such holiday accommodation in rural areas can constitute a dominant feature, usually on the outskirts of a settlement located close to services and with a sea view. In a flat coastal area these vertical structures, with their access roads, green manicured grass and subsidiary buildings, are a prominent feature. They have a different form, conflicting with that of the naturally shifting dune systems and higher associated levels of human activity than occur elsewhere.

Guidance

Large scale tourist developments within the Open Firth character type are not easily accommodated by the dynamics of the natural system. Placing such developments within service corridors or areas of urban settlement as far as possible, is desirable to protect and retain the natural landscape and coastal systems. Sensitive and robust areas can be identified and used to inform a programme of positive management, whereby people are channelled to coastal areas most capable of withstanding high levels of pressure.

Long, low buildings and parking can use indigenous colours and textures and follow the natural linear patterns of the coastal edge, rather than be grouped together in a dark setting of hard surfacing.



Buildings will benefit from being where gently undulating coastal landforms allow some natural screening.

In designing and locating visitor provisions it is important to recognise the seasonal nature of this character type as a draw to tourists (ranging from summer sun to dolphins and wintering birds) and avoid the need to replicate facilities, thereby lessening out-of-season impacts.

Artefacts introduced for interpretation such as information boards and signage should be kept to a minimum and placed low and unobtrusively on the main paths, respecting the exposed character of the landscape and the lack of built forms.

Tourist accommodation, which is usually of a temporary nature, eg caravans and prefabricated chalets, although usually placed near to existing settlements to benefit from the use of services and access, should aim not to dilute the urban setting by building with non-indigenous materials on the immediate fringes of the settlement. Building alignment

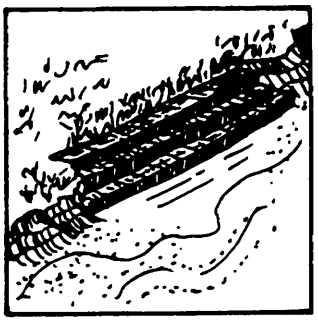
should respect the natural patterns of the coastal edge, and where possible building design should employ similar textures and colours to those found in the landscape.

COASTAL DEFENCES

Forces for Change

Large scale coastal defences are most likely to be carried out in conjunction with road improvements or industrial expansion. Defences such as gabions and rock armouring, which reinforce an actively eroding coastal edge, create a hard linear feature and an unnaturally sharp transition, in contrast to the natural gently shelving coast.

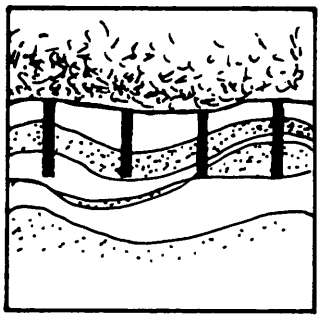
Natural irregular coastal edge.



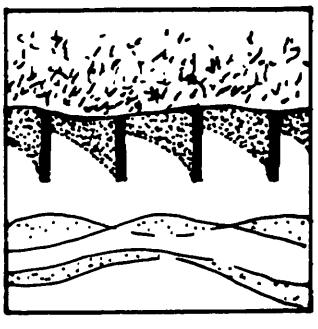
A hard linear edge in the landscape contrasts with surrounding irregualr edge.

Elsewhere groynes placed perpendicular to the coastal edge are used as a mechanism to trap shifting sediments. By the very nature of the groynes' function, to actively slow down the movement of sediments, they will change the inherent dynamic character of this landscape.

The presence of the hard, linear groynes within the landscape is highlighted, due to their position placed perpendicular to the orientation of the natural coastal edge. With time, the accumulation of sediments by the groynes dramatically alters the shoreline, from natural flowing forms to a series of regulated geometric patterns.



Visual tension created as strong, man-made, linear, groynes cut across the predominant natural pattern.



Groynes alter natural flow of coastline creating geometric pattern and strong rhythm.

Guidance

A greater knowledge of the effects of groynes means that it is unlikely that new projects of this type would be implemented. In the case of existing features, a programme of monitoring with 2 or 5 yearly fixed photography could be employed to inform subsequent management of these defences. Where the need is identified for the upgrading of existing coastal defences, eg gabion boxes being replaced by longer term measures; the use of indigenous stone rip-rap usually has less physical and visual impact, though this will very much depend on the nature of the individual site. The rip-rap, in dispersing the waves'

energy to stop erosion, also traps sediments carried in suspension. Where new defences are being considered, a detailed assessment of the coastline should be carried out, with particular attention being given to the position and role of the proposed defences in altering the pattern of sediment movement within the wider coastal area.

In areas that have a less dramatic erosion problem, the combination of geotextile matting, acting as an anchor medium for sediments, and planting of indigenous species, can provide effective defences, as well as safeguarding the natural coastline patterns.

STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS

Significant areas of this landscape character type are designated for protection because of scenic, environmental and ecological importance, resulting in a policy of no change or positive management in these areas. Policies to discourage public access in such locations may result in greater pressure elsewhere.

RAF/MOD

Forces for Change

The vertical built forms of the aircraft tower and buildings, the airstrip criss-crossing the landscape, and the noise of the aircraft flying overhead dramatically contrast with the experience of the natural qualities of the Open Firth landscape.

In the event of the RAF withdrawing from sites on the southern edge of the Moray Firth, or the MOD from Morrich Mor, any derelict buildings and structures left behind will increase the experience of exposure and isolation, and negative associations within this landscape.

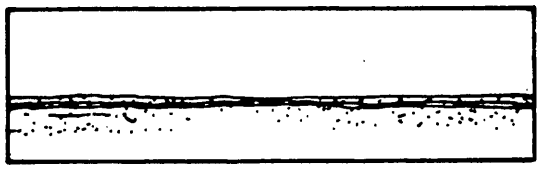
Guidance

With any withdrawal of the RAF there should be a requirement, at the very least, for the removal of all dominant vertical features. In addition an approach should be adopted which encourages the dismantling and removal of all structures and surfaces associated with the RAF/MOD installations, and to actively encourage restoration of the natural characteristics.

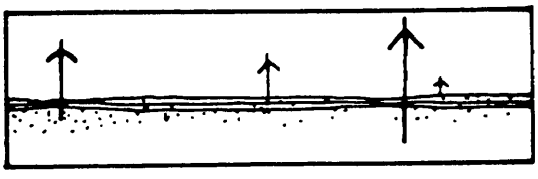
RENEWABLE ENERGY - WIND

Forces for Change

Utilising the coastal exposure, wind turbines would be substantial vertical forms (40 - 60 m high) in a predominantly horizontal landscape, situated on the edge of flat coastal areas. They would be visually intrusive from a considerable distance. It is likely that new access roads would have to be put in as these devices tend to be located away from settlements. The wind turbines would become points of visual focus providing a sense of the vertical dimension in a landscape with a strong horizontal emphasis.



Vast open landscape with no prominent foci.

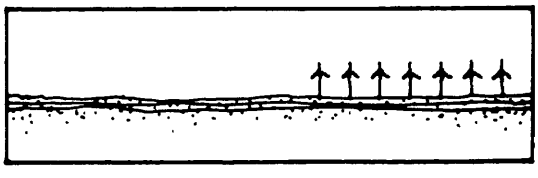


Variety of foci with no functional relationship to landscape creating visual confusion.

Guidance

As wind turbines are perceived by some to have an industrial character, it may be most desirable to locate them next to existing structures which are of a similar vertical scale or industrial nature.

Where there are no existing structures, visually the wind farms can best be accommodated along the Open Firth by adopting a linear pattern parallel to the coastal edge, using a line of turbines which would more readily respond to the vast scale of the horizontal plane. It is important to locate the wind farm away from any settlements, otherwise the height of the turbines will be emphasised by the visible comparison with small buildings.

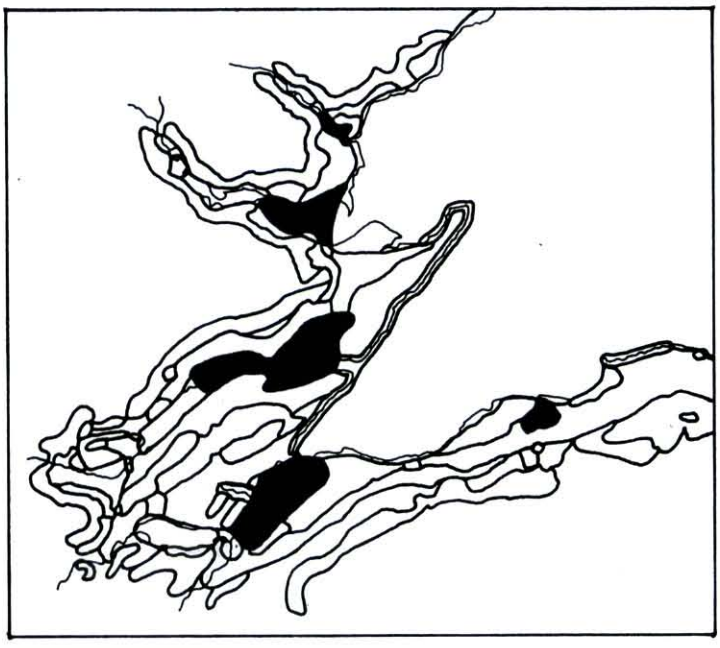


In open landscape vertical elements following the horizintal form do not conflict with landform.

Windfarms following natural irregular patterns and lying parallel to the coastline

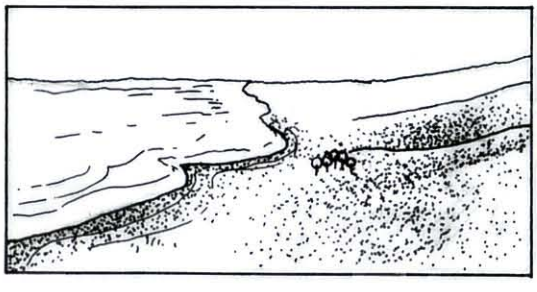
Where access roads have to be created, following the linear pattern of the coastline will lessen the potential impacts, with any associated buildings being low and unobtrusive.

3.2 ENCLOSED FIRTH



The Enclosed Firths extend from where the firth is narrowed by sand bars or rocky headlands, inland to where the intertidal zone dramatically narrows in response to a more prominent slope; as at the mouths of the Dornoch, Cromarty and Moray Firths, and Loch Fleet and Findhorn Bay.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS



- This is a coastal landscape type with a variety of shorelines ranging from gently shelving edges with extensive intertidal areas, to a more pronounced sloping coastal edge, with a sharper transition between land and sea.

- Wide panoramic views over mudflats and the proximity of the opposing shoreline pulls the horizon closer and gives a sense of visual containment.

- The edge of the firth is often characterised by the complex natural patterns and textures of coastal intertidal mudflats.

- This is a natural, dynamic landscape with diurnal rhythms of water, and seasonally migrating birds.

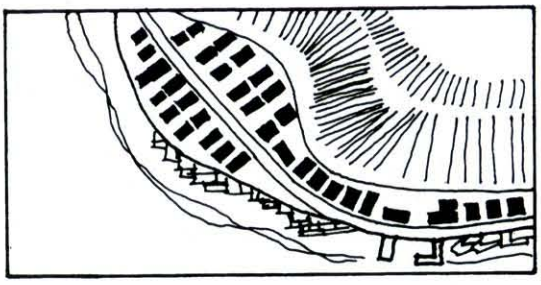
- The dominance of the natural edge is significantly affected where industrial artefacts, oil rigs, buildings, harbours and boats, impinge upon this experience. Both from within and outwith the character type, the eye is drawn to these foci.

- Reflections on calm days increase the presence of the surrounding landscape and mirror the changing skies.

- The landmarks of prominent hills, distant mountains or industrial artefacts make it easy to orientate oneself in this landscape.

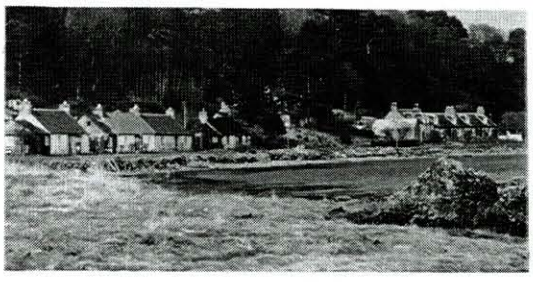
- The cross-firth bridges allow this character type to be experienced from the middle, giving views to both shores and up/down the firth.

- Small, typical settlements are dispersed and reflect the constraints imposed by the firth landscape. Linear settlements are squeezed between land and water in a narrow setting or in clusters on the open flat coastal deltas.



When space has permitted the road moves inland and houses are built gable-end to sea in the narrow strip between the road and coast, giving an experience of sudden enclosure.

- Linear settlements are set back from the firth edge beyond the coastal road which accesses the harbour.



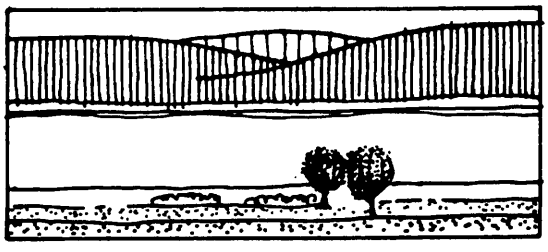
- On delta fans, small groups of intimate scale, stone farm dwellings are situated at the end of a narrow road. These are often sited within large pasture fields, much of the waterlogged ground being unsuitable for arable farming.

RURAL HOUSING

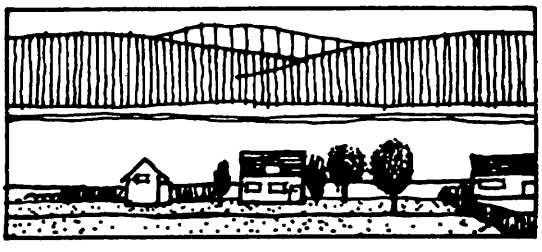
Forces for Change

Housing placed on the firth edge would mean an increase in the number of vertical forms in the strongly horizontal landscape of the firth, and a weakening of the dispersed pattern of the existing settlements. However in some locations house construction will be limited by the high water table. With large numbers of new housing there would be increased pressure for new roads and access tracks, from dead-ends to loop roads, and associated garden landscaping.

With any increase in the concentration of settlements on the flatter, coastal lands, the perception of habitation within often very natural surroundings, will increase.



Views over to the opposing background



Focus of attention on foreground

Guidance

Within the relatively open firth structure, it is important to retain the small scale of the original farm holdings. New buildings placed so as to have a relationship with the underlying field pattern, and if in similar groupings to traditional settlements, will be accommodated more readily in this landscape character type.

URBAN EXPANSION

Forces for Change

A feature of the settlement in this character type, is the density of the huddled urban form, integrated into the strongly natural coastline. Added housing can cause additional sprawl outwith this immediate setting and along the coastline, whilst housing placed further up-slope can visually and physically impact on the landscape setting, reducing the inherent unity of the settlement.

Guidance

Additional housing must first respect the shape and density of the existing settlement so that it is seen as part of the urban fabric, and reads as a group. Sensitively sited housing will not conflict or compete with the strong landform of the setting.

INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION

Forces for Change

In some areas reclamation of land to the seaward, creates a sharp transition between land and sea, giving an artificial edge to the firth and reducing the sense of interconnection between the water and the shifting mobile coast.

An increase in the decommissioning of oil rigs on-shore, could mean an increase in the industrial presence and number of vertical structures within the firth itself. Prior to this, oil rigs have always been limited in number, and therefore, to a certain extent, seen as a novelty. The noise and movement of the onshore and offshore machinery create a different type of activity to that characteristically found on the firth edge.

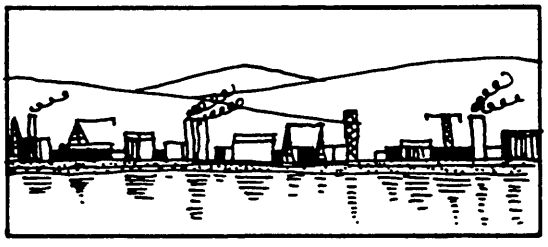
The expansion of pipe line assembly areas and harbour facilities out into the firth will introduce hard, linear elements and new activity foci.

With the built edge situated on the visually dominant land/water junction, the presence of urban forms in such locations, is highlighted by reflections in the water, and will often dominate views, from the opposing shoreline across the unrestricted plane of water.

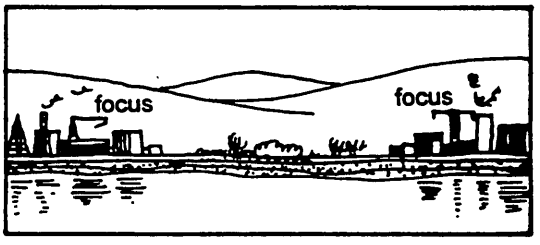
If closures occur, empty buildings with boarded windows and no signs of life, can give a negative connotation to the built edge, changing from one of prosperity to neglect.

Guidance

It is important to recognise that visually prominent industrial settlements although part of the Enclosed Firth landscape type, are occasional features, which should not become a dominant element and therefore characteristic of these coastal areas. Retaining the natural coastline and landscape between any industrial areas will help to act as visual and physical buffer areas.



Continuous line of vertical elements dominates coastal edge



Visually industrial features remain as two separate points of focus

With short term closures, a feature of the current economic climate, buildings and structures which are retained can be used in the future for new development to preclude the need for new expansion on the outskirts of settlements. Where buildings are no longer in use, or are becoming neglected, structures should be dismantled, to reduce the visual neglect and feeling of decay.

TOURISM

Forces for Change

Tourism in this landscape character type is connected with an increased focusing on the interest of the firth environment. Within the landscape one is likely to see an increase in interpretation both of the natural firth landscapes, and the industrial landscape. This may in turn stimulate an increasing demand for tourist facilities such as visitor centres, car parking and viewpoints, features which in themselves could impinge upon the naturalness of the coastline.

Promoting the firth in this way would necessitate an increase in access to the shoreline in order for people to experience the natural landscape and views of the firths.

Guidance

Advantage should be taken of locations where views over the firth can be obtained, particularly where the opposite shore is sensitive to disturbance. Also more could be made of the unique viewing opportunity presented by the firth bridges. It is important to link the demand for visitor/interpretation facilities with the availability of empty traditional buildings so as to avoid introducing new and conspicuous built forms in this landscape.

Pedestrian access could be developed by the promotion of path systems and car access, to direct people away from the most sensitive areas. Where new buildings are required, their design and siting within the landscape should respect the existing uses and not disturb the natural patterns of the landscape. Education within these facilities and elsewhere can raise peoples' awareness of the firth characteristics and the siting and growth of the industrial landscape.

RENEWABLE ENERGY - WIND

Forces for Change

Wind energy generation is feasible along the exposed coastal edges of the firths. There is often good access, but the nearness to existing settlements will enable people to unfavourably compare the height of the wind turbines with the surrounding small scale of buildings. Wind turbine structures, if placed next to an industrial centre, could seem to extend the industrial landscape along the firth edge, which may constitute a significant negative effect to some individuals.

Guidance

Wind turbines could be related to the linear character of this landscape type but with the nature of this landscape, and its views directed across the firth, a wind farm would need to be sited so as not to obstruct these important views.

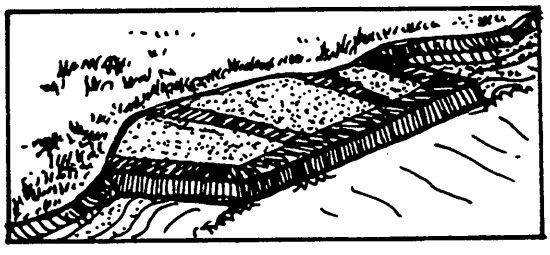
LAND RECLAMATION

Forces for Change

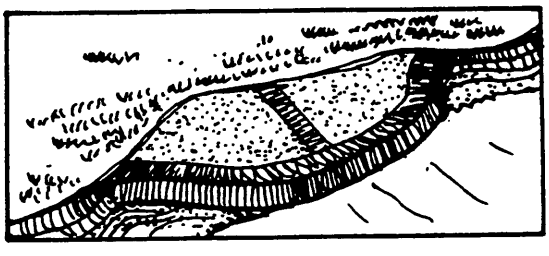
A reclaimed coastal edge, with its straight lines and a steep shore profile between land and sea, generally causes visual disruption, due to its contrast with the characteristically gently shelving and irregular firth edge. The nature of these changes are enhanced by the siting of prominent vertical or industrial forms on these reclaimed edges which seemingly jut out onto the flat plain of water.

Guidance

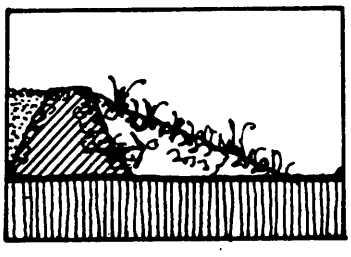
Where land reclamation is proposed, it is important that the design of any reclaiming bund structures not only respect nature conservation interests in their siting but also relates to the overriding shape and scale of the curves in the natural shoreline. To improve the detailed appearance of the reclaimed land in relation to the adjoining shoreline, the angle of the retaining structure could be designed so as to create a sympathetic profile which responds to the gently shelving coastal edge and also a more hospitable site for the establishment of vegetation.



Hard geometric outline is out of character and scale with existing coastline.



Reclaimed land complements scale and shape of existing irregular, curved coastline. Also presenting a more efficient coastal edge to absorb wave energy.



Creation of a shallower angle to reclaimed edge is more sympathetic to the existing coastline.

COASTAL DEFENCES

Forces for Change

Where the availability of suitable flat land between the upland areas and water's edge is limited, transport routes have been located on the shore edge. The very nature of roads along coastal edges which are dynamic and shifting, necessitates a continual need for management of coastal defences. As such there is a reduction in the characteristic intertidal areas and replacement by a hard uniform edge often constructed from materials which appear inappropriate in this location. Such protection measures may also have unknown 'knock-on' effects on rates of sedimentation and deposition elsewhere along the firth coastline.

Guidance

The maintenance of constructed defences should be undertaken as they show signs of deterioration, so as to prevent an image of neglect developing.

Indigenous stone rip-rap can disperse the waves' energy more effectively than gabion boxes or concrete edges, and at the same time create a more sympathetic shoreline (if well constructed) and trap sediments to promote future vegetation growth.

INFRASTRUCTURE - ROAD AND RAIL

Forces for Change

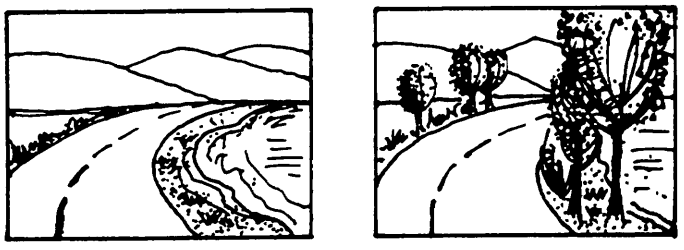
The characteristic journey along the coastal edge is one in which the original road or railway follows the coastal outline, through pockets of diverse vegetation. The upgrading of roads by increasing the width and promoting straightness, often results in a loss of mature roadside scrub and herbaceous vegetation, creating a uniform corridor along the firth edge. There is also a corresponding reduction in the quality and diversity of the road traveller's experience. Larger more prominent roads have an increased visual impact from the opposing shoreline.

Frequently the experience of the firth is lost as the road, on the wider expanses of coastal land, deviates inland and views over the firth become restricted by the landform and vegetation.

Guidance

The planting of indigenous species will help to create a setting and reduce the visual impact of the road on the surrounding landscape.

Road upgrading, whilst expanding the original road width and providing the necessary overtaking opportunities, should respond to the surrounding landform, creating a compatible form, rather than a regular straight line, the unnaturalness of which will highlight its presence in the landscape.

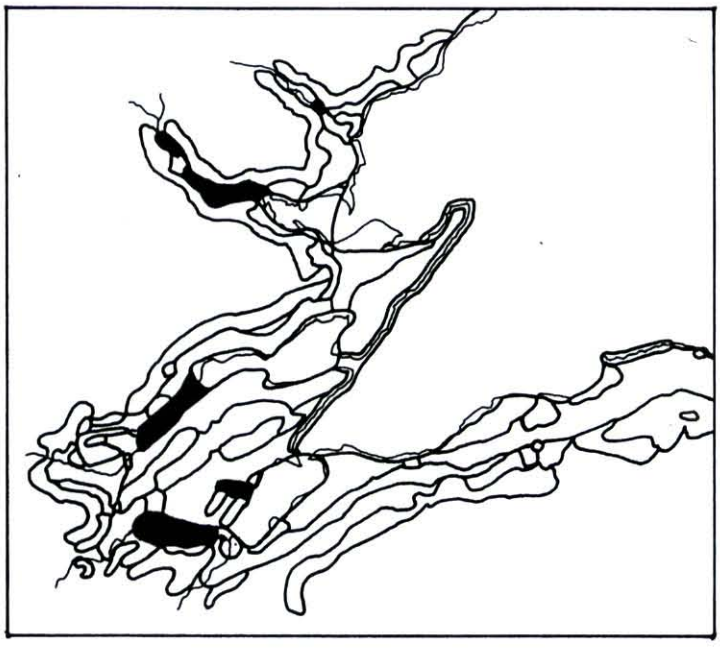


Structural effect of vegetation helps to create a setting for road in a flat landscape.

Unity in the visual impact of features in the landscape when the road relates to the underlying landform

3.3 NARROW FIRTH CORRIDOR

This landscape character type is found where the U-shape of the glacial firth becomes more pronounced, at the heads of the Cromarty and Dornoch Firths, also the Beauly Firth, Munlochy Bay and a limited stretch of Strath Fleet.



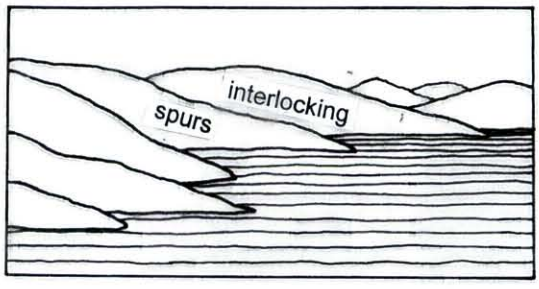
KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- The flat plane of the firth is contained within a glaciated u-shaped valley with a narrow intertidal zone.

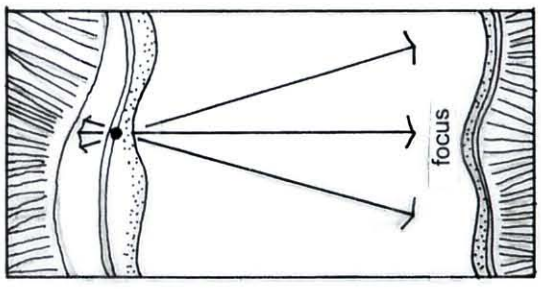
- The overall form of the glaciated valley creates a strong physical and visual connection between the firth and surrounding landscape character types.

- The proximity of the opposing sides of the firth give clear and finite horizons and a feeling of enclosure and shelter.

- A series of interlocking spurs give an irregular coastline and restrict forward views along the coast. The eye is drawn to the land/sea interface which becomes an important focus, so too the plane of firth and glimpses of framed distant mountains.



- From the coastal road views inland are limited, consequently the opposing side becomes the focus of attention, and increases in visual extent when reflected in water.

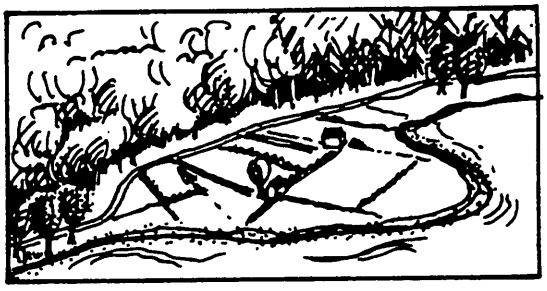


- The coastal transport route and cross-firth bridges give a valuable understanding of geographical location and orientation.

- The unobtrusive and highly dispersed settlement pattern without larger urban settlements increases the awareness of this firth landscape.

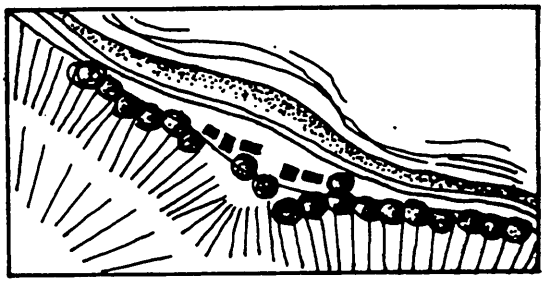
- Small farm settlements along coastal roads correlate with flat deltas suitable for pasture farming.

- On the larger deltas farm buildings are located within a setting of scrub and gorse vegetation within predominantly pasture land and are accessed by narrow farm lanes.



Farm buildings show a functional relationship with stone and gorse field boundary pattern

- Where the delta is smaller and suitable land for building is scarce, farms are located next to the main road, where the land rises into the adjoining character type.

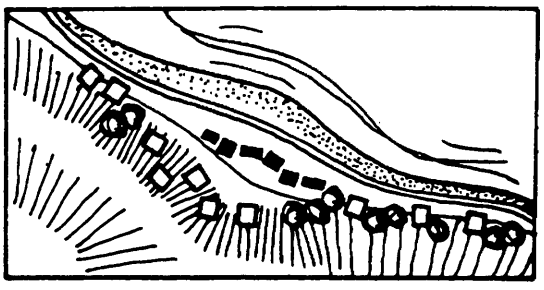


Buildings located at transition from flat firth plane to valley sides, are readily absorbed by the landscape.

RURAL HOUSING

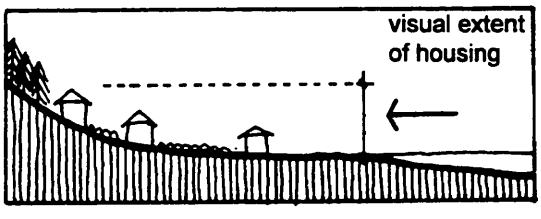
Forces of Change

Due to the relative lack of existing buildings along the firth edge and the restricted land space, the capacity of these peripheral landscapes to absorb new housing is minimal. With any new building there is likely to be an increased perception of habitation within the firth landscape. The demand for views of the firth would mean houses situated primarily responding to the best views, away from other buildings and vegetation that might cause obstructions, with little regard to the characteristic clustered farm holdings and vegetation and cultivation patterns.

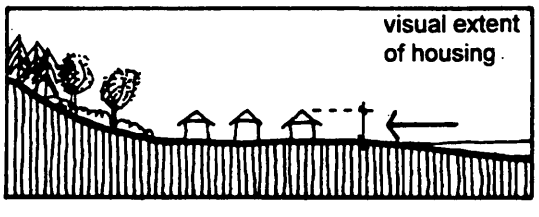


Housing placed outwith the setting visually impacts on the landscape and reduces the experience of the unified relationship between the setting and settlement.

Guidance



Successive new housing placed further up the slope to take advantage of the view, increases the visual impact of the housing in the landscape.



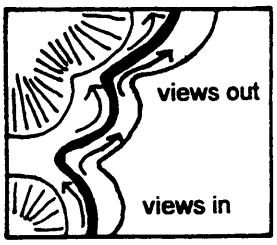
Housing placed in clustered layout on flat land creates less visual impact.

Careful attention has to be given not to place new housing where it becomes visually dominant from the opposing shoreline or distant views along the coastal roads in order to maintain the relatively uninhabited experience of this landscape. Particularly vulnerable locations are at the end of spurs at the land/sea interface. Buildings should be located in small groups to mimic the pattern of buildings of a small farm holding and to avoid a linear scattering of houses along the roadside. The building should appear small in scale and make use of indigenous scrub and trees to provide a setting and offer an increased capacity to absorb new buildings.

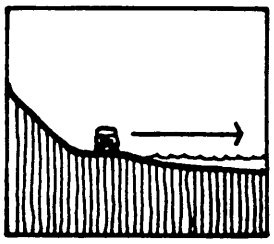
ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

Forces for Change

The upgrading of coastal roads within this character type would mean the widening and straightening of the existing road layout. This could mean coastal reclamation where the firth edge is too narrow to allow expansion inland. In turn this would increase the visual presence of the road as it would be no longer screened by firth-side vegetation and, with the straightening of the road, distant views ahead to the mountains and new development alike, become important considerations.

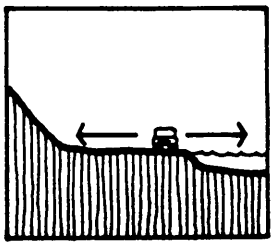


Experience of diverse coastal edge



Tangible presence of slope, pushing and directing views.

Experience of coastal edge lost



Road no longer constrained by landscape - the cutting reduces the physical presence of the slope experienced

Visually the straighter road would conflict with the strong, natural, curved coastal edge. The powerful experience of the road, squeezed between slopes and firths, which is a notable reaction to this landscape, may be lost.

Guidance

The full landscape and environmental effects of road upgrading which would involve the use of coastal engineering should be established at the option appraisal stage. As part of any road upgrading it is important to replace roadside vegetation and scrub so that a setting is created for the new road which complements the existing patterns and texture of the landscape. The design of the upgraded road layout should seek to provide a more efficient layout for the motorist whilst seeking to maintain to some degree the character of the winding roads, where distant features are not continuously in view, and there is a diversity in the journey experience in terms of views and enclosure.

TOURISM

Forces for Change

Active promotion of this landscape and its flora and fauna could mean increasing pressure for access down to the firth edge, and for the viewing of migratory birds, the provision of visitor facilities and viewing points. If placed at points which provide dramatic views these would tend to be visually prominent from elsewhere, and so visually disrupt the firth edge. An increase in interpretation is likely to mean greater use of signage and information

boards in the explanation of features, thereby reducing the experience of a natural, uncluttered and uninhabited landscape.

Guidance

It is important to balance access to the firth shoreline and new structures with the sensitivity of the firth and the importance of coastal views. Much of the essence of this landscape is summed up in the experience gained from travelling along the narrow coastal shores, with little sign of other travellers. Necessary small-scale interpretation/visitor centres could be placed within existing built forms, away from firth edge, in inlets, minimising impact and responding to original settlement patterns. Centre-based interpretation located in settlements which provide leaflets are an effective way of giving information without the need for site-specific visitor facilities. Robust and sensitive areas of coastline, both in ecological and visual terms, can be identified and used for directing the placing of built structures. Using existing built structures, such as bridges, and natural viewpoints as interpretive and viewing opportunities would avoid the need for the unnecessary creation of new facilities.

COASTAL DEFENCES

Forces for Change

Hard coastal defences for road and car park construction alter the mobile character of the coastal edge. Within this firth character type any developments requiring changes to the coastal edge would be very prominent due to the importance of the interface between land and water acting as a natural focal point.

Guidance

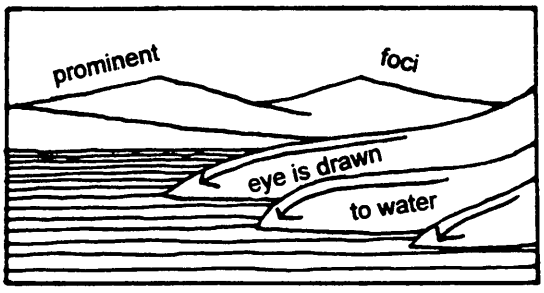
Consideration should be given to the importance of the views possible along the Firth edge and to identifying the important foci of the land/sea interface.

Where coastal defences are necessary for upgrading around the end of a spur the reinforced shoreline should be designed, incorporating a graded slope for the transition between land and sea. This would allow the characteristic slope of the spur to be replicated, whilst also creating a suitable gradient for plant establishment.

VISUAL CHANGES OUTWITH CHARACTER TYPE

Forces for Change

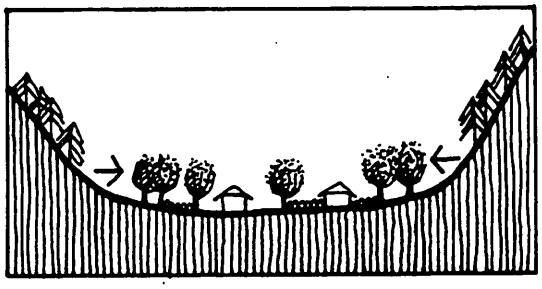
The nature of the strong physical connection between the water and steep slopes, and the forcing of views out across the water to opposing valley sides means that any development changes (such as forest restructuring, new housing or wind farms) on the opposing slopes will have an important impact on the visual experience and characteristic 'wildness' of the narrow firth corridor.



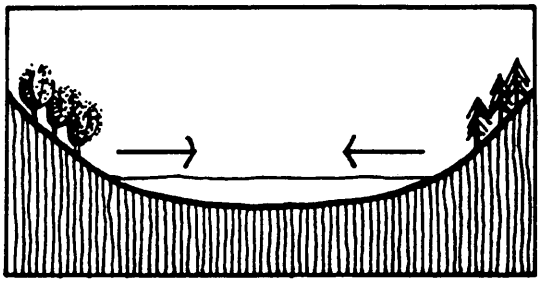
Retain views to particular prominent hill and mountain summits and important foci where spurs draw the eye to the water.

Guidance

This is a situation where the transition between one character type and another is relatively sharp and the nature of the topography permits a strong visual connection to be made. Consideration of the effects of any changes in adjoining character types should be taken into account.



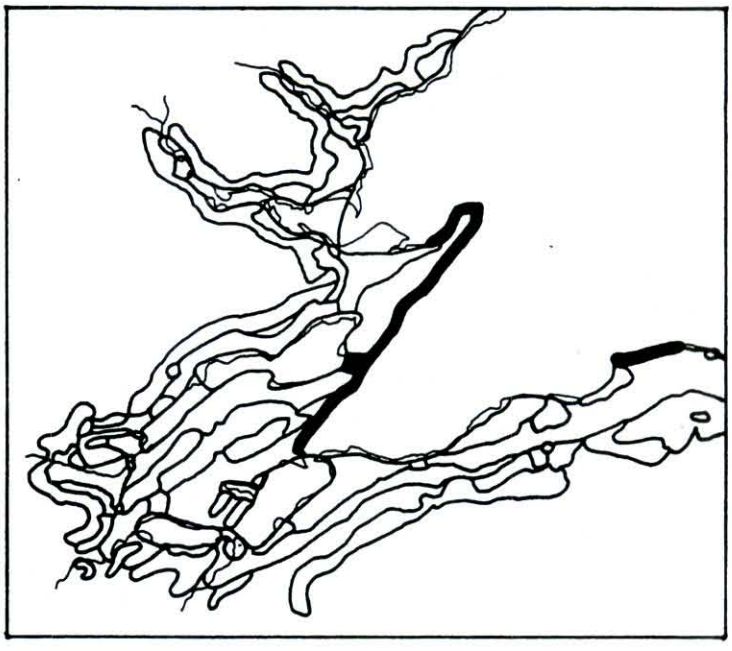
Typical valley landscape is cultivated with a variety of vertical features such as trees and buildings, restricting views.

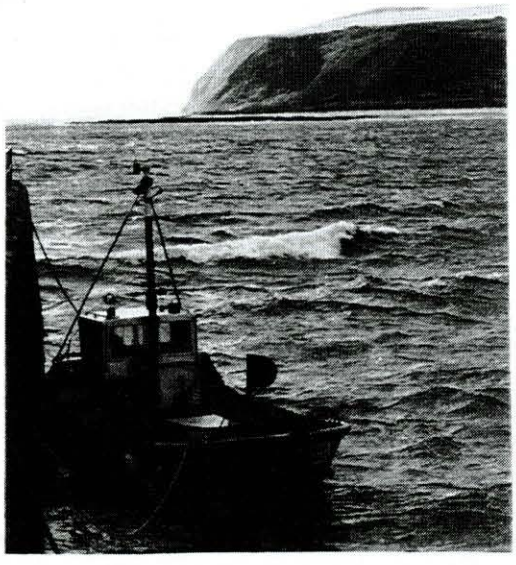


Fundamental characteristic of firth landscape is the open, flat, plain, allowing unrestricted views with strong inter-visibility.

3.4 HARD COASTAL SHORE

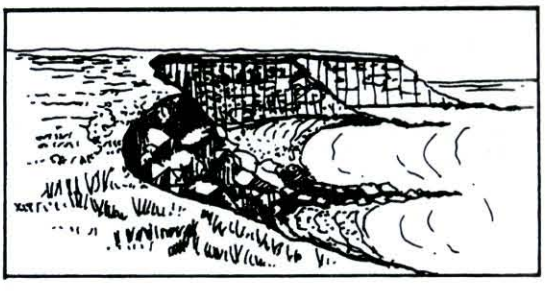
The Hard Coastal Shore character type constitutes a series of sea cliffs forming a dramatic rocky coastline from Portmahomack to Tarbet Ness and south to the Sutors and Rosemarkie. A small area also exists from Burghead east along to Covesea.



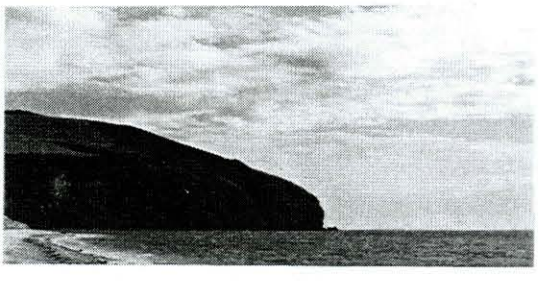


KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Sharp steep transition between land and sea. Generally a raised beach is backed by old red sandstone cliffs.



- From the shore, cliffs are a solid form. Their verticality is emphasised by the contrasting sea/sky horizon.

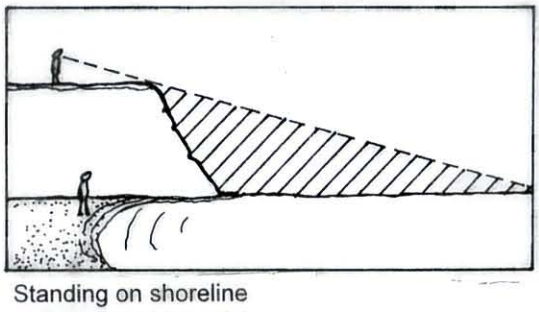


- The smooth green undulations of cultivated headlands and cliff tops contrast with the rocky and craggy cliffs where heather and gorse cling to the less shear rock faces.

- From the higher elevation of the cliff tops, views out are extensive. The great area of the sea visible, increases the perception of scale.

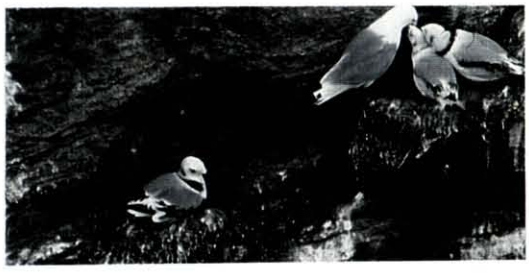
Realisation of steep drop brings feeling of vulnerability unease exposure.

- Looking out to sea from the cliff, the actual shoreline between land and sea is hidden from view, this deceives our sense of distance and proximity to the shoreline.



Standing on shoreline nothing is hidden, giving a feeling of stability, safety and protection.

- Strongly natural landscape dominated by the rugged nature of the vertical, irregular coastline, and dynamic qualities of the sea, and birds nesting and roosting on the cliffs.



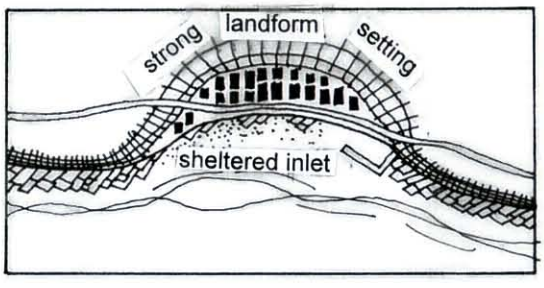
- The high exposure to the wind and sea lends this landscape a sense of power and restlessness. Its restricted access gives a sense of remoteness.

- The prominent upland areas associated with these cliffy shores define an edge and give a sense of shelter and enclosure to the low lying firth lands.

- Settlements typical of this landscape type are infrequently dispersed along the foot of the cliff and strongly defined by the availability of flatter raised beaches or small sandy inlets.

Strong coastal influence with proximity of deep, rough waters and enclosing cliff headlands

- All settlements show a compact, linear layout constrained between the water and rapidly rising topography inland.



- Settlements of narrow, small streets and houses with a strong relationship to the coast, overlooking small harbours and sheltered bays, give an intimate scale to the built form.

RURAL HOUSING

Forces for Change

New, isolated houses in all settlements within the Hard Coastal Shore landscape type have been placed intermittently on the fringe of the settlement with little consideration being given to its' relationship with the strong coastal setting. Due to the prominent character of the core, and intimacy of scale, any deviations with regard to size, shape and colour are emphasised.

Guidance

Housing can be accommodated within the existing setting by responding to the strong character of the original core. The size and shape of building elements and materials should reflect the characteristic features and patterns which typify the settlement core.

HOUSING/INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION

Forces for Change

Housing and light industrial expansion tends to be targeted at the larger of the coastal settlements to take advantage of the existing infrastructure and services. Housing tends to be placed on the periphery of the original settlement as are the larger industrial units, with little consideration being given to the coastal nature of the setting. In this situation the architecture, materials and layout of buildings often deviates from the traditional scale and texture.

The physical constraints of the immediate landscape setting could put development pressure on the slopes and land above the settlement. From within the settlement this would dramatically reduce the sense of a compact character, with buildings emphasised on the skyline when approaching from inland and from seaward. The smaller coastal settlements are characteristically hidden within the relatively sharp transition from land to sea. The presence of developments outwith this natural containment would create a toothed effect in contrast to the smooth, green cliff edge.

Guidance

The natural landform setting of the settlement should be identified, within which any further development should respond to the character of the core, and beyond which new development would begin to modify the experience of that landscape. Where there is space to expand within the settlement setting, the housing and industrial facilities should respond to the narrow, intimate scale of the existing buildings and roads.

TOURISM AND LEISURE

Forces for Change

One of the most popular types of family accommodation within coastal settlements are caravans which are usually placed close to the coastal edge for ready access to the sea, and often on the fringe of a settlement to take advantage of the service provisions. Although the caravans are relatively low and compact accommodation, their generally large numbers, rectangular shape and highly reflective, light colour, intensify their presence in the landscape.

One facet of the dispersed nature of points of interest for the tourist along the Moray Firth, with often remote locations, is the dependence of touring by car and in turn a demand for car parking. In many coastal settlements congestion arises from on-street parking along the narrow streets, and as such often the only suitable flat land for parking is the harbour, which conflicts with its working role and focal point for tourists.

Guidance

Where possible existing vernacular dwellings should be used for tourist accommodation. Where caravans or alternative accommodation are proposed they should be small in number, so as not to dominate the small scale of the settlement, and be placed within the geographical setting on the periphery where the more recent architecture can act as a visual buffer between the original core and the tourist accommodation. The use of complementary colours and a layout which responds to the existing settlement may reduce the visual impact.

Due to the high numbers of seasonal tourists that these coastal settlements often receive, attempts could be made to distribute car parking zones evenly throughout the urban fabric, using small pockets of open space, rather than expansive areas of hard standing, that become eyesores in the winter season.

LOSS OF HISTORIC LANDSCAPE

Forces for Change

In some settlements the original buildings have had roof or building extensions constructed to create more room within what are small dwellings. Within such intimate settings these extensions can erode the individuality and sense of place of the traditional built form. Changes of surfacing materials, from the irregular textures and surfaces of setts and cobbles, to the smooth and dark bituminous roads, create large, hard, smooth areas which contrast with the intimate size and shape of the dwellings. The roughness of the coastal edge, and the frequent sight of cracked concrete, with the rust stains of reinforcing rods often gives an air of neglect to the harbour area.

Guidance

The design and materials of the indigenous architecture should be identified, paying attention to the more readily recognised characteristics of the building form such as the roof proportions, and the nature of the spaces created between buildings. As and when applications for extensions are made, this information can be used as guidance, so that alterations can be made that complement the overall character and form of the settlement.

Environmental improvements which use traditional materials and construction techniques and meet the requirements of the local residents, can be implemented to counter the loss of character which often stems from an ad hoc approach to maintenance, particularly in the harbour area.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Forces for Change

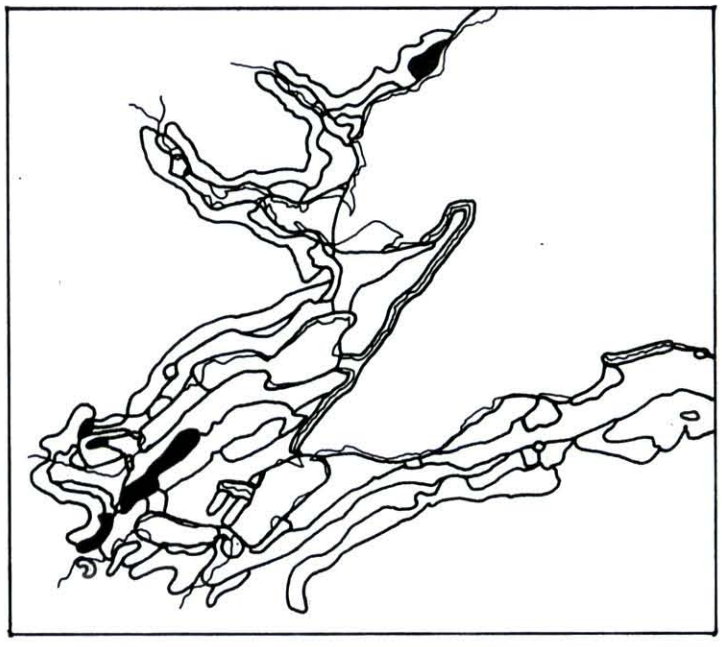
The open, exposed nature of the upland coastal edge, with the existing infrastructure, could be considered as an ideal site for wind farms. However the characteristic lack of vertical forms along the cliff top, would emphasise the presence and stature of the wind turbines.

Guidance

As the character type is usually experienced from a distance inland, or viewed along the cliff edge from a few accessible points, small wind farms could be located in a linear pattern, parallel to the coastal edge, but kept separate from settlements or the bird populations that exist on the cliffs. However it may be perceived that the rugged and natural character of the cliffs of the Hard Coastal Shore are sufficiently valuable in their own right as landscape features to predictate against their installation in this character type.

3.5 CROFTING

The crofting character type is primarily located on the large raised delta west of Brora, Balvaird at the western end of the Milbuie Ridge on the Black Isle, Clashandorran and the foothills west of Beauly, and Bottacks and Knockfarrel, north and south of Strathpeffer respectively.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Varied landforms with small scale fluvio-glacial undulations on slopes and foothills, giving complexity to the landscape.

- A small scale pattern of land use management. Small planned fields bounded by rough, weathered stone dykes give a strong cultural character and sense of maturity to this landscape.

- An intimate human scale which arises from the stature and spatial arrangement of dwellings and fields and the experience of their rhythm.

- The narrow, twisting roads following the field pattern, create a feeling of disorientation.

- Views are restricted by the undulating landform. The human scale of landscape elements increases the sense of enclosure and focuses attention onto details in the foreground.

- The scattered presence of buildings throughout this character type gives a relatively populated feel to these small areas.

- A rough textured landscape of pasture fields, dykes, fences, scrub woodland and buildings. The muted colours of these elements, the browns, greens and yellows, heighten the diversity of the landscape.

- The croft buildings act as small but frequent vertical features forming an integral part of the diverse crofting landscape.

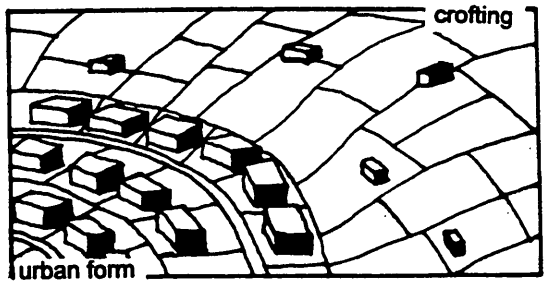
- This pattern of rural settlement is very much dictated by the system of original land allocation in the township. The uniformity of planning has often created a strong geometric pattern of narrow fields.

- The size and form of early croft dwellings are a function of the manual labour used to create them. These low structures, built of indigenous stone, visibly strengthen the relationship between people and place.

URBAN EXPANSION

Forces for Change

There is a total contrast between the scale, texture, colour and size of housing in the encroaching urban landscape and that of the crofting landscape. The needs of the car dominate the new urban spaces with spacious road and hard regular surfaces and the standardisation of peripheral housing design leading to a loss of the intricacy and identity that is associated with the crofting landscape. The diversity of colours and textures found in croft dwellings contrasts with the uniformity of materials used in urban housing where little or no sense of place is achieved.



Small spaces between the houses means that the vertical urban forms read as a texture, whilst the croft dwellings within the landscape read as a series of scattered vertical points.

Guidance

It is impossible to integrate this kind of urban expansion into the crofting landscape without radically changing it. Due to the intimacy of the crofting landscape even a single house may have a cluttering effect on the crofting landscape. Urban estates, in their present layout and shape, would be incongruous and visually disruptive in this setting. Where such developments are necessary attention needs to be paid to making the transition from the urban setting to the crofting type less of a visual and physical contrast by varying the density and size of the buildings and the nature of the spaces between, in a 'housing density gradient'. Elements of the crofting character type could be brought into housing sites and layout, rather than the urban form being extended into rural areas, eg by making the roads slightly narrower and the scale of houses smaller but still within an urban arrangement.

Density gradients used to achieve a greater balance between the urban and rural forms. Extension of crofting features such as stone walls into the uniform urban architecture can be used in detail design to help create sense of place.

Urban form — Transition - scale of housing reduced but form of layout still urban. — Crofting

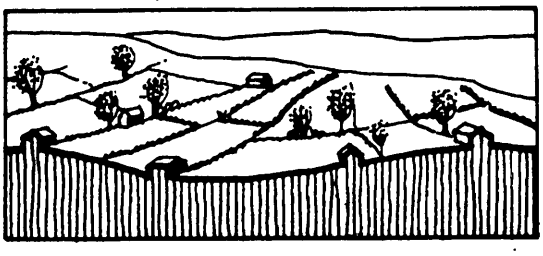
RURAL HOUSING

Forces for Change

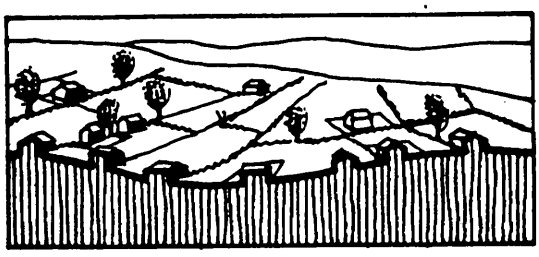
New 'kit' houses, often with 2 storeys and dormer windows tend to be out of scale and proportion with the existing rural architecture. Modern colours and textures are visually

more prominent amongst the more subtle tones of the rural area. The importance given to housing with views creates a demand for positions in the landscape which are unrelated to existing field patterns or roads. Characteristically these new houses have windows and gable-end extensions facing these views, new curved access roads and a clipped, manicured landscape setting which highlights the newness of the housing.

Within the Crofting type, due to the scattered and dispersed nature of the vertical features, the addition of new houses by 'infilling' into the existing pattern will in most cases create a cluttered landscape, and a loss of the rhythm of open spaces and crofts.



Rhythm of small point features set within fields give a dispersed texture to landscape character



Infilling of crofting landscape reduces character of scattered crofts and creates increased perception of habitation.

Guidance

The character of single croft dwellings relating to the field pattern should be followed, and where possible existing crofts should be renovated and extended rather than replaced with new houses. Where new housing is proposed, thought should be given to the existing layout and proximity of neighbouring dwellings to retain the rhythm of low, vertical features. The characteristic small scale architecture and variety of materials of which existing crofts are constructed should be echoed in the new designs, so that the crofting identity can still be recognised and retained. Existing species and patterns of vegetation could be recommended if advice is being given for the landscaping of the site.

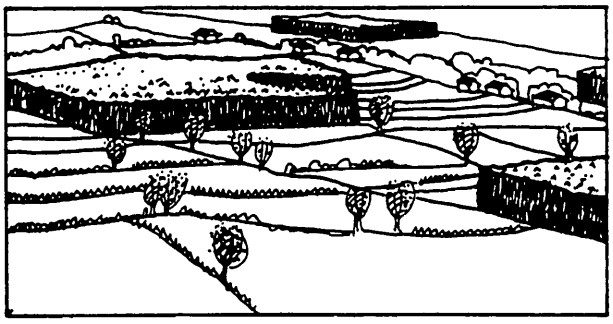
FORESTRY

Forces for Change

Incentives for woodland creation and management, and the provision of the recent Crofter Forestry Act predicate towards an increase in extent of both coniferous and deciduous woodland often in small units of a few hectares.

This could weaken the strong geometric pattern of the crofting landscape, both visually and physically.

Existing crofting landscape with strong small scale geometric field pattern and low impact human scale vertical elements.



Presence of strong vertical structure looks incongruous in, and contrasts with the intimate, highly diverse landscape, producing dominant focal points. From a distance the blocks add to the visual chaos in the landscape, whilst attention to detail in the foreground landscape is blocked. Uniform colours and texture blankets the undulating landform and underlying field pattern.

Guidance

In order to retain the essential character of this landscape despite changes in landuse, it is imperative that the underlying structure and pattern is respected. The key issue is the balance between forestry and agriculture: the relative amount of forestry introduced to an area should be carefully assessed to ensure that it does not jeopardise the generally open character of the crofting landscape.

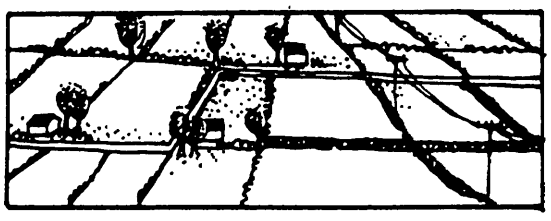
New woodland planting based on single field plots and existing field boundaries is likely to appear incongruous in this landscape. A more harmonious relationship is established between landscape elements when forests are designed to follow the landform and scale of the landscape. Where possible, giving a preference to deciduous trees over conifers would produce the visual qualities of texture, seasonal diversity and colour which are better suited to the crofting landscape.

In this way, forestry can be a positive addition to diversity in the landscape, provide substance and connectivity to existing trees within the field pattern, and act as a unifying element between landform and field pattern.

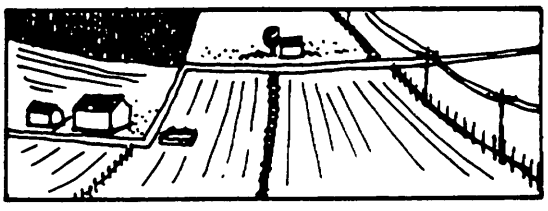
LOSS OF HISTORIC LANDSCAPE

Forces for Change

The dry stone dykes and abandoned crofts which have become derelict over the last 50 years or so and are features characteristic of this landscape are replaced by the new features of modern housing and fences. The intimate mosaic and texture of the small vertical features is replaced by a hierarchy of built elements which intrudes above the lowlying skyline. Replacing dry stone dykes and scrub enclosures with fences weakens the small, rectangular field pattern and, the additional loss of small trees and shrubs, reduces the experience of maturity and perceived cultural importance of the landscape. The structural effect of fences with their thin wires and wooden posts is slight and they tend to blend in with the landscape rather than delineating a pattern upon it. Thus fields visually merge into larger units, and with them the intimate scale is lost.



Strong geometric pattern with an intricate scale of dwellings.



Scale of landscape increases with larger housing, fields becoming amalgamated and dominant woodland blocks.

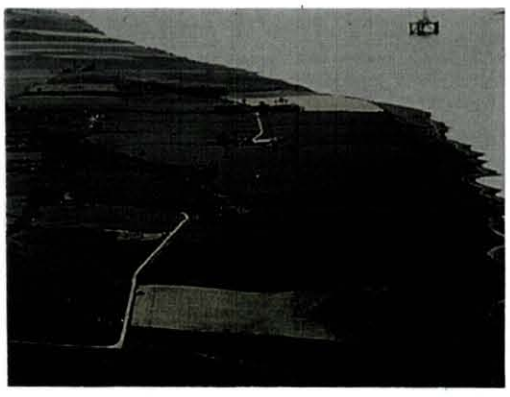
Guidance

Where feasible, dykes and wooded field boundaries should be repaired and managed and in accordance with the existing field pattern, or, where alterations necessitate changes, the characteristics of the rectangular pattern could be mimicked. Consideration should be given to replacing scrub and isolated trees around buildings and along field boundaries to retain the diversity and continuity of features within the landscape and reduce the impact of unsympathetic single house developments already in the landscape.

Given the importance attached to the location and form of the original croft dwellings, new proposals for housing within this landscape in particular should include a detailed assessment of the proposed development, location and the relationship to the surrounding character type.

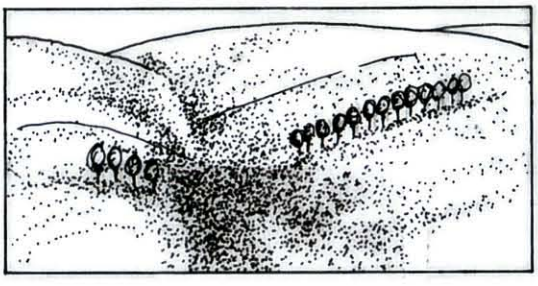
3.6 OPEN FARMED SLOPES

This character type extends in a band stretching north-east from the head of the Cromarty Firth along the slopes to the north of the Milbuie Ridge, and from Nigg Bay north to Tarbet Ness. Smaller areas are found around Strathpeffer and Forres.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Gently undulating lowlands with strong overriding fall of slope and convex profile.



- A strong geometric pattern of small to medium fields is superimposed on the slope. Field boundaries are made more prominent where these are stone dykes, gorse or turf.

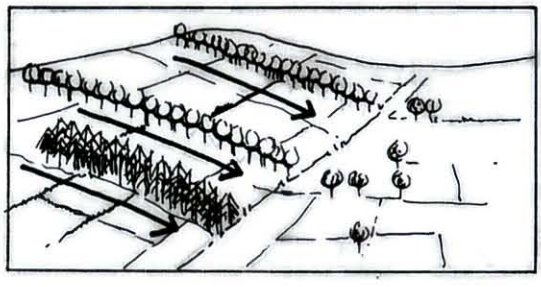
- The delineation of farm holdings by shelter-belts creates a second, stronger pattern overlying the pattern of field boundaries.

- The smooth textured fields and dispersed point settlements give a diverse but well ordered landscape with a strong repeating geometry, where prominent field enclosures emphasise the underlying topography.

- Main roads within this character type tend to follow the break of slope giving extensive panoramic views over this landscape towards distant mountains and coastline.

- This is an open landscape, emphasised by the views from the slopes. The strong inter-visibility between urban and rural areas in this type increases the general awareness of this farmed landscape.

- The rhythm created of repeating shelter-belts emphasises the fall of the slope and draws the eye down into the valley.



Tree lines draw the eye.

- Features such as buildings on the crest of the hill are emphasised, due to their position on the skyline and the smooth profile of fields.

- Typical settlements within this type are farm holdings, tightly grouped mixtures of old and newer architectural forms which create point features in the landscape.

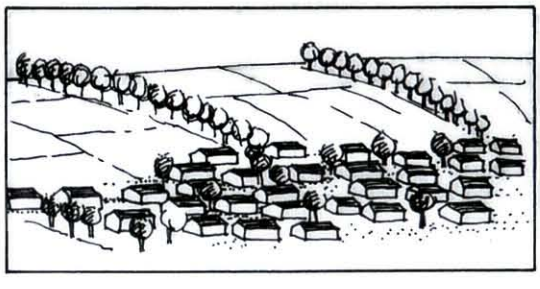
Huddle of different shapes and sizes of buildings, with different colours and textures.

- Farm holdings are often found midway down the convex slope, where they are sheltered from the stronger winds, but above the waterlogged valley soils and winter frost pockets. These built foci are often emphasised by a surrounding stand of trees.

- Associated with the farm holding, single small houses, often abandoned or in ruins, sit conspicuously within the smooth textured fields.

- Larger urban settlements within this type often contrast with blocks of uniform houses separated by trees/woodland, seen from a distance as a random mix of hard and soft forms.

- The strong landscape structure is lost as shelterbelts following the field layout become dispersed at the urban periphery. The loss of order leads to visual confusion at the rural/urban interface.



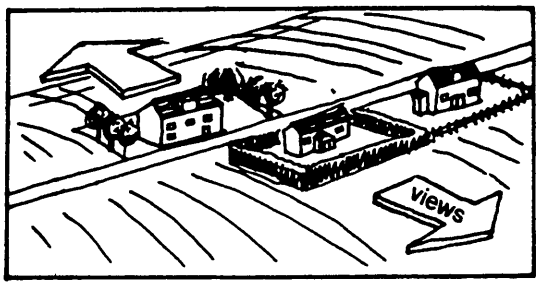
Views from slopes emphasise the presence of the growing urban periphery

RURAL HOUSING

Forces for Change

Farm buildings act as point features within the open fields in this character type, so the placing of sporadic new houses into the landscape tends to create a cluttered effect. With much of the core areas of this landscape type restricted by land use and the lack of access, more houses are placed on the break of slope to take advantage of the proximity to the main road and panoramic views. New, and often larger, houses would break the smooth horizons characteristic of these convex slopes and create a toothed effect.

Housing located on the break of slope with good visual access to surrounding landscape and physical access to main road.



The perception of habitation increases due to the greater concentration of houses on the main roads.

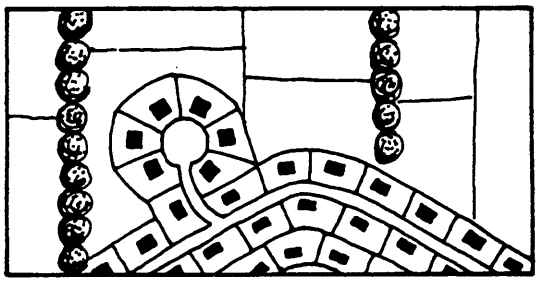
Guidance

Rather than increasing the amount of isolated housing in the farmland and diluting the dispersed character of the settlement pattern, it is important to follow the existing settlement pattern and build on the character of the landscape as a prosperous farming landscape rather than one with a residential character. The pattern of farming 'townships', of a small huddle of houses, possibly centred on an existing house, can be used to reduce the visual impact of new housing with the demand for views still being met.

URBAN EXPANSION

Forces for Change

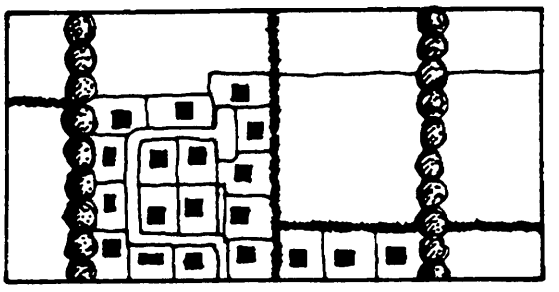
The increased expansion of the urban periphery onto the farmed slopes results in the urban texture overspilling onto the simple, low profile geometry of the fields. The uniformity of the type and size of buildings and open spaces between, along with broad sweeping roads, gardens and car parking areas, is in marked contrast to the character of the setting. The curved housing layout, contrasts with the shelterbelts which are a key characteristic in this landscape type.



Unity of landscape is lost as the curved layout of the housing contrasts with the characteristic strong field and shelterbelt pattern.

Guidance

The existing shape and size of the fields and rhythm of shelterbelts provide a reference for the size and scale of new areas of housing that would more readily achieve a balance in this landscape. A transition between the built and countryside forms could be achieved by extending the lines of trees or scrub into the housing, not only providing a strong connection, but also creating a more orderly structure prior to new development and giving a sense of place and maturity to a new residential area.



Adopting a geometrically designed layout of housing, roads and green spaces will mean that the resultant pattern is not so alien to the neighbouring farming landscape

INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION

Forces for Change

The scale and shape of industrial buildings are far greater than the existing farm buildings and their uniformity of design, and often bright corporation colours, highlight their presence in the landscape. Their siting is usually determined by available flat land next to the larger settlements and main access road, and thus ribbons of industrial development often cut across the straight shelterbelts and field patterns.

Guidance

As the industrial estates are being placed predominantly in the farmed landscape, the scale of the industrial buildings could act as a transition of size and density between the urban estates and the point features of farm holdings. If the layout of the industrial units, with car parking and wider access roads, were to achieve a more geometric layout corresponding with the abutting farmland, with new access roads created following tree boundaries, this would preclude the need for industrial estates to sprawl along the roads.

TOURISM

Forces for Change

Due to the glaciated topography of the firths, the strong slopes sometimes end relatively abruptly at the coastal edge where they abut the firth character types. With the narrowness of the coastal edge in the firth landscapes and the protective designations for landscapes of ecological interest, there is the very real possibility that demand for interpretation and visitor facilities will fall on these transitional edges. Visitor centres would in such circumstances tend to be fairly large buildings with areas of car parking which, if placed in prominent positions to take advantage of the views, could interrupt the openness of this character type.

Guidance

It is important to create visitor facilities which have good access to the coast and views without impinging on the ecological or visual qualities. Ideally linking it to an existing site or building. The buildings should be integrated within an area of parking, rather than having parking as a separate feature that will create a feeling of neglect when empty in the winter season.

ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

Forces for Change

The upgrading of narrow farm roads that cut across the valley and along the slope, could highlight their presence in the landscape, due to the open fields allowing extensive views across the character type. The removal of roadside scrub and a darker surface material could emphasise this change.

Guidance

It is important to keep a road layout that respects the underlying field pattern, and to replace roadside scrub to improve the setting. It is critical to retain views from the upper roads, as the visual connection with other areas of the surrounding landscape is a key characteristic in the experience of the Open Farmed Slopes.

AGRICULTURAL CHANGE

Forces for Change

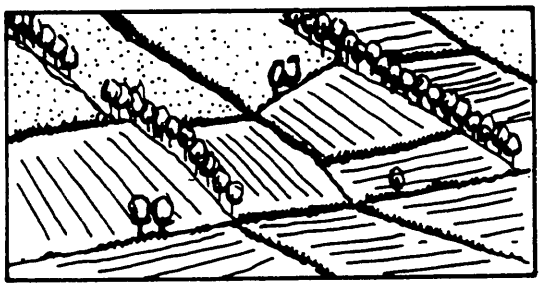
Extensive pig farming is increasing in extent on the poorer quality, freer draining agricultural land, and the thinner soils nearer the hill summits. This land use disrupts the smooth features of the fields, with the patchiness of the foraging, disturbance of the soil by the pigs and the appearance of the metallic pig arcs, giving an irregular outline, rougher visual quality and a sense of point foci which draw the eye.

Guidance

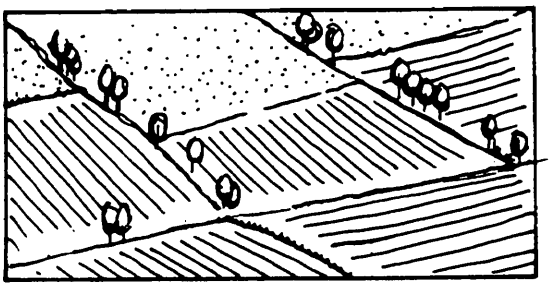
From a visual point of view, the main aim would be to try to incorporate the pig fields within the strong geometric pattern of the existing farming landscape. It is important to keep these fields on flatter, but free draining, land away from main roads and housing where they would be overlooked, and from where they can be seen from elevated viewpoints, reducing their visual presence in the landscape. The use of tree lines would reinforce the landscape structure, as well as provide partial screening.

LOSS OF HISTORIC LANDSCAPES AND BUILDINGS

Forces for Change



Landscape character with strong structural elements of tree lines, stone dykes and hedges.



Physical and visual impact of trees and field boundaries on landscape is negligible.

The removal or dereliction of turf, gorse and dry stone dyke field boundaries, and their replacement by fences which have a reduced visual presence when delineating the fields, can have a significant effect on this character type. When the same crops are placed together the visual impact of the fence is minimal, and so the perceived size of the field increases, losing the patchwork effect of the smaller fields.

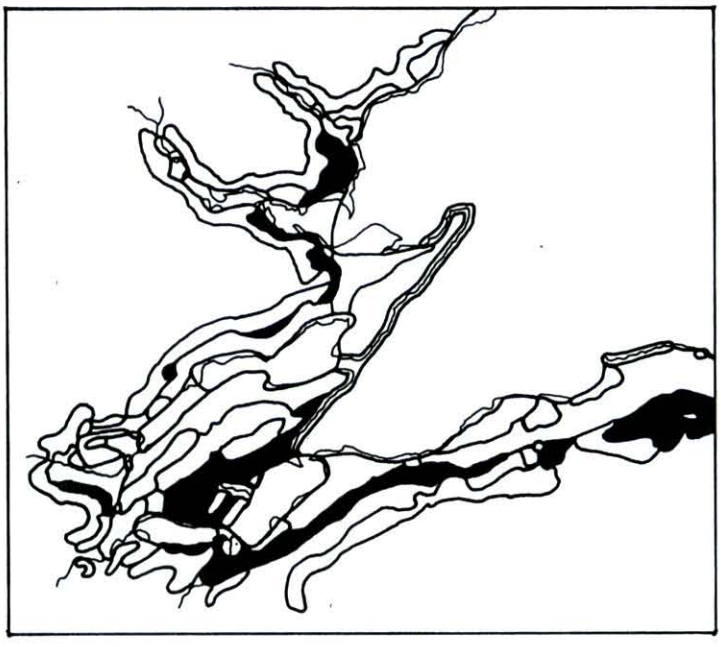
The removal of many of the shelterbelts, from disease or over-maturity, reduces the historical sense of place for each farm holding and the emphasis they give to the underlying fall of slope.

Single or small labourer's dwellings falling into disrepair, create a feeling of abandonment and neglect and become small point features incorporated within the smooth fields.

Guidance

It is important to repair and replace the dominant features of the farming landscape, to maintain the strong geometrical pattern, particularly long-term maintenance of the remaining dykes which are such pronounced features. Further tree planting will help to retain the shelter belts, as they are not only important for the intrinsic character of the landscape, but they provide shelter and act as wildlife corridors within the open fields. The repair of the derelict croft housing would retain the historical links and reduce the need for new housing in the rural landscape.

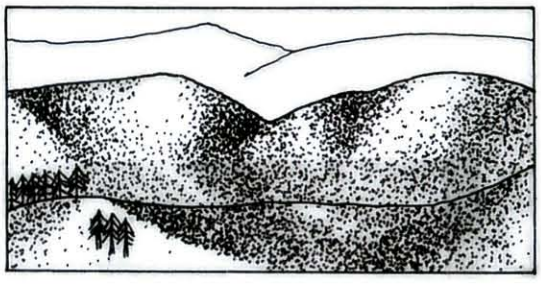
3.7 FOREST EDGE FARMING



Within the Moray Firth basin this character type is found on the foothills south of the Moray lowlands, the Aird, the south side of the Black Isle Milbuie Ridge, and on the slopes north of the Cromarty Firth.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- A complex relief is characteristic of this landscape type. Found at the base of convex slopes, the generally undulating topography is overlaid with smaller scale fluvio-glacial surface features.

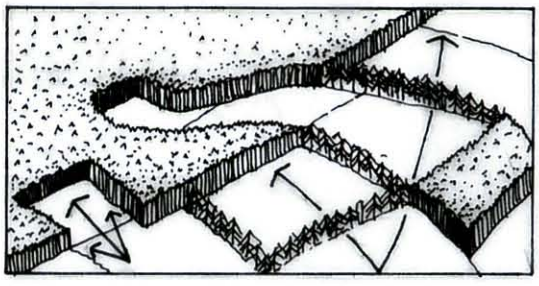


- The rectilinear field pattern within farm holdings gives a strong geometry to the landscape, made more prominent by the enclosing dry stone dykes and dark gorse hedges.

- A mosaic of coniferous forestry blocks and belts is superimposed upon this farmland, its edge being 'pushed and pulled' by existing settlements and the template set by fields and narrow roads.

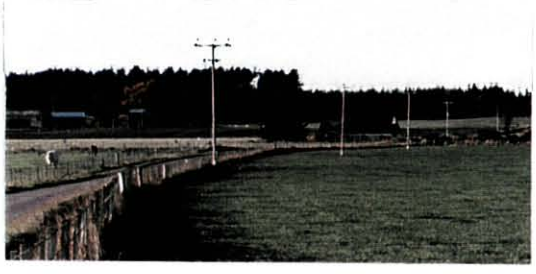
Forest blocks smoother the landform, imposing a framework.

- The dark, uniform and vertical qualities of the forest provide a range of different spatial experiences from visually permeable shelterbelts enclosing individual fields in farmland to extensive plantations in which farm holdings exist as 'rooms'.



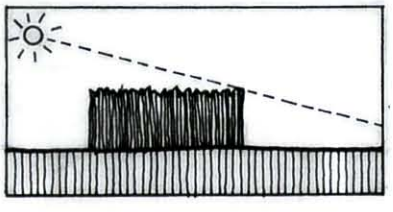
- The forest horizons restrict distant views, attention to detail is increased and becomes directed and focused within smaller spaces, especially against the dark green, uniform backdrop.

- The uniformity of forest texture and colour and the smothering effect it has on the topography and the blocking of views to any distant, recognisable landmarks creates a feeling of disorientation in this landscape.

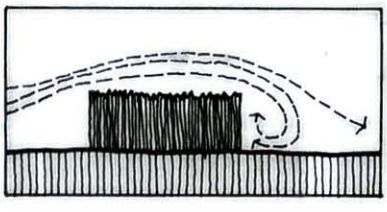


Navigation along the geometric road, is usually achieved by recognition of small scale features such as farm holdings, forest outlines or individual trees.

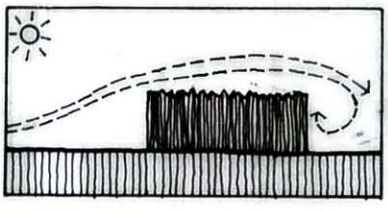
- The density of the forest stands create an edge which acts like an impenetrable wall and has a marked affect on microclimate.



Marked drop in temperature in winter in lee of north facing edge due to extensive frost shadow, from low angle sun

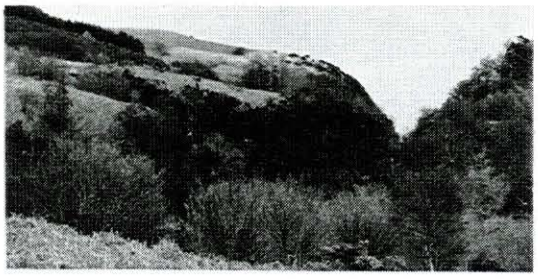


Increased wind turbulence in lee of north facing edge due to high tree density deflecting wind flow.



South facing, dense forest edge modifies wind flow and acts as a sun trap.

- Diversity within the forest structure arising from small pockets of deciduous trees and scrub vegetation is often associated with fluvio-glacial features and narrow stream gorges.

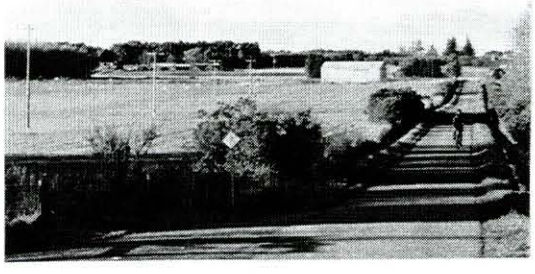


The experience of openness on emergence from gorge is striking.

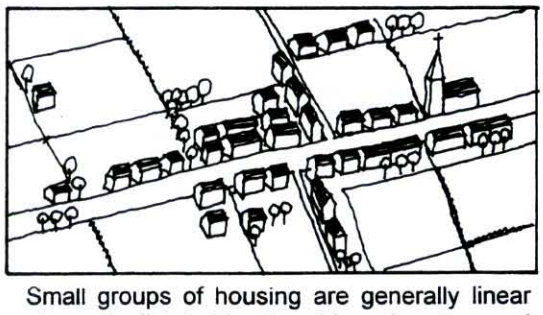
- The typical settlements of this landscape type are farm holdings; an area of open fields abutting the forest edge in which the farm sits as a point feature. The presence of these holdings has influenced the present day form of the forest edge, an accident of land purchase rather than design.

Typical settlements are well dispersed giving a feeling of a managed but highly populated landscape.

- Farm holdings are connected into the wider landscape pattern by the linking narrow road system which follows the geometric field enclosures of the dry stone dykes, scrub and fences.

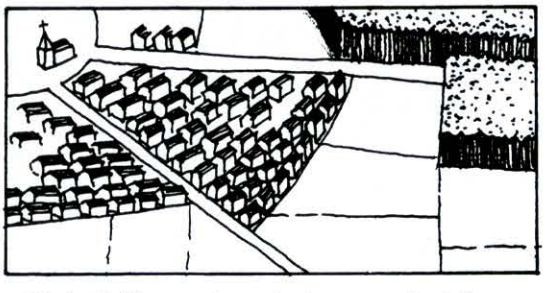


- In larger villages the intimate housing, vernacular architecture, building materials and mature trees all give a sense of place that is controlled by the underlying landscape character.



Small groups of housing are generally linear elements dictated by the old road system and field patterns.

- In larger urban settlements the enclosing forestry no longer provides a dominant structure. The affect of 'en masse' housing competes with the structural elements of forestry, and similarly appears to ignore the underlying patterns of landform and land use.

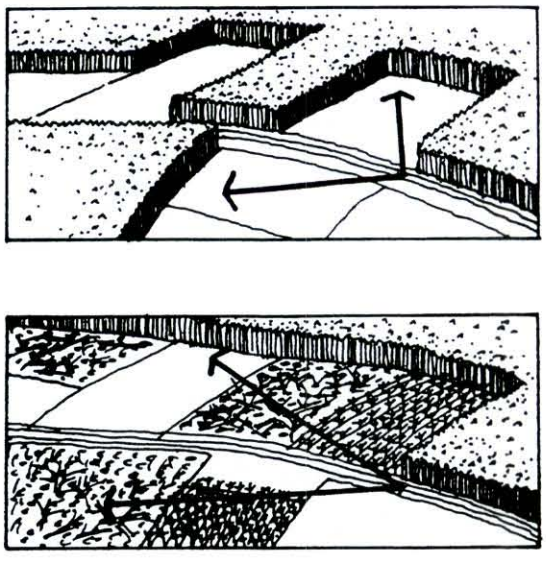


Straight lines, urban texture, vertical forms, begin to enclose small fields.

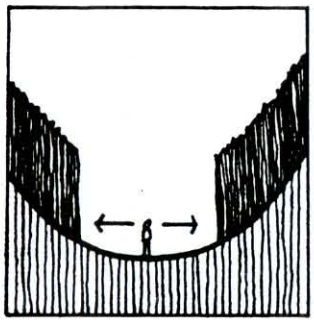
FORESTRY

Forces for Change

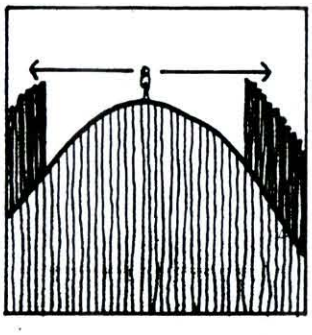
Pockets of agricultural land coming out of set-aside and revisions to the Woodland Grant Scheme could encourage small scale conifer and broadleaf planting along the forest edge. Changes to the existing forest boundary and variations in the heights and textures of tree stands could give rise to a sense of visual disruption for the viewer. In some cases, however, adjustments to the forest/farm land boundary may provide opportunities for improving landscape character.



The pulling and pushing of the forest horizon results in visual disruption and the creation of different spaces until the trees reach a significant height (after 30-40 years). The changing physical and visual access to the landscape increases the sense of disorientation. FA forest design guidelines discourage planting on an individual field basis.



Vertical forest edge emphasises enclosed experience of valley.

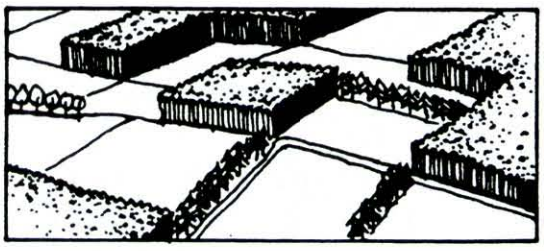


Openness of summit is emphasised by contrast to the surrounding dense forest.

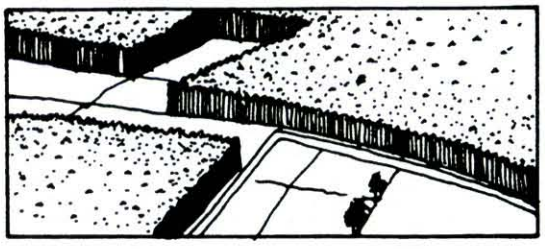
An increased complexity results, as the landform exposed on felling adds a further dimension to the experiences of this landscape, eg by increasing the enclosure of a valley or the opening up of hill tops. The juxtaposition of open slopes and forested edges can create a complex composition which confuses the way we experience that landscape. With the removal of trees, views outwith the immediate landscape setting become possible, increasing the whole sense of scale of the landscape. Attention is diverted away from the immediate surrounds as the eye is led to distant views.

FA forest design guidelines discourage felling and restocking on an individual field basis. Proposals must consider the appropriate scale and shape of such areas to both landform and potential viewer. They should also demonstrate both structured and species diversity to achieve unity in the landscape

With the infilling of spaces and management of over-mature shelterbelts there is a gradual change in the interlocking character of forestry and farmland. From a distance, looking into the landscape, this could mean a reduction in the visual diversity of the landscape. Tensions could be created at the transition between the forest edge and the small open spaces, with the unity of the landscape which was provided by the geometrically interlocking pattern being eroded, and the experience of openness when moving from forestry to farmland exaggerated by the quicker transition from one extreme to the other

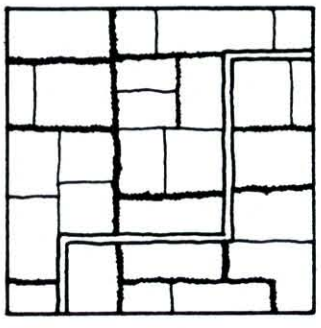


Rhythm of open spaces.

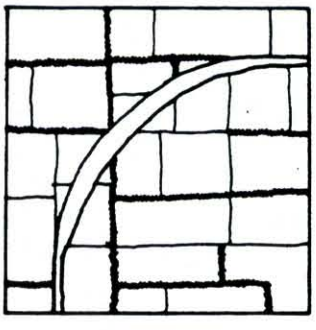


Loss of the toothed forest edge, creating uniform forest cover rather than a series of rooms.

As much of the existing planting has reached, or is approaching, maturity there is a predicted increase in the production of timber over the next decade, necessitating the improvement and upgrading of roads and forest access. Many of the narrow farm roads will be widened to facilitate the transportation of timber by large lorries, adding curves that are not compatible with the geometric patterns of the landscape. The associated removal of roadside and field enclosures (walls, hedges, ditches and verges) will add emphasis to the uncharacteristic size and form of these roads.



Existing road sits harmoniously in landscape pattern creating unity.



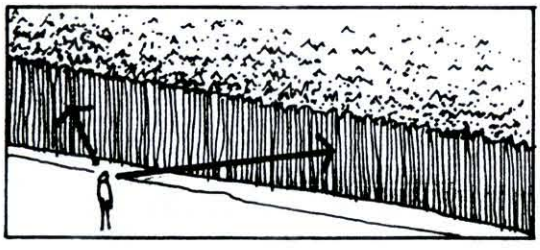
New road lies unconformably across geometric field pattern.

Guidance

The rhythm of enclosed spaces in the transition from farmland to forestry is characteristic of this landscape type. It is an important feature to retain. Continuity of structure needs to be managed by balancing the ratio of open fields to forestry in the design, clearance and replanting of forest coupes. Unity in the landscape can be retained by designing the forest edges so that the scale of the forest blocks responds to the scale of the underlying farmland, rather than that of the forestry plantation interior. A 'field' or square could be carved out in the forest (from the edge inwards) to retain a varied edge character.

Shelterbelts have an important structural influence in enclosing space and creating shelter, and should be maintained and replaced where possible. Existing coniferous and deciduous edges to plantations could be used to help retain a continuity of structure, allowing felling to take place within.

However, the appropriateness of a tree belt to act as a visual barrier would depend on the structural integrity of such a belt (including its susceptibility to wind throw), the shape of the belt in relation to the landscape character and landform of the area, and the future management of the trees to sustain their screening value.



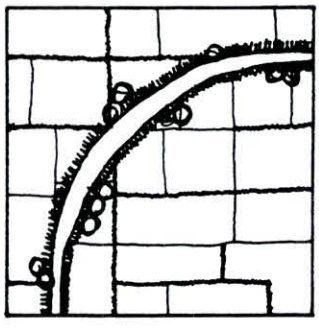
Visually the dense forest edge restricts views into the stand and directs them elsewhere.

Forest edge maintains the existing structure, minimising views into felled area.

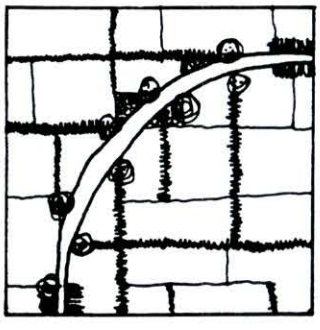
The experience of different sizes of enclosure is a major characteristic of travelling through this landscape. The opening up of distant views adds to this experience by making the transition from the enclosed forestry to open fields more extreme.

Mature deciduous trees, next to large areas of seasonally unchanging coniferous forestry, provide important pockets of colour and textural diversity, which aid orientation. Wherever possible their presence should be retained and encouraged as a feature of amenity and interest.

To plant alongside new roads would emphasise the uncharacteristic curves of the new road layout. On building new roads, the scrub from the field boundaries should be replaced in a way which reinforces the existing geometric field pattern.



Planting along roadside reinforces the conflict created by the curved route over the geometric fields.

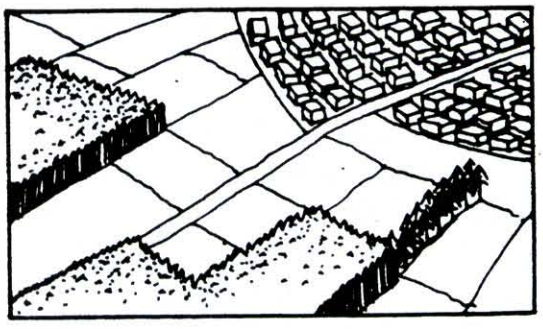


Planting along road corridor which picks out the underlying field pattern by its location, but doesn't contain and separate road from the surrounds.

URBAN EXPANSION

Forces for Change

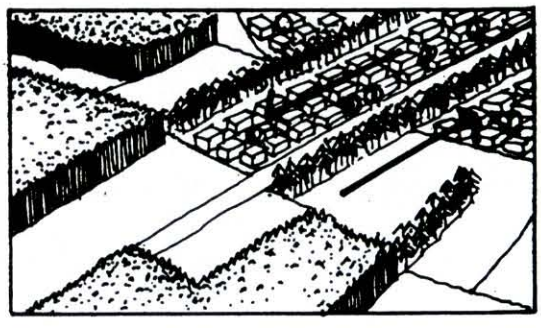
Housing estates that are placed as an entity on settlement peripheries often lead to a loss of point features within the areas of open farmland, which are characteristic of the traditional dispersed settlements. Instead, the simple, straight, vertical edges to the urban form cut across the field patterns and shelterbelts rather than being contained by them.



This results in a sharp transition between open farmland and urban fabric with a loss of experience of enclosed spaces.

Guidance

Even where the landform of the foothills enables the ready creation of a setting, the urban periphery tends to sprawl out in an irregular fringe. The vertical qualities of the forest and shelterbelts can be used to provide structure to the edges. The sizes of the existing woodland blocks can be used as a template from which new blocks can be based upon according to sites and scales of planting.



Extension of shelterbelts into housing with trees creating structure for future development.

INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION

Forces for Change

Industrial units tend to have a large vertical and horizontal volume which requires the kind of space only available at the edge of a settlement.

Guidance

In areas where the landform is complex and undulating near the urban edge, a stand of deciduous trees can interlock into the urban landscape to provide some diversity and sense of place.

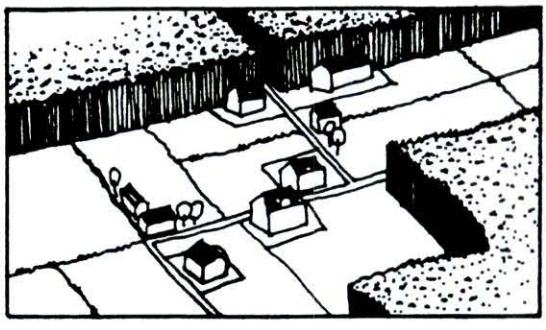
Where the industrial landscape is going to require more space, the scale of the forest structure must be in keeping with the size and form of the industrial units. Shelterbelts and hedgerows can provide diversity in structure and form in the detailed design of the industrial landscape. With a backdrop of dark forestry, attention needs to be paid to the colour and architecture of the industrial units by using a palette of colours that will

complement the predominantly evergreen surrounding landscape (eg earthy colours of browns and yellows which reflect the surrounding soils and changing crops).

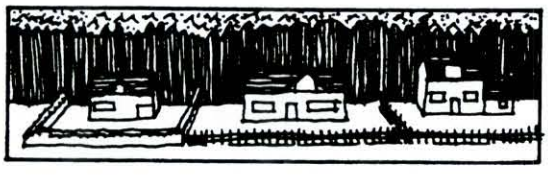
RURAL HOUSING

Forces for Change

Where there is adequate existing infrastructure for expansion and nearby centres of employment there is likely to be an increased pressure for residential development. New housing placed within these areas can be particularly visually obtrusive when inadequate consideration is given to the detailed siting and design. The houses themselves tend to be of a 'kit' construction. These are brought on to a site rather than designed on site and as such tend to be large in size with the proportions of roof to walls lower than is found in older houses and no use made of traditional building materials. The visual obtrusiveness of the house is often increased by a manicured garden of clipped hedges, short mown grass and wooden fences. The enclosed nature of the forest structure causes the eye to focus towards these intrusive elements.



Increased housing creates fragmentation of fields and reduction in characteristic spatial qualities.



Simplicity of forest edge disrupted by recent housing.

Concentrations of housing tend to evolve, with housing sometimes being placed along both sides of a narrow road or next to the forest edge, both of which contrast with the typical pattern of dispersed farm holdings. Buildings placed next to the forest edges, often responding to perceptions of shelter and prospect, are not only visually very prominent but can suffer from the disadvantage of the locally modified microclimate if north facing.

Guidance

When there is demand for housing within rural areas, the small-scale expansion of villages where services and infrastructure can cope, may be the more favourable option in landscape terms. This would respect the dispersed pattern of settlements within the landscape and could create focal points of interest within the forest structure.

Where proposed, rural housing should respect the existing character of this landscape type and relate to the narrow roads away from the forest edges.

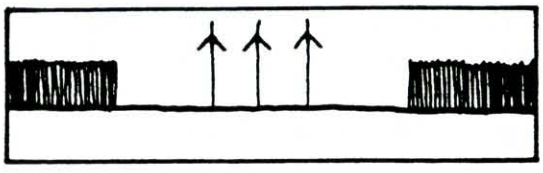
If single housing is unavoidable it should be sited near existing field boundaries, away from the forest edge and other farm dwellings. Designs should respond to the scale, form and materials of the older, long-established dwellings in the area.

RENEWABLE ENERGY - WIND

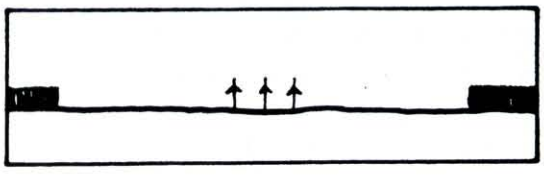
Forces for Change

Due to the possible effects of the forest edge in creating turbulence and affecting the uniformity of wind supply to the turbine blade, wind turbines within this character type would tend to be single or in small groups in open areas.

The open space available within the forest structure could become increasingly cluttered if additional elements were to be incorporated into the space. Due to the height of the wind turbine above the tree canopy (40-50 m as compared to 25-30 m of a mature spruce), an unbalanced relationship could result which increases the vertical emphasis and visual draw of the turbine.



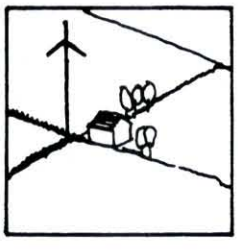
Vertical height of turbines is out of proportion to surrounding small space.



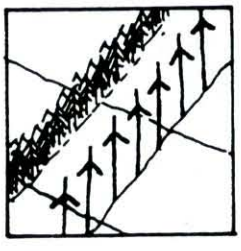
Balance of vertical height to open space acheived.

Guidance

Single turbines as point features should exhibit a clear functional relationship with the farm holding or other recipient of the power generated, as well as to landscape elements, but care should be taken to ensure that the scale of the open space balances the vertical height of the wind turbine.



POINT
Farm holding



LINE
Tree shelterbelt

AREA
Forest block

MINERAL EXTRACTION

Forces for Change

Gravels of fluvio-glacial origin tend to give this landscape its characteristic, small scale, irregular surface features, eg the winding ridges of eskers. These are usually covered with dense deciduous trees and provide important local focal points in the landscape.

Extraction of these gravels would mean a physical loss of land and the associated vegetation, leading to a loss of visual diversity. The extraction pits with exposed rock faces can create visual disruption, particularly in an upland landscape. This is compounded within small spaces by the building of new access roads and security fences, as well as by the crushing plant and piles of stored material.

Guidance

Where the extraction of gravel is proposed on flatter land, the forest structure, using shelterbelts, could be extended to encompass the working pit and to reduce the visual intrusion and noise impact. The shelterbelt should respect the existing geometric field pattern and the surrounding open space. Planting of similar deciduous trees within the forest structure may help to retain the essence of the diversity that this feature gave to the landscape.

Where the gravel pit is located on a hillside, the vertical height and strong edge of the forest would only seek to outline the presence of the extraction pit further. Where possible, the forest stand in the foreground of the pit should be retained throughout the working life of the pit, to provide some partial screening for the main views from the road.

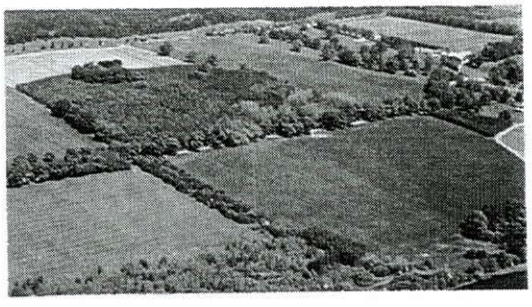
Dark edge of forest acentuates line of open pit and focuses views.

Forest canopy screens pit.

When the need for gravel extraction becomes redundant all structures and surfaces associated with the pit workings should be removed and the pit itself restored in a way which relates to the landform of adjoing areas.

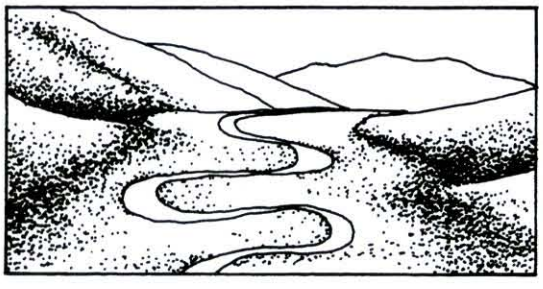
3.8 ENCLOSED FARMED LANDSCAPES

Situated on the flat river plains at the heads of the Beauly and Cromarty Firths from Beauly through Muir of Ord and Conon Bridge to Contin, and in a band leading north-east along the north side of the Cromarty Firth. Smaller areas are also located to the north of the Dornoch Firth, Loch Fleet and along Strath Fleet.

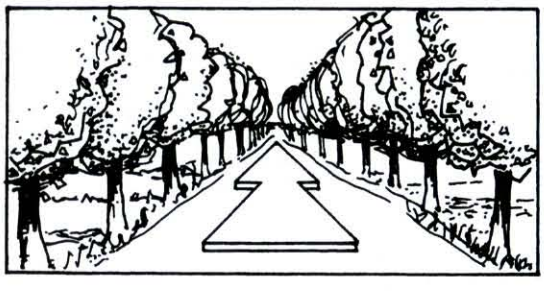


KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Flat to gently undulating lowlands, of firths and river flood plains.



- The strong linear pattern of trees, draws the eye, giving an indication of scale and distance, due to the low angle views over the flat land.



Strong perspective of tree avenue draws the eye along the road.

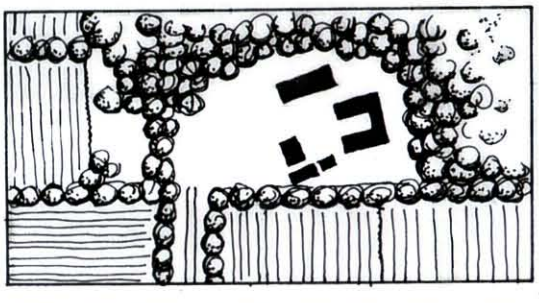
- A simple landscape composition of geometric fields enclosed by mature deciduous tree lines, creating a series of rooms.

- The towering trees, glimpses of prominent buildings and the formal effect of regularly spaced trees, give a sense of grandeur and wealth.

- The deciduous trees give a range of colours and texture, increasing landscape diversity locally and providing seasonal variation.

- The presence of different tree species (eg Foulis beech trees, the Lovat oaks) associated with the estates helps to give a strong sense of place.

- The typical rural settlement as farms placed well off the main road, enclosed within irregular groups of mature deciduous trees that link into the avenue structure.



Tree structure affords physical and visual containment; farm buildings are not visible from the roadside or from views into the area.

- Farm settlements consist of a variety of buildings, the vernacular usually being low and long in an 'L' or 'E' shape, around which are placed more recent barns.

- A dominant feature readily associated with this landscape type is the large house or castle. The scale and grandeur of the building is heightened by its prominent position in the landscape, with the tops of the building often rising above the mature tree canopy, and ornamental gates marking its existence at the roadside.

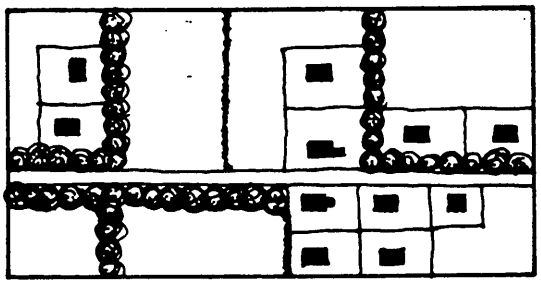
- The remnants of the designed landscape associated with these buildings can still be recognised; dense policy woods create a dark backdrop behind the house, whilst in front formal gardens and parkland allow views to be gained from the house.

- On the flatter land, developments encroach upon the smooth, rectangular fields and tree lines, replacing them with urban forms of wide open, curved streets and shapes and scales of buildings which contrast with the existing farm and estate architecture.

RURAL HOUSING

Forces for Change

Along the main roads that link the settlements new houses, single or in groups, are often placed in close proximity to existing tree lines. The sizes and height of these houses are often larger than the indigenous farm buildings.



Small scale of housing plots erode the large simple, geometry of the smooth arable fields.

The uniformity of materials and design reduces the diversity of these point settlements. The positioning of these buildings on the edges of fields and their proximity to the roadside reduces the simple geometric composition of the landscape. A greater housing density, increases the experience of habitation. Consequently the unity of the landscape is affected as the orderly composition with its strong structure of tree lines complementing large fields is reduced and the rectangular pattern is fragmented by the smaller housing plots.

Guidance

In order to maintain a rural rather than suburban character, new housing in this landscape should be placed off the main routes, and be accessed preferably by an existing track, so as to reduce the need for new infrastructure. The house design and size should respond to the low, long forms of existing farm buildings, preferably with several houses grouped together rather than dispersed. Housing plots which respect the original open nature of the large, rectangular fields pattern, can be identified along the irregular edges of policy woodlands, or awkward corners left out of active farming. Deciduous trees incorporated around the new dwellings would help greatly in creating a setting for the dwelling and add to the existing woodland structure.

URBAN EXPANSION

Forces for Change

The sense of enclosure and structure that the trees bring to this landscape by their vertical presence is in areas of urban expansion replaced by a mass of built forms with a seemingly random scatter of garden shrubs and trees. The overriding similarity of the housing estate, with single buildings in small plots and uniform access roads creates a chaotic patchwork effect which contrasts strongly with the geometry of the surrounding fields and woodland elements.

This chaotic layout, and the demise of strong tree lines creates visual confusion, as there are no longer prominent features on which to focus, and to aid orientation.

Guidance

The growth of housing estates should be incorporated into the existing geometric pattern of fields with mature tree lines being retained, and/or new lines incorporated into the new housing area. This will not only give an overriding sense of order to the housing, but also provide a sense of place and continuity to the newer settlement within the older pattern. The stark contrast between rural and urban environments is also reduced as the strong presence of trees will still be the main focus of attention and reduce the impact of the built forms.

INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION

Forces for Change

Industrial estates tend to be situated on the periphery of the settlements, sited directly on, or close to the existing main roads, and railways and away from the main residential areas. The large size and low profile of the buildings is in complete contrast to the smaller, denser urban forms, and the typical farm holdings. The roads are wide and open between the buildings, with a network of tributary feeder roads and loops, to create an efficient flow of large vehicular traffic. This network and the sameness of the buildings creates a feeling of disorientation and confusion, increased by attempts to differentiate by the use of corporate signage. Where some 'landscaping' is adopted it is usually out of scale with the building, and seeks to underline their large size even more.

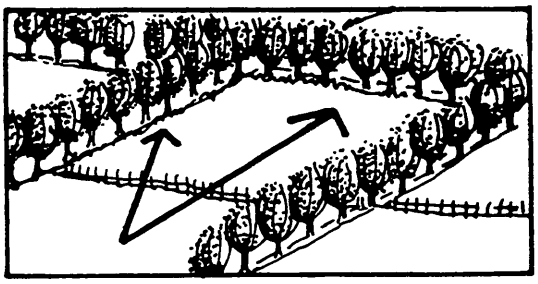
Guidance

The range of industrial units could be incorporated within a structure of trees which would provide a unifying backdrop and landscape structure of a similar scale to the buildings. Tree species that characterise the nearby farmland estates could be extended into these industrial areas, and this would add emphasis to the distinctiveness of the locality.

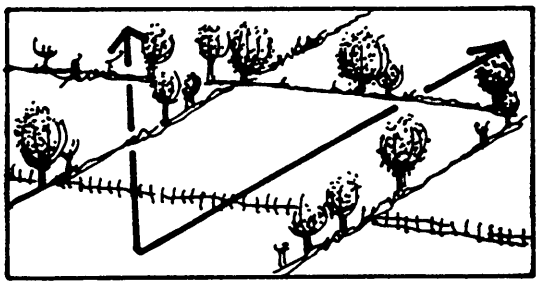
LOSS OF HISTORIC LANDSCAPE

Forces for Change

Many of the trees characteristic of this landscape type have now reached maturity. As such their ability to withstand high winds and heavy snow is severely compromised. As the tree lines and avenues start to thin, and are removed, there is a considerable loss of enclosure and the structure experienced from both within and without this landscape is diminished. With fewer trees, this results in a different sizing and spacing along the tree lines, giving an irregular pattern which achieves a less formal result. The distinctive pattern of fields begins to merge, and without the vertical tree elements the farmland loses the added element of seasonal diversity and the experience of inherent grandeur that characterised it.



Air of formality and order from regular size and spacing of trees.



Over maturity and negelct of trees results in a loss of the formal effect due to irregular tree size and spacing.

The slow and subtle nature of the loss of trees within this landscape, and the relative structural impact that even a few mature, deciduous trees can have, creates a situation where the constant thinning of the trees continues unnoticed until the extent of tree loss is so great that it leads to a change in landscape character.

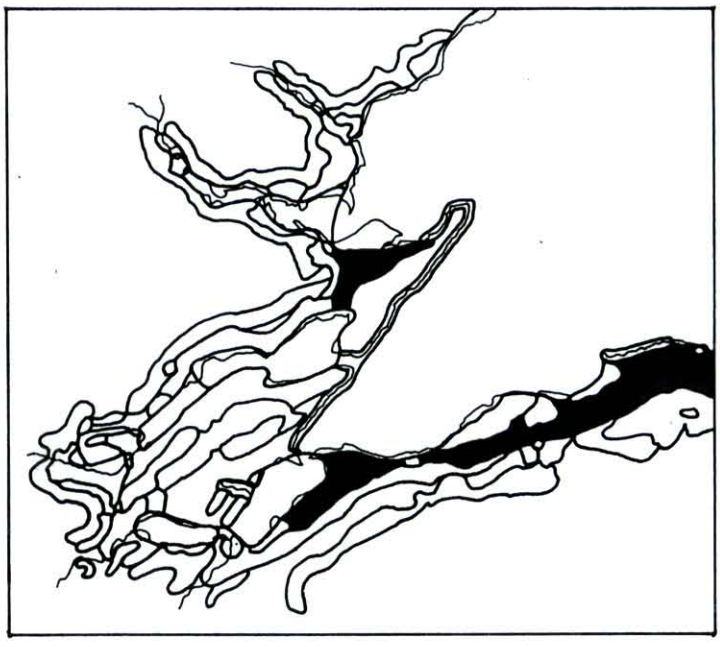
Guidance

The relatively long period of time that it takes these trees to reach an age when they have a major structural effect means that to rectify the situation takes time and considerable forward planning.

A programme could be implemented which identifies the present layout of policy and amenity trees, their species and ages to inform the future management of this, possibly the most valuable component of this character type. This information could be used to produce a plan of action to replace lost trees, manage those existing and plant new trees, on a continual basis, in order to retain the layout and continuity of the tree cover.

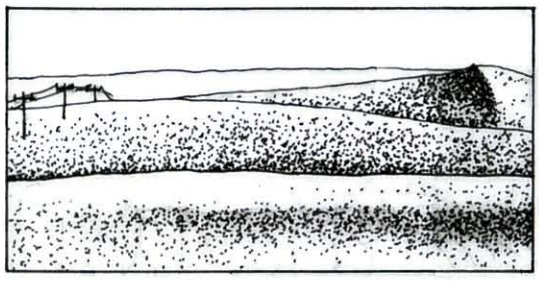
3.9 INTENSIVE FARMING

Located in two main areas, one being the stretch of land extending north-east of Nigg Bay to the landward edge of Morrich Mor, and along the Moray District lowlands, in a band from Balloch, past Nairn to Lossiemouth.



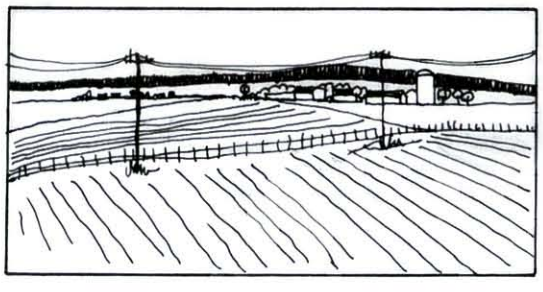
KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Little variation in landform, this is a flat to gently undulating landscape with infrequent fluvio-glacial features.



- This farming landscape is one of simple wide horizontal compositions, of large, smooth, arable fields, interspersed with extensive coniferous forestry plantations.

- The height of vertical elements is absorbed by the large scale of the horizontal landscape but, as points of interest in low diversity farmland, they draw the eye.



Seasonal plough lines emphasise undulating landscape. Groups of farm dwellings with silage tower act as point features.

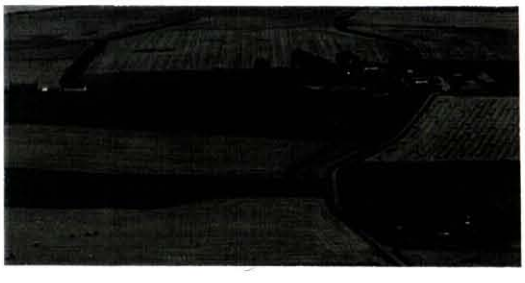
- The lack of prominent structural elements in this landscape; woodlands, trees, walls and buildings, gives it an overriding expansive scale.

- The low angle views mean that the landscape is seen as a pattern of interlocking bands of brown and green arable fields and the darker forestry plantations.

- It is an easily accessible landscape with a network of main and minor roads.

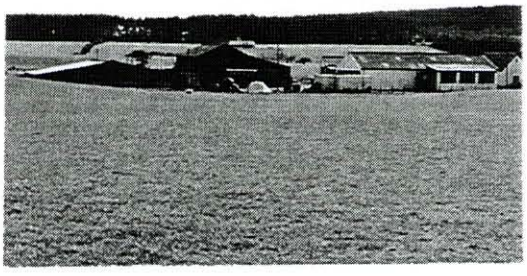
- The farmland offers little visual diversity. For the traveller the drama of extensive views is soon replaced by the focus of the road corridor.

- The lack of prominent vertical features in the landscape creates disorientation on the smaller roads.

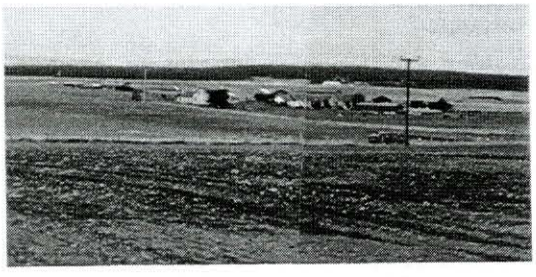


- Farm holdings tend to be accessed by straight narrow roads set perpendicular to the main road and highlighted by a line of telegraph poles.

- Large farm holdings are typical of this character type. Clusters of buildings, often including a prominent silage tower, are dispersed throughout the farming landscape.

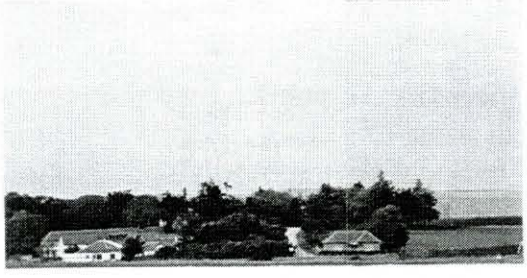


- Those small pockets of farm settlements associated with mature trees give a diversity of colour and texture and become unusually prominent in their contrast with the open, smooth arable fields.



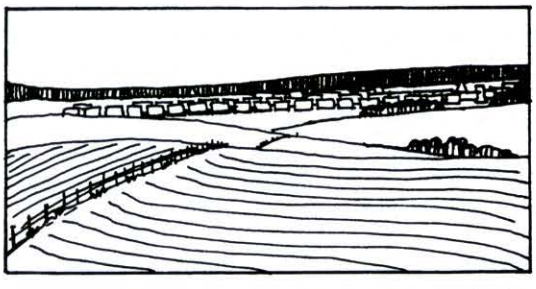
Farming clusters recede into the distance giving a sense of scale to an otherwise open landscape.

- Occasional 18th century farm steadings exist, exhibiting a range of stone buildings with pantile roofs, from stables to granaries. These are usually arranged in a U-shape or hollow square. The original form of steading has been expanded and modified by later buildings and vegetation.



Steading in more prominent position as situated on 'dry sites' of irregular raised mounds from glacial deposition. Surrounded by an abundance of mature remnant deciduous policy woods.

- Larger urban settlements tend to have a uniform built edge which is viewed as a thin light band which is highlighted against the muted colours of farmland and forestry.



Difficult to realise the true extent of the settlement as sense of scale is distorted by foreshortening over distance.

RURAL HOUSING

Forces for Change

Due to the large scale of this farming landscape, the small size of single housing would clutter the simple composition of the interlocking fields. Within such a landscape the extent of the setting that would have to be created to give a single house a sense of place, would look incongruous.

Guidance

New single houses placed into the Intensive Farming character type should be grouped together to create point features with a greater visual impact, reflecting the indigenous farm steadings of this character type, and accompanied by a bold tree structure. Where possible the buildings should be integrated as part of an existing small settlement or woodland element, a village, mature tree copse or small scale woodland belts.

URBAN EXPANSION

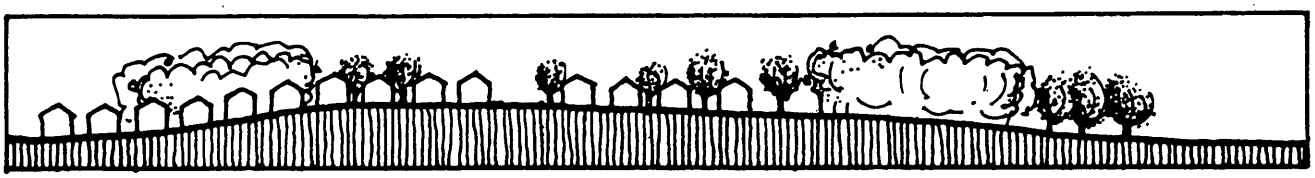
Forces for Change

The urban edge of a settlement tends to be seen as a pale band within the strong horizontal composition of this landscape character type. Although the intensive farmland is one of the few landscape types that can actually absorb the larger scale of urban expansion, the openness of the relatively flat landscape provides no obvious cues to creating a sense of place and strong setting for the new housing. The characteristic exposure of this landscape requires a design which creates shelter and enclosure at a scale that reflects the surrounding landscape whilst not dominating the human scale of the residential area.

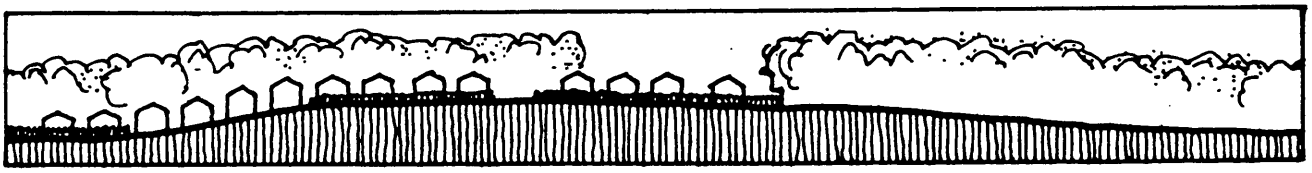
Guidance

Within such an open landscape, where there is an obvious lack of a setting for new houses, maximum use should be made of the positive aspects of the location, namely the wide, open views into the surrounding landscape. The structural properties of woodland and forestry can be used to create a setting for housing, which helps to modify the microclimate on the one hand, but retain the views on the other.

The design of the woodland should be of a scale that complements the surrounding landscape and seeks to link the urban forms to farmland. The relationship between the built form and the woodland edge can follow a strong linear form, as is often found in existing plantations. It is important that visual and physical access into the surrounding landscape is considered in the layout of the urban estate so that people's experiences of that landscape become a part of its sense of place.



Housing estate dominates landscape. Dominance emphasised by contrast to the small scale of the individual and groups of trees.



Scale and extent of woodland reflects landscape character and housing, with hedges used to create structure in the detail design.

Visual access into the surrounding landscape would have to be considered in the location and layout of the housing estate, whereas physical access could be designed to link into the boundary areas between woodland and the built edge, with footpaths, shelterbelts, and hedges extending from the core of the built-up area out into the woodland being considered as part of a cohesive design.

INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION

Forces for Change

Many of the industrial estates in this character type are found in association with a bypassing of the main settlement and the improved access thereof. As such, the industrial estate becomes almost a separate development from the town, with larger building units and wider roads. With expansion into the Intensive Farming landscape, the edge becomes increasingly obtrusive as it grows outwith the irregular town horizon of buildings and deciduous trees, and into the open horizontal landscape.

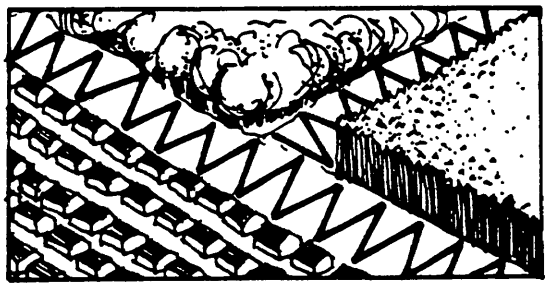
Guidance

Existing and new woodland planting can be used to create links with the open farmland and reflect the scale and size of existing industrial units, and allow for the possibility of future developments. Due to the nature of the larger built units, attention paid to the colours used for the outdoor facades, choosing those which complement the farmland colours, will help to lessen their prominence as built vertical forms.

RECREATION

Forces for Change

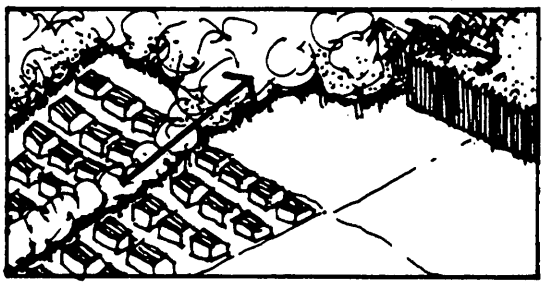
Near the urban edge there is an anticipated increasing demand for informal recreational use of woodland areas by local communities. Placed within the rural area neighbouring the residential edge, there is usually little integration of the woodland with the settlement owing to separate planning policies and ownerships, and as such there is no active encouragement of physical access into the surrounding landscape.



Little or no visual and physical access into the surrounding landscape and woodland.

Guidance

The creation of woodlands on the periphery of a settlement can be used not only as an informal recreational resource but also to create a more appropriate setting within which a settlement can grow. The design of the woodland should pay particular attention to the scale of any surrounding forestry blocks and the structural part that these play in the landscape. At a detailed level, the species and layout of individual trees can be used within the built form to link the structural woodland to housing areas.



Links made between housing and surrounding landscape. Tree structure gives character to new housing.

INFRASTRUCTURE - ROADS

Forces for Change

Upgrading main roads within this character type would widen this linear feature within the landscape, emphasising the open, flat landscape character which allows such long straight roads to be constructed. Larger junctions, with lighting and landscaped roadside embankments and cuttings, would draw attention to the presence of the road within the flat landscape. Widening the road and increasing the number of traffic lanes encourages an increase in speeds, and means that the traveller spends less time within the character type. In this situation there is a tendency for features such as views of prominent landmarks or the coast, to be overlooked.

Guidance

To reduce the impact of the road as a linear feature from a distance, care should be taken not to emphasise the road's presence by planting of trees and scrub to screen the road, where tree lines are not already a characteristic feature of the landscape. The open road

should be allowed to sit upon the landscape where possible and not set within cuttings. Where screening is required near to settlements for visual and noise abatement the patterns of existing policy trees and shrubs should be used as a template for the scale and species of planting. Planting that is proposed near to the road could be used to create interest for the traveller, directing views and altering the scale of spaces, so that the traveller becomes aware of the landscape that they are passing through.

LOSS OF HISTORIC LANDSCAPES

Forces for Change

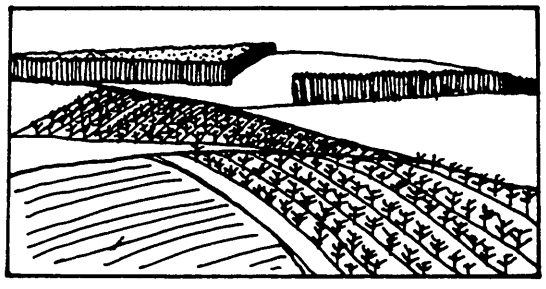
The small pockets of diversity in this landscape which arise from the old estates, policy woods and small villages are shrinking, as is their influence as a feature within the farming landscape. The presence of their irregular colours, textures and layout, creates features which act as important aids to orientation in this landscape.

Guidance

The visual and historical importance of the policy woods and their influence as focal points should be assessed, and used to justify a programme of maintenance, management and replanting.

FORESTRY

Forces for Change



Visual disruprion caused by deep plough lines and new forest blocks contrasting with smooth texture of arable fields. Interlocking character of large fields is lost.

Agricultural land coming out of the set-aside scheme is often being taken over into forestry production, taking advantage of the existing infrastructure and processing facilities. If relatively small blocks of forestry are placed within this large scale agricultural landscape, the simple composition would become much more complex and cluttered with the addition of smaller scale units.

Guidance

New blocks of forestry set into the landscape should aim to link into the existing forest structure. The large scale of the landscape needs to have a strong structure of forestry to complement it.

New forestry planting in this low-lying landscape should take account of the views from key routes and residential areas

RENEWABLE ENERGY - WIND

Forces for Change

Single or small groups of turbines within this landscape may increase with the recognition of their potential for generating energy for single farm holdings or industrial facilites. Depending on the scale of enclosure of the surrounding landscape, the height of the turbine may be emphasised against the open horizontal landscape.

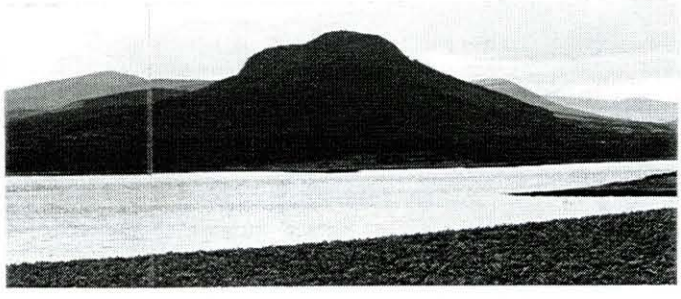
Guidance

The placing of single turbines into the farming landscape should complement the existing human elements and have a functional relationship to the building for which power is being generated. This would help to connect it to the landscape and increase its value as a focal point.

Should groups of wind turbines be considered appropriate the ordered landscape pattern would provide a framework within which the vertical character of the turbines contrasts simply with the strong horizontal skyline and bold blocks of forestry.

3.10 FORESTED BACKDROP

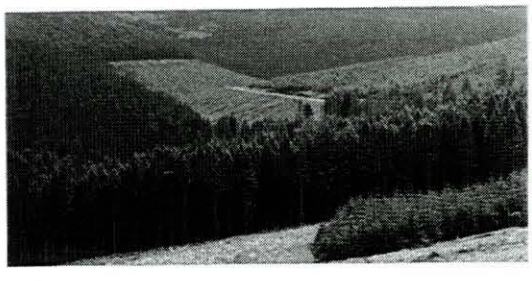
This character type is found in the foothills that act as a westerly border to the project site, from Brora south to Inverness and along the slopes bordering the Moray lowlands. In these latter locations the Forested Backdrop is delineated only where it meets existing character types. On the map there is no definite boundary on the inland side of these areas. This is deliberate, as the character type extends inland, beyond the visual containment of the Moray Firth basin.



Extensive areas are also located along the coastal dune edges on the north shore of Loch Fleet, Culbin Sands and Burghead Bay, and covers the Milbuie Ridge, with smaller areas around Loch Ussie and Munlochy Bay.

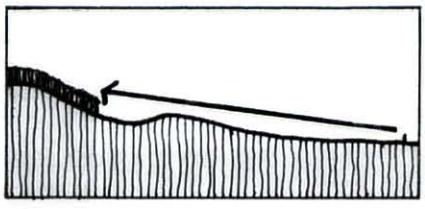
KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- The landscape ranges from flat, lowlying coastal shorelines, to the smooth, gentle slopes and pronounced valleys and rocky summits of the upland areas.

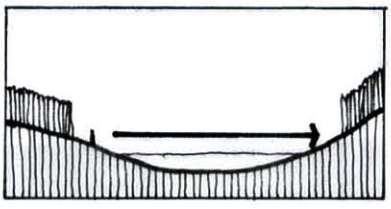


- The strong geometric forest forms mask the small scale surface irregularities of the sand dunes and moorland. The uniform colour and texture contrasts with the relatively natural underlying landscapes.

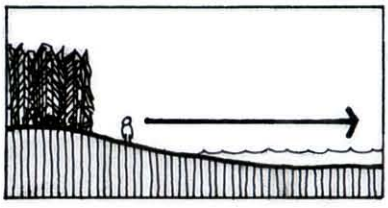
- The forested landscape acts as a dark backdrop which pulls and pushes the horizon, back and forth changing the scale of the landscape experience.



Forestry acts as a distant dark horizon which pulls the upland edge closer



Along the edge of the Firth it restricts views inland and deflects them over to the opposite side

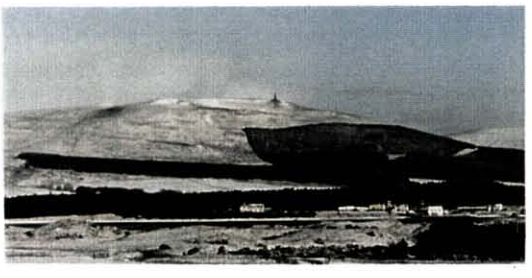


On the coastal shore the forestry constricts the extent of the shore and forces views out over the sea

- The large size of forestry plantations and the angles made by the geometric patterns are often out of scale with the underlying slopes, creating a visually unbalanced landscape. The dark lines of the forest edge emphasise the fall of slope and the bare, often rocky summits.

- Views gained from the open upland moor to the firth allow the overall shape of the firths to be realised and are important in understanding the relationship of the land to water.

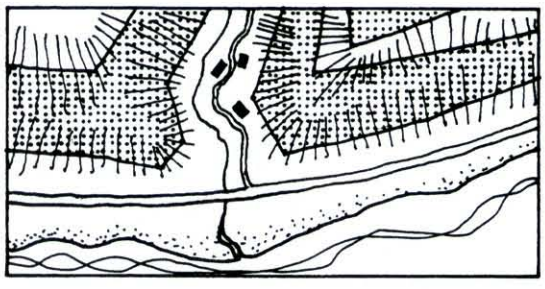
- The dominant visual feature of the forest horizon, often with an upland position becomes important, when considering the impact of development and the effect it has on other character types.



- The planting and harvesting cycle can create great visual disruption especially when seen against the bare trunks of the standing timber.

- The differing scale of the landscape is exaggerated when passing from narrow enclosed stream valleys and roads within the forest, to the open exposed moorland with its wide panoramic views.

- The irregular, complex nature of the foothill topography has meant settlements, composed of single small buildings, are located in dispersed linear patterns along winding roads within narrow river valleys, using what land there is available for pasture.



- Along the settled valleys, weathered buildings, stone dykes, irregular surfaces, scrub and deciduous trees give a highly diverse landscape, their range of natural colours and textures from reds and browns through to greens and yellows, contrast with the sameness of the forest cover.

Feeling of shelter and remoteness due to dispersed building, absorbed into the valley spurs, assissted by diverse vegetation cover.

RURAL HOUSING

Forces for Change

The dispersed nature of the existing settlements is reduced as newer buildings are placed in close proximity along the roadside. The size and shape of recent housing is often quite different to the indigenous buildings, as is the use of modern materials, their vibrancy contrasting with the naturally, weathered stone. Their position, often within a small valley, is usually on a prominent knoll or artificial smooth mound, to take advantage of the views down the valley. As such they become focal points set within a manicured landscape which contrasts with the surrounding highly diverse, rough textures and colours.

Guidance

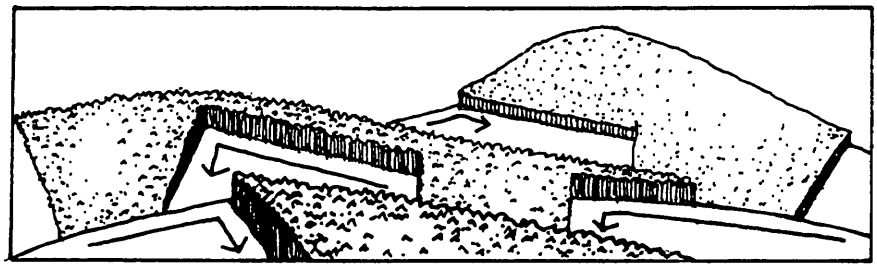
Within the Forest Backdrop character type, housing should respect the typical dispersed pattern of crofts, retaining the sense of remoteness and isolation of settlements. Where housing is placed next to the roadside in close proximity to indigenous trees and shrubs, this position against the vegetation could help to tie it into the landscape and retain a semblance of maturity in the landscape.

FORESTRY

Forces for Change

The visual impact of forest restructuring can be experienced from both within and outwith this character type. As a result of felling, the rough textures of felled trees and ripped surfaces leave behind large expanses of visual devastation. Brush mats, established during the felling operation, may appear as lines, sometimes cutting across the natural landscape contours and creating an unnatural geometric pattern.

Important landscape focus of hill-top is reduced in impact by blanketing effect of forestry, highlighted as a 'cap' and separate, rather than integrated into the landscape.



Hard geometric edges cutting across the slope contours, conflicting with the flowing form of the landscape and the dominant interlocking spurs.

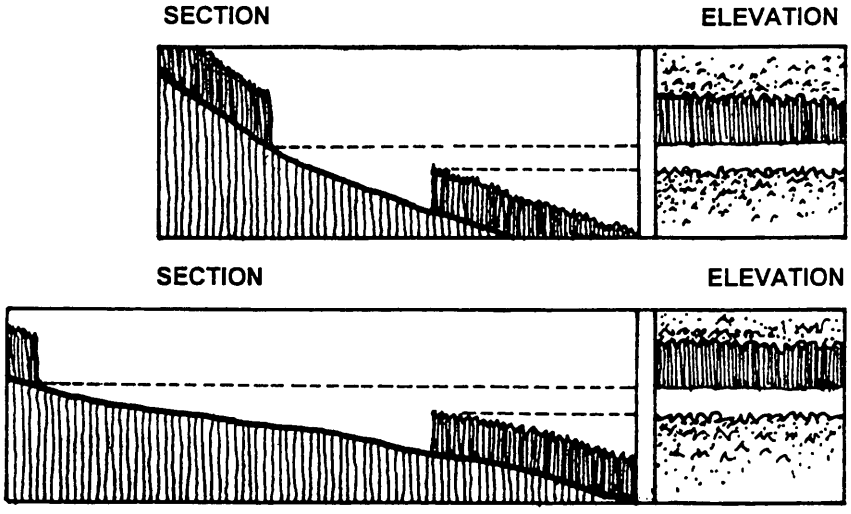
Whilst having the long term aim of improving the forest structure, restructuring changes the relationship between the blanketing forest and the underlying landform and can result in visual tension and a feeling of unease in the landscape.

Once felled the timber is transported out of the plantations to be processed, necessitating the upgrading of many of the narrow winding roads to cope with the demands of large articulated lorries. Roads are straightened and widened and no longer correspond to the irregularities of the narrow valley or hillside.

The textures and patterns of the moorland, and the presence of the clean, simple horizon is lost when forest planting extends into these areas, increasing the dominance of the dark horizon. Important views that characterise the upland landscape and the experience of the wide open, exposed moorland can be lost.

Guidance

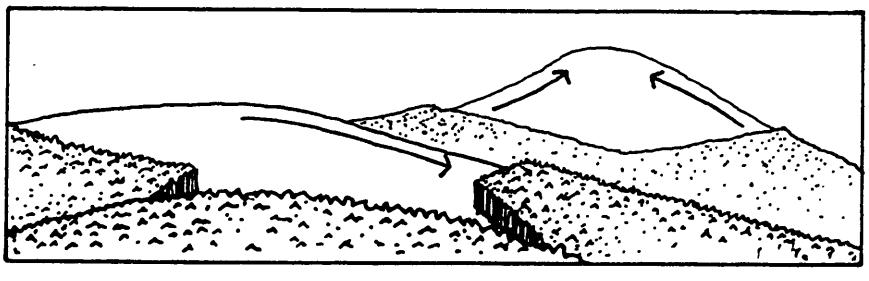
Forest planting and restructuring proposals should respond to the underlying topography with the scale of felling or planting coupes taking into consideration the size and shape of the landform beneath it. The relative scale of the coupes should be adjusted according to the ground elevation and relative distance of the viewer. This will reduce the visual disruption and help to create a long-term sensitive forest structure.



Size of the felling coupe should take into consideration the underlying landform. Felling on a steeper gradient results in an increased extent of visual impact.

A diverse roadside vegetation can be replaced at the sides of the widened roads to create a setting and soften the hard forest edge with its straight lines and dark colours. But this should be done with care to avoid a 'band' effect along the road. It may be preferable to interlock such edge detail into the forest mass by means of features such as watercourses and forest rides.

Clear skyline of summit retained as important focus in landscape and reinforced by contrast with rougher forest texture below.



Forest design responds to interlocking character of hill-slopes whilst retaining economically viable size of felling coupes.

In a well unified landscape the forest design follows the the smooth flowing patterns of the rounded summits and reinforcing the interlock.

TOURISM/RECREATION

Forces for Change

As a recreational resource often within easy access of urban settlements, this landscape is likely to be the focus of various recreational activities. Along with this may come a demand for a range of facilities, from information boards and signs, to toilets, food outlets and gift shops. In recent years the variety of users has increased from pedestrians to include mountain biking and equestrianism. Signposting to direct the number of different users could become visually intrusive and confusing, whilst visitor buildings tend to be large and placed in a clearing with associated car parking, which contrasts with the experience of travelling through the dense, uninhabited forest.

The increased demand for tourist accommodation has seen a growth in the production of wooden chalets with 'A' frames, out of character in their form and siting with the existing dwellings; these are usually located in groups in felled forest clearings. With the strong seasonality of tourism, many of the chalets sit empty for much of the year, giving an abandoned look to the countryside. From a distance the sharp forest edge of the clearing acts as an outline, highlighting the different land use.

Guidance

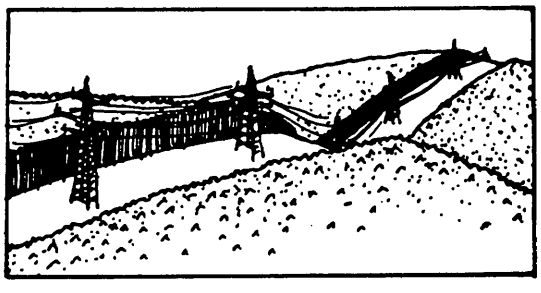
Where possible car parking, toilets and shops, should be located within a thinned forest structure, where the overhead tree canopy will 'soften' the visual impact of the car parking and built forms of the tourist facilities, and help re-establish the feeling of wilderness.

Care should be taken to make signposting functionally clear but minimal in number. Pressures to accommodate too many activities in one area should be resisted. Track construction and management could be implemented to tackle the differing problems of erosion arising from different activities. Where possible the use of existing buildings for seasonal accommodation for tourists should be encouraged. Where new accommodation is proposed it should respect the layout, size, shape and building materials used in existing dwellings and settlements and, if possible, be promoted as a year-round facility.

ENERGY

Forces For Change

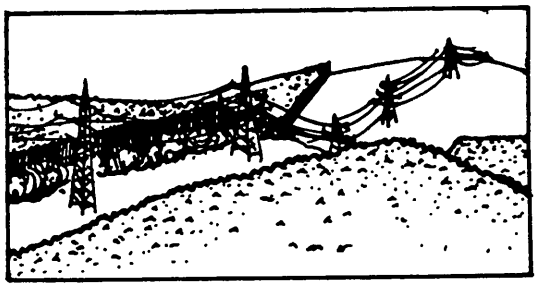
Transportation of electricity via transmission lines and pylons requires a wayleave often up to 45 metres through forested areas. As a result numerous lines cut through the forested slopes servicing the larger coastal settlements. Within the plantations the pylons cut a strong track through the uniform green forested slopes which emphasises the visual 'blanketing' effect of the plantations.



Eye is drawn by unnatural parallel forest edges with dark shadows, cutting through forestry, irrespective of underlying landform.

Guidance

Where existing transmission lines cut through the forests, or where they are proposed, attention should be paid to creating edges to the forestry that follow a more natural outline and the fall of the landscape, reducing rather than emphasising the presence and impact of the pylons and lines.



Underlying forestry allows for wayleave but seeks to complement underlying landform. Use of deciduous trees and shrubs to soften existing forest edges.

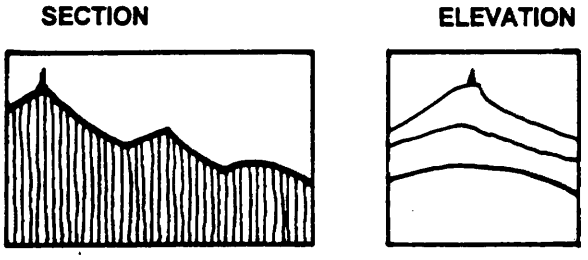
TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Forces for Change

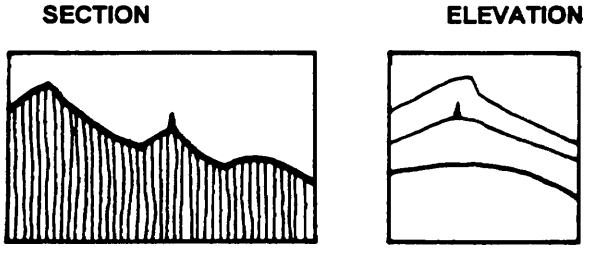
The growth in the telecommunications forecasts an increase in the number of mast installations and supporting infrastructure usually on high ground. The masts tend to be placed on hills within close proximity to the settlements and roads they are servicing in order to get the best possible reception. The prominent rocky hill summits surrounding the Moray Firth are unsuitable for forestry and as such their presence as focal points is emphasised when seen in contrast to the surrounding even, dark, forest texture. If telecommunication structures are sited on these prominent summits the visual importance of, and significance attached to, the natural landform will be affected. Access roads for these installations can act as a hard, linear feature, superimposed on the underlying natural form.

Guidance

Masts and supporting infrastructure may be placed within this character type in locations where the landform would help to absorb the man-made features, rather than draw attention to it. The nature of the generally convex rounded slopes, means that masts could be placed in an open position, but one where the upland backdrop reduces the vertical emphasis. This would give the necessary height whilst avoiding the need to be placed on important hill summits. Where the existing forest roads are unsuitable for servicing the telecommunication buildings, the flow of the landform contours may be used as a guide, when placing new roads, to achieve a sense of unity. However, new access road development could be avoided if helicopter access were a feasible option.



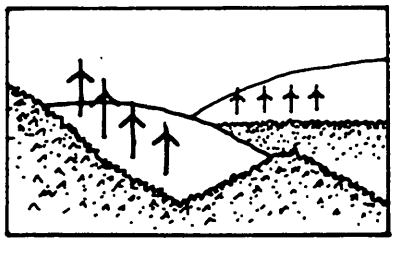
Visual prominence of mast is increased by being placed on important fcal point in landscape often with local significance.



Mast retains good reception, but is placed with an upland backdrop which helps to accomodate the vertical height.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Forces for Change



Wind turbines located in response to forest pattern, creating increased visual tension in landscape.

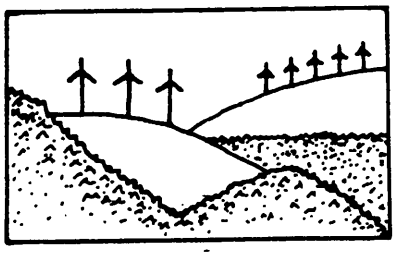
The potential for wind farm development is foreseen throughout a large area of the Forested Backdrop character type; this is mainly due to the exposed and windy nature of coastal and upland landscapes and availability of existing forestry roads for access. The location of wind energy developments may cause visual confusion, in contrast to the lines, shapes and patterns introduced by the forestry, creating a visually 'cluttered' effect between the forest blocks and the natural landform.

Guidance

In the remoter regions of the Forested Backdrop landscape, where there is a feeling of wildness away from the linear forest patterns and settlement, the perception of wind turbines as an industrial element may conflict with this experience. As such, a wind farm may appear as a human-made intrusion and be an inappropriate element in these areas.

On flatter land there may be landform and land use clues which would aid the positioning of wind farms so that they respond, as far as is possible, to landscape character. Where

located adjacent to forest, it is important that wind turbines relate to the spatial definition of the forest edge as this is likely to be a dominant feature in the experience of that landscape.



Windfarm located in response to rhythm of landform reducing visual tension of increased vertical forms in landscape.

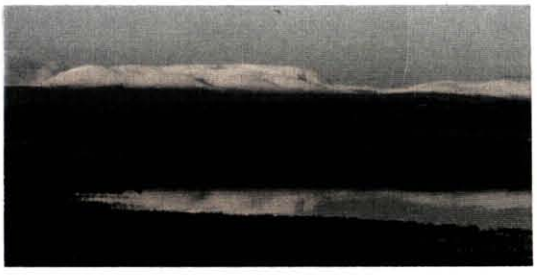
On the upland landscape it is important that the distribution and number of wind turbines relates to the landform character rather than to forestry, as the relatively dynamic nature of the forest structure means that it is the strong, visual relationship of wind turbines to landform which will provide continuity.

DISTANT MOUNTAINOUS BACKDROP

In the context of this study, the Distant Mountainous Backdrop is treated as an important feature of the Moray Firth, rather than a character type. Although they have no direct physical connection with the Moray Firth basin, apart from their influence on climate, the mountains provide a recognisable distant horizon, which increases the sense of drama, space and scale of the lowland environment.

The relationship of sea to land, with the fingers of the firth reaching far into the uplands, gives opportunities for views far inland to the highlands. This is an unusual quality of coastal lowlands but is typical of all the Moray Firth landscape character types.

The shape of these distant mountains range from the angular forms of the Fannichs with their dominant peaks and summits, to the strong, heavy mountain mass of Ben Wyvis. The prominence of the mountainous backdrop varies from being invisible when shrouded in low cloud, blue/purple and recessive in the shimmering heat of summer, to the stark clarity and apparent nearness of the snow-clad, winter peaks.



This report identifies character types, focusing on what constitutes the overwhelming, key characteristics of the Inner Moray Firth landscape, those that give the landscape its distinctive qualities within what is a relatively narrow coastal strip.

Most apparent is the overriding dynamic nature of the Moray Firth landscape. Overlying the glacial landforms and continually changing shoreline, the cultural layer of farming, crofting and forestry, brochs and sculpture stones, oil rigs and bridges, make up a rich and vibrant tapestry. The activity of the coastal edge, its waves, wind, people, birds and industry, coupled with the less tangible qualities of large water bodies and expansive mudflats, are aspects of this landscape which are difficult to pin down, but vital to protect. Proposals for change must acknowledge and respect these qualities, but at the same time present options for the future.

In this rapidly changing landscape, it is important that the previous landscape layers are not diminished in their visual and physical contribution to the present day. Thus recognising and mapping the character types not only records what is important in this landscape but also highlights the key elements that need to be maintained and managed into the future. The character types and guidance given here are useful as a starting point, but every landscape is different and for any design proposals to attempt to be in unity with the landscape, guidance must be tailored to the site specific needs.

The qualities of the Moray Firth, with its strong slopes and firths allowing views to be gained across and out of the character types, is characteristic of this landscape. This inter-visibility and the recognised importance of long distance views, is a reminder that in considering any proposals it is imperative that we take a step back and see the landscape type in its broader context. Piecemeal development which does not respond to this broader context as well as to the character of the immediate area will have cumulative effects which may jeopardise the very qualities of the landscape that we are aiming to retain.

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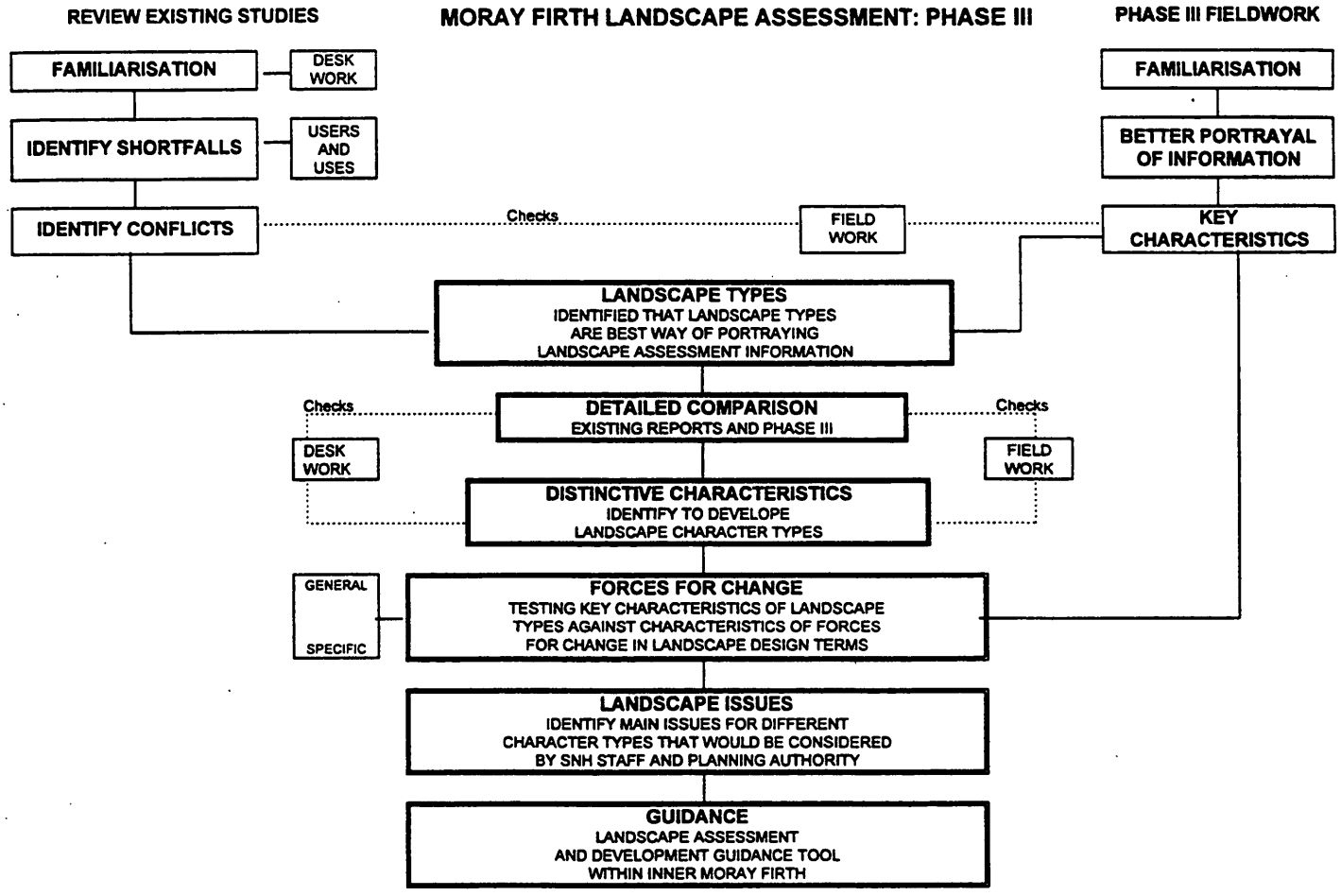
METHODOLOGY

As the Phase 3 report builds on previous assessments the methodology reflects this in the approach adopted for the desk study and field work section. The flow diagram below shows that the study comprised an initial period of desk study which included a detailed familiarisation with the previous reports. This coincided with short periods of field work used to back up and check desk study conclusions. As the assessment continued the two processes fed into work on the main section of the report which deals with the identification of the character types and their analysis.



Review Existing Studies

The problems and shortfalls of the existing studies came to light in the period of familiarisation where a thorough desk study was undertaken to extract key information from the two different approaches. When the reports were compared, similarities and conflicts in the landscape unit descriptions were highlighted, and these formed the basis for further field work. It was at this point that it became obvious that a clear and logical approach based on the principles of landscape character assessment was necessary in order to analyse and portray the results of this field work.

Phase III Field Work

The process began with an initial familiarisation of the area, during which the important first impressions and reactions to the landscape were noted and sketched, this lead to the analysis and portrayal of information, based on landscape character types. This used experience gained from reviewing previous SNH landscape assessments.

Moray Firth Landscape Assessment Phase 3

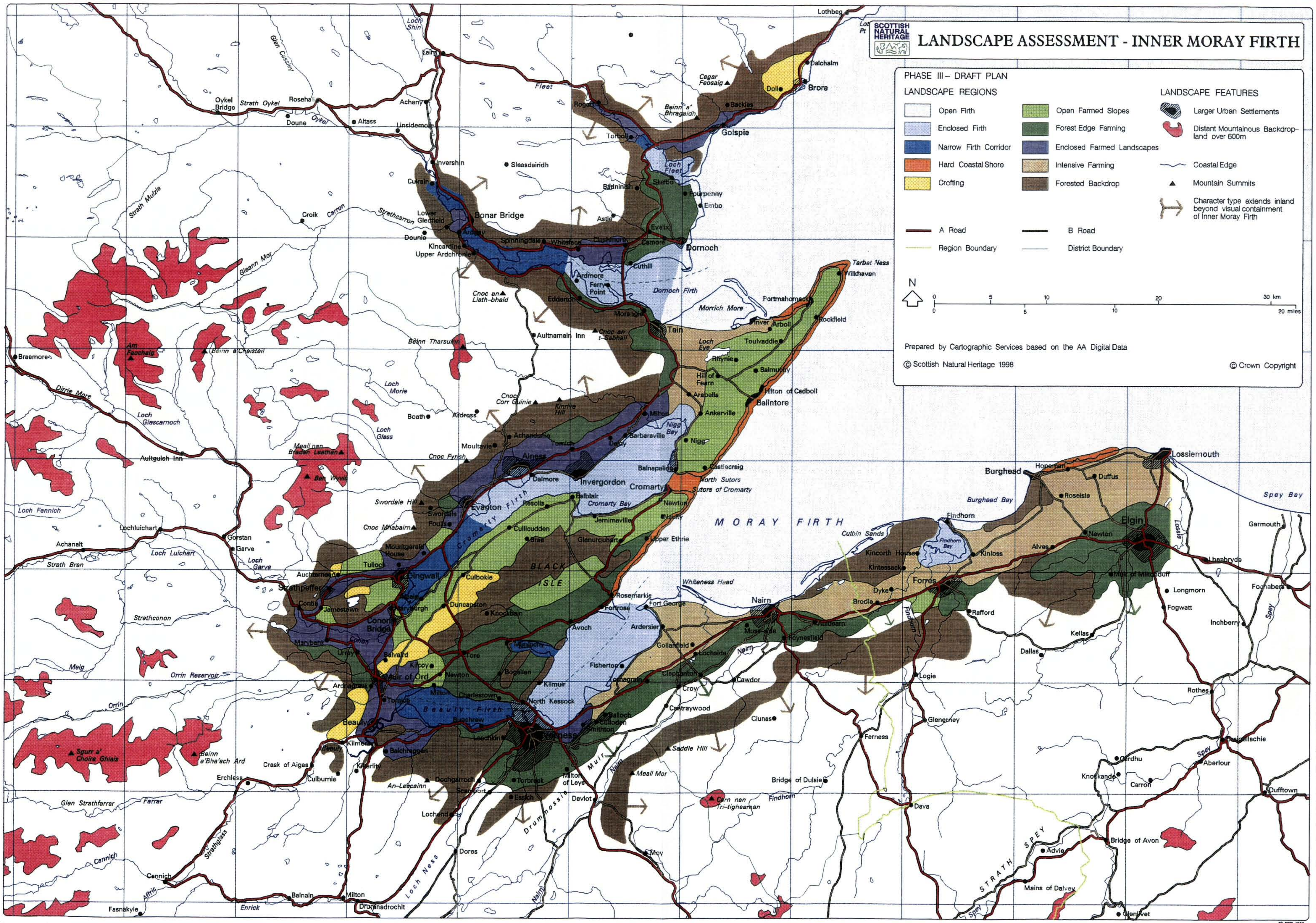
Information gathered from the review and field work were combined in order to identify landscape character types. These were considered and described in terms of shape, scale, pattern, diversity and experience, highlighting the main human responses to landscape. These were constantly tested and refined by assessing their sensitivity to change.

After discussion within the Moray Firth Landscape Assessment Steering Group, it was agreed that only the most important forces for change would be identified and the way in which they relate to each of the character types analysed. The key forces for change were used to establish the particular sensitivities of each landscape type for which guidance principles were then developed.

The desk study and field work was carried out on 1:50,000 maps, and then transferred to 1:250,000. This scale, it was decided, related very well to the diversity of the landscape within the study area and ensured that the character types are depicted at an appropriate and manageable size.

The detailed field work was carried out, as and when necessary from October to November 1995, initially to supplement the original survey work contained within the first two reports and then later as a tool to test the validity of the character types.

As part of the field survey work, a photographic record was kept, from both within and outwith the character types. It became an invaluable reminder of the seasonal and diurnal changes within the landscape, but most importantly highlighted the importance of the firths as an intrinsic part of this landscape.



SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE
LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT - INNER MORAY FIRTH
PHASE III – DRAFT PLAN
LANDSCAPE REGIONS
Open Firth
Enclosed Firth
Narrow Firth Corridor
Hard Coastal Shore
Crofting
Open Farmed Slopes
Forest Edge Farming
Enclosed Farmed Landscapes
Intensive Farming
Forested Backdrop
LANDSCAPE FEATURES
Larger Urban Settlements
Distant Mountainous Backdrop-land over 600m
Coastal Edge
Mountain Summits
Character type extends inland beyond visual containment of Inner Moray Firth
A Road
B Road
Region Boundary
District Boundary
N
0 5 10 20 30 km
0 5 10 20 miles
Prepared by Cartographic Services based on the AA Digital Data
© Scottish Natural Heritage 1998
© Crown Copyright
MORAY FIRTH
BLACK ISLE
Cromarty Firth
Beauly Firth
Dornoch Firth
Inverness
Dingwall
Alness
Invergordon
Cromarty
Tain
Dornoch
Golspie
Brora
Bonar Bridge
Nairn
Forres
Elgin
Burghead
Lossiemouth
Strathpeffer
Muir of Ord
Beauly
Balintore
Spey Bay
Strath Spey
Loch Ness
19-FEB-1998

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.