

MORAY LOCAL LANDSCAPE DESIGNATION REVIEW

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DRAFT REPORT



moray
council

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Chapter 1

Background

1.1. INTRODUCTION

The present Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV) designation in Moray identified in the 2015 Local Development Plan has no background documentation recording the reasons for designation. Considerable change has also occurred to the character of some parts of the AGLV since it was first designated as wind farms and other built development is now accommodated within, and close-by, these landscapes. Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) requires local authorities to identify and protect locally designated areas and to clearly explain the reasons for their designation. The key requirements of this study are therefore to consider afresh areas of local landscape value with the aim of safeguarding and enhancing their character and qualities (including recreation and tourism) and to promote understanding and awareness of these landscapes.

This report sets out the evaluation that has been undertaken of Moray's landscapes to define candidate areas for designation. Draft Statements of Importance are included for these candidate areas.

1.2 APPROACH TO THE STUDY

A 'blank canvas' review of landscape across Moray has been undertaken, allowing consideration of all landscapes across Moray, including areas currently covered by other landscape-based designations. The review has been carried out broadly in accordance with the 2006 HS/SNH Guidance on Local Landscape Designations (but updated where relevant with the 2017 draft guidance). The study has been undertaken in two stages; an initial evaluation of all landscapes within Moray resulting in the definition of candidate areas for local designation undertaken principally as a desk exercise; and a more detailed assessment of candidate areas involving field work to define boundaries and landscape qualities and preparation of Statements of Importance.

The study has been overseen by a Steering Group with members of that group additionally being involved in field work with the consultant and contributing specialist knowledge to the draft

Statements of Importance. The Steering Group have confirmed that the preferred name for local landscape designations in Moray is Special Landscape Area (SLA).

1.3 STAGE ONE EVALUATION

A review has been undertaken of landscape character based on consideration of the revised SNH landscape character assessment for Moray, the 2016 Moray Wind Energy Landscape Capacity Study (MWELCS) and settlement capacity studies undertaken by Alison Grant for Forres, Fochabers, Lossiemouth and Elgin. This review has additionally been informed by the consultant's knowledge of Moray's landscapes and has resulted in the identification of 32 landscape character units for assessment (Figure 1).

The number of landscape character units identified for evaluation is considerably more than the SNH classification and identified in the MWELCS. This is because it was considered that a more detailed breakdown was needed along the coast and close to settlements where there are notable variations in character and in some uplands areas where significant landscape change is likely to occur due to consented wind farm development.

Desk review of background information has been undertaken together with some field assessment. Evaluation tables have been drafted for each landscape character unit with the assessment principally considering the following information (see Figures 2-4):

- Nature conservation designations including NNRs, SACs, SSSIs, RAMSAR sites, Ancient and long-established woodland, local nature conservation sites, SSSI citations have been reviewed to ascertain the reasons for designation and to identify geological/geomorphological interests.
- Information from the Historic Environment Records including Inventory listed Gardens and Designed Landscapes, SAMs, listed buildings and monuments and battlefields and the Historic Land Use Assessment.
- SNH Wildness mapping (composite and four constituent layers).



- Core Paths and other recreational interests including walking guides and Forestry Commission literature on facilities.

The evaluation considers consented development to form part of the landscape and visual baseline. The most significant landscape change likely to be associated with such developments is the consented Dorenell wind farm located in the Cabrach area, an area currently designated as an Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV). Route options for the proposed dualling of the A96 have also been reviewed and any potential effects on candidate SLAs will be set out in the study.

Cross-boundary landscape designations have also been considered particularly where Moray abuts the North Coast and Deveron Valley Special Landscape Areas in Aberdeenshire (Figure 5). This has involved review of the key reasons for designation of these SLAs and studying how they

interface and relate to adjacent landscapes in Moray. Relevant issues relating to adjoining landscape designations are noted in the evaluation tables.

All 32 landscape character units have been analysed and scored against key criteria, largely as set out in the HS/SNH 2006 guidance. The assessment avoids applying overly complex matrices and numerical scoring, with the emphasis being on providing well-reasoned judgements based on thorough field work and assessment.

The evaluation focusses on the key 'landscape character and qualities' identified in 3.4 of the guidance and rates these on a five-point scale of high, high-medium, medium, medium-low and low. The criteria considered in the evaluation are set out in the Table 1 below:

Table 1: Stage One evaluation criteria

Criteria	Factors considered in the assessment
Rarity /Typicality	<p>Whether this is a rare or unique landscape or has some rare features when compared with other landscapes within Moray. Does this landscape have a distinct 'sense of place'?</p> <p>How commonplace is this landscape within Moray? If many similar landscapes are present, is this one a particularly good example?</p> <p>Does the landscape have a strong identity?</p>
Scenic Qualities	<p>The degree of diversity of landform, vegetation cover and settlement.</p> <p>Does the landscape form/include an iconic or landmark feature?</p> <p>Does the juxtaposition and contrast of this landscape character area with adjacent landscapes make an important contribution to wider scenic quality?</p> <p>Consideration of the setting the landscape may provide to key archaeological/historic features or settlements.</p> <p>The integrity of the landscape in terms of its composition, for example, does it comprise a few high-quality features with the rest of the landscape being less diverse? Does the landscape have a sense of cohesion with each of its parts strongly contributing to the whole?</p>



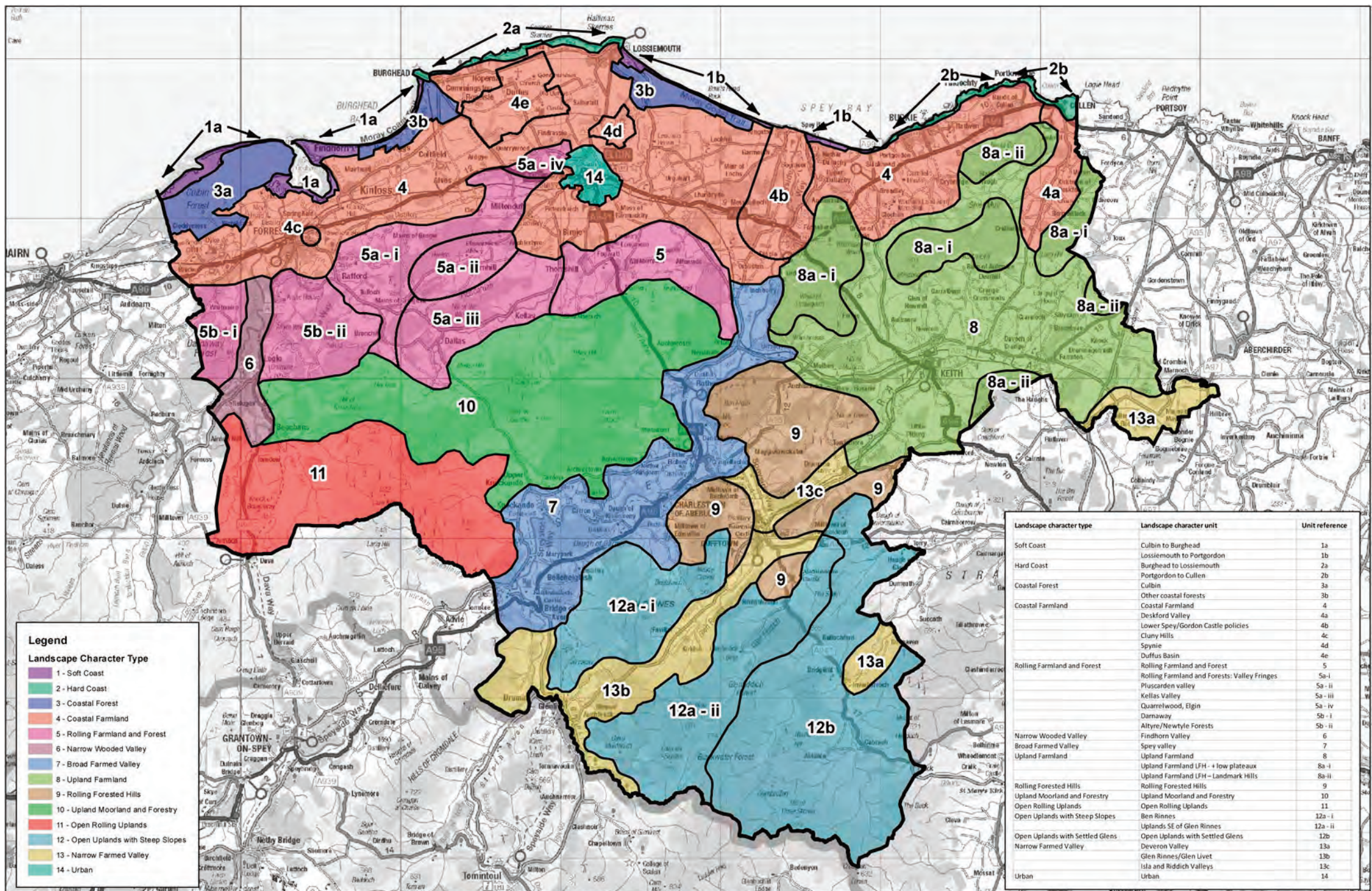
	<p>Consideration of experiential qualities such as the 'sense of place' and aesthetic qualities (such as colour, texture, contrast, change).</p> <p>The quality of views, including consideration of whether there are focal points, revelatory or panoramic views to and from the landscape or whether views are more contained and intimate.</p>
Enjoyment	Recreational use including the presence of core footpaths, cycle ways, tourist and visitor destinations. As access rights have considerably increased recreational opportunities within most landscapes, a judgement has been made on the likely intensity of use with the presence of a strong network of core paths, National Cycle Routes (NCR), Long Distant Paths, promoted activities such as watersports, and presence of known popular hills or coasts and the degree of promotion of recreational pursuits, tending to increase the score.
Cultural qualities	Historic site-specific information including listed buildings, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Conservation Areas and the presence of Inventory of Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes principally inform this assessment.
Naturalness	The presence of international and national designations such as SPAs, SACs, RAMSAR and SSSI sites, Local Biodiversity Sites (LBS) and ancient/semi-natural and long-established woodlands inform this assessment together with judgements made on more perceptual qualities such the relative modification of the landscape and the degree of seclusion or remoteness experienced. SNH's Wildness Mapping has also been reviewed as part of this assessment.

Other factors are considered in the evaluation but are not formally scored. These include consideration of connectivity, defined as being either physical (the extension of a major river valley or woodlands across character unit boundaries) or visual (identifying where a landscape may contribute to wider scenic composition, for example hill slopes providing a backdrop to a valley). Any cross-boundary issues with adjoining authorities and existing landscape designations are also identified under this criterion. Variations in quality across the landscape are also noted as this is useful in evaluating candidate Special Landscape Areas and defining boundaries in subsequent stages of the study.

1.4 OTHER LANDSCAPE-BASED DESIGNATIONS IN MORAY

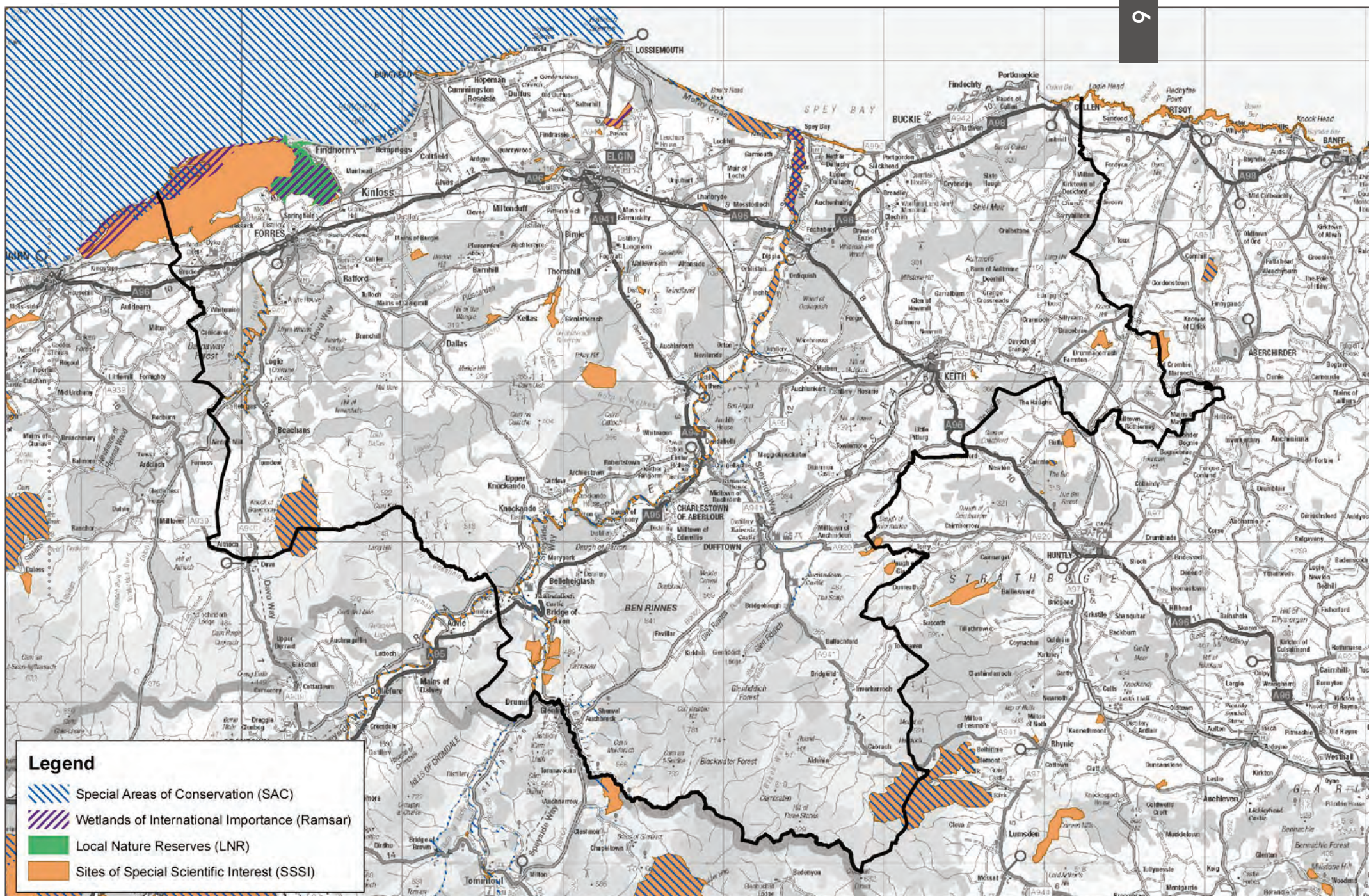
There are a range of other landscape-based designations in Moray which may have a similar role to any potential local landscape designations. These include the Coastal Protection Zone, Pluscarden Special Area of Control, and Countryside Around Towns designations (Figure 6). The AGLV designation is likely to have been defined primarily on the basis of the scenic value of the landscape while a more holistic approach to designation of local landscape areas is now advocated which includes consideration of value associated with cultural heritage, nature conservation and recreation. The Council will consider the function and policy attached to existing landscape-based designations once the review of local landscape designations is finalised.

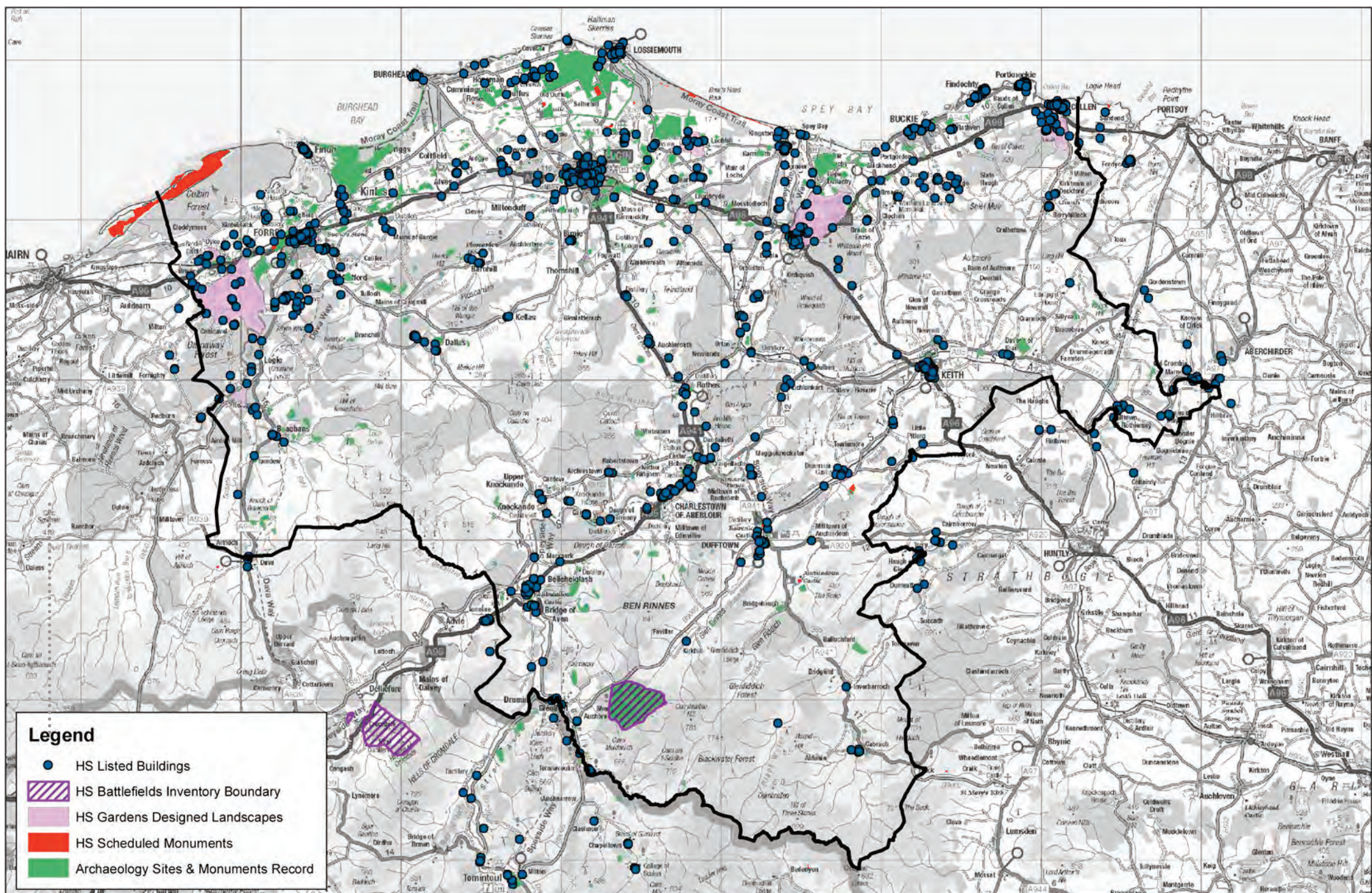


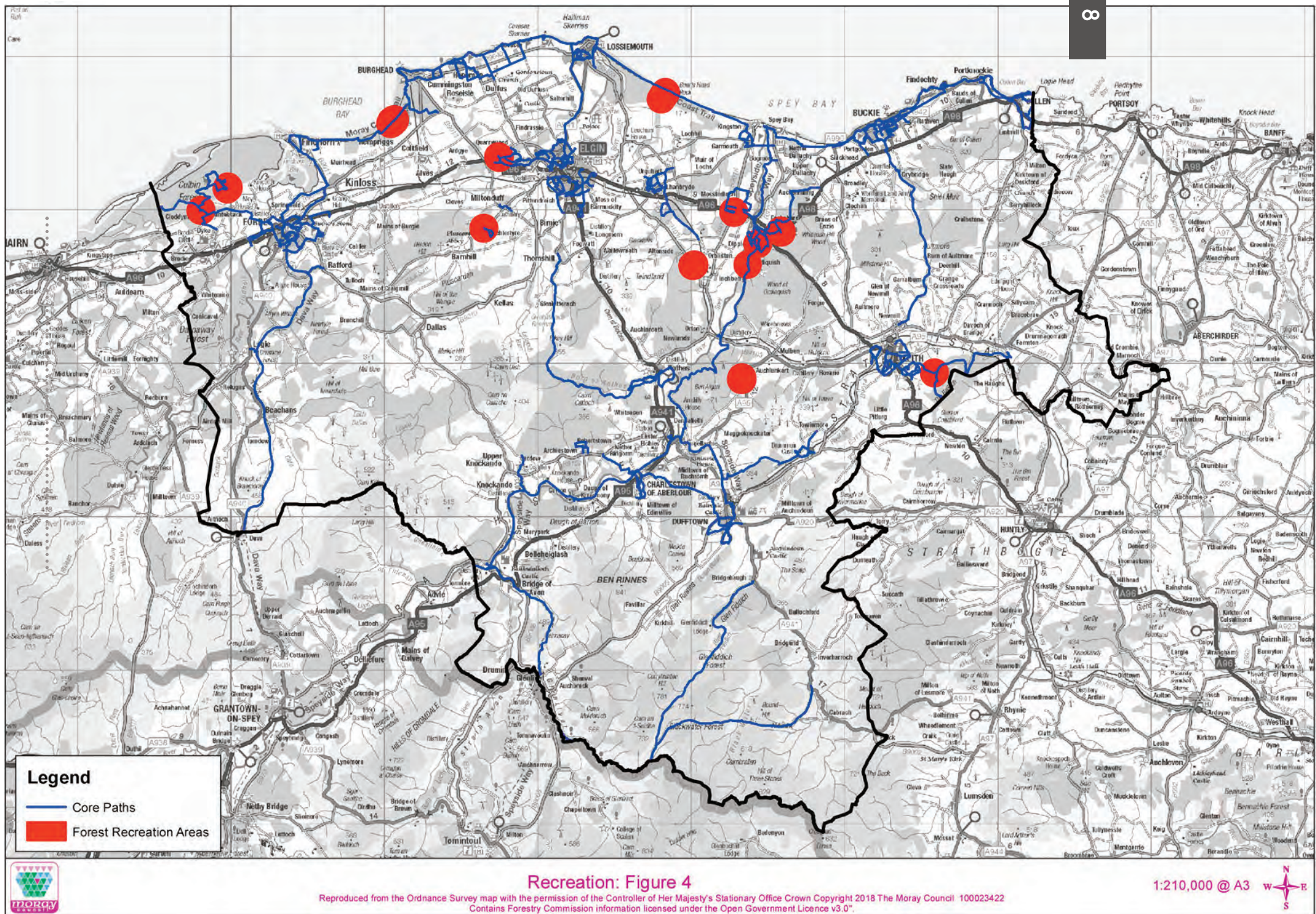


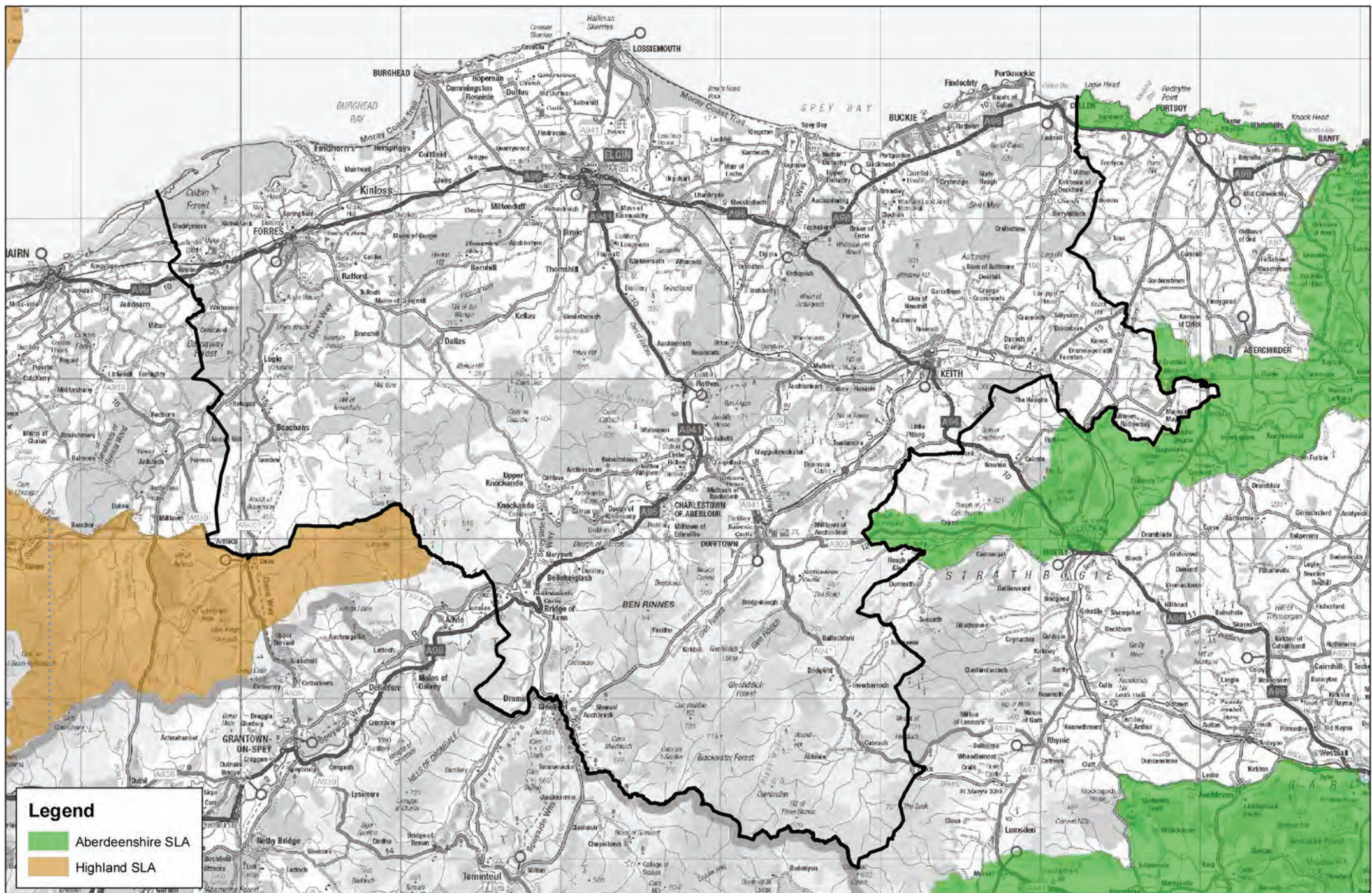
Landscape Character Units Evaluated in Stage One: Figure 1

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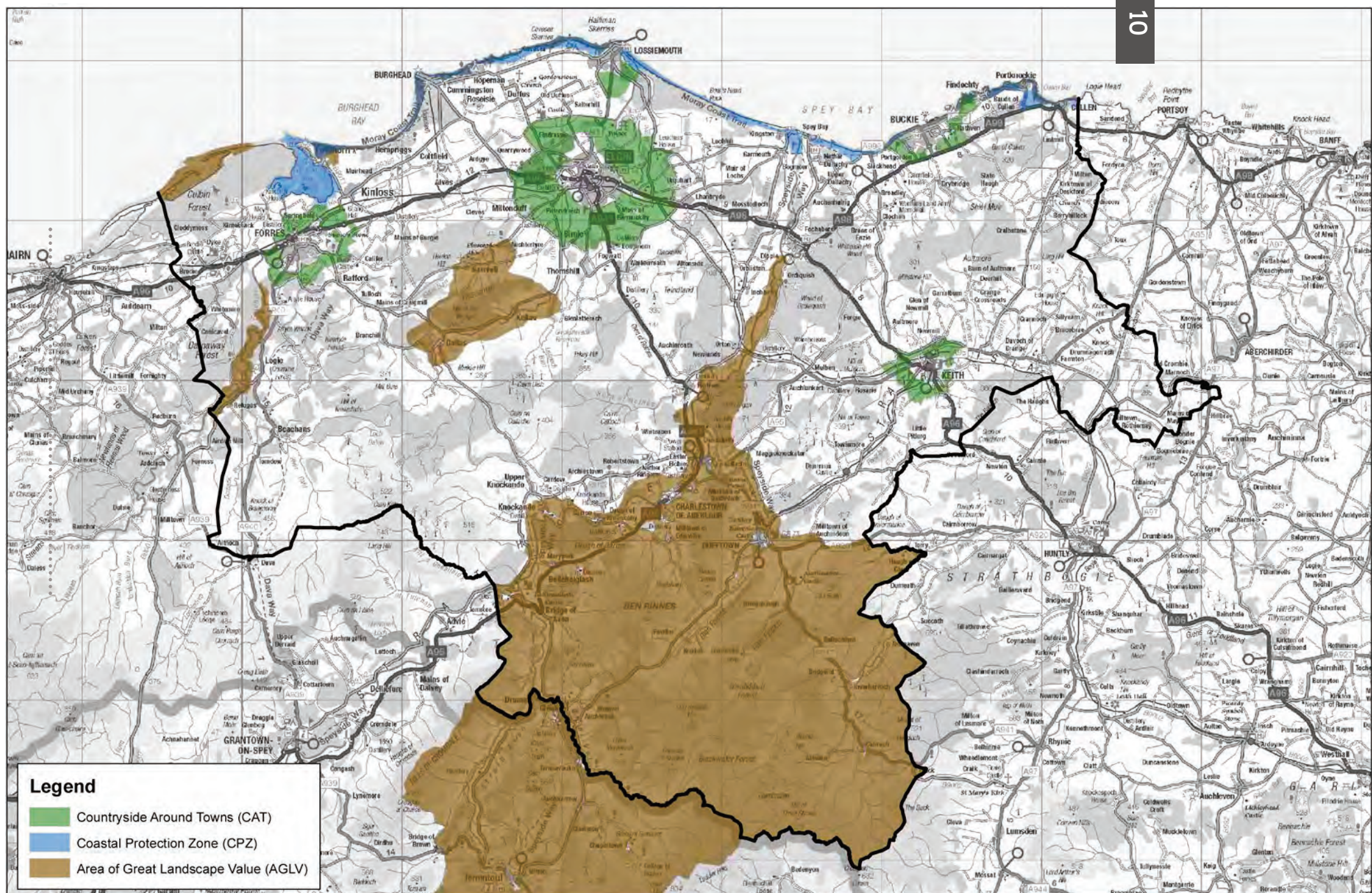


SLA Designations in Highland and Aberdeenshire: Figure 5

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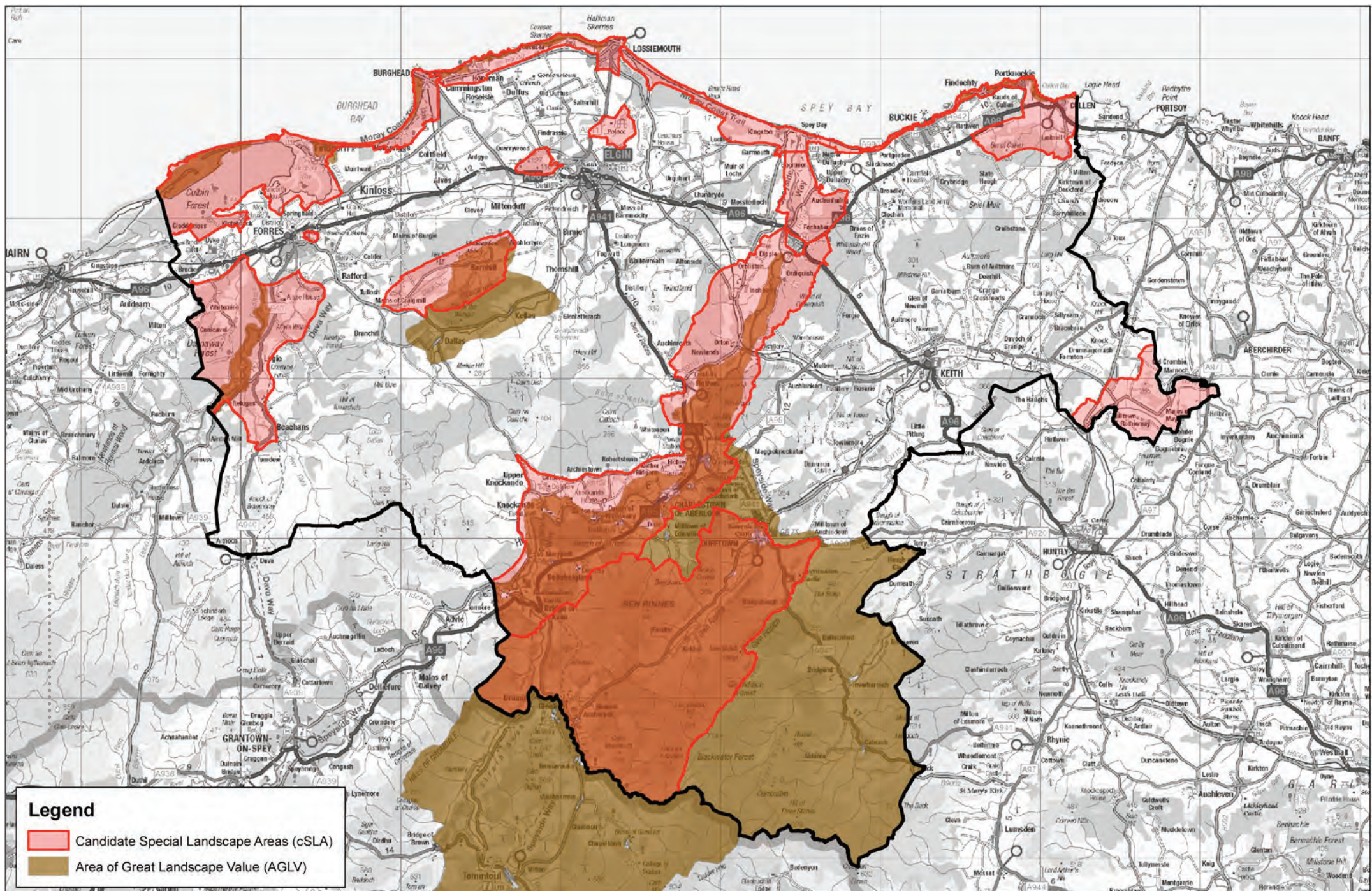




Moray Local Landscape Designations: Figure 6

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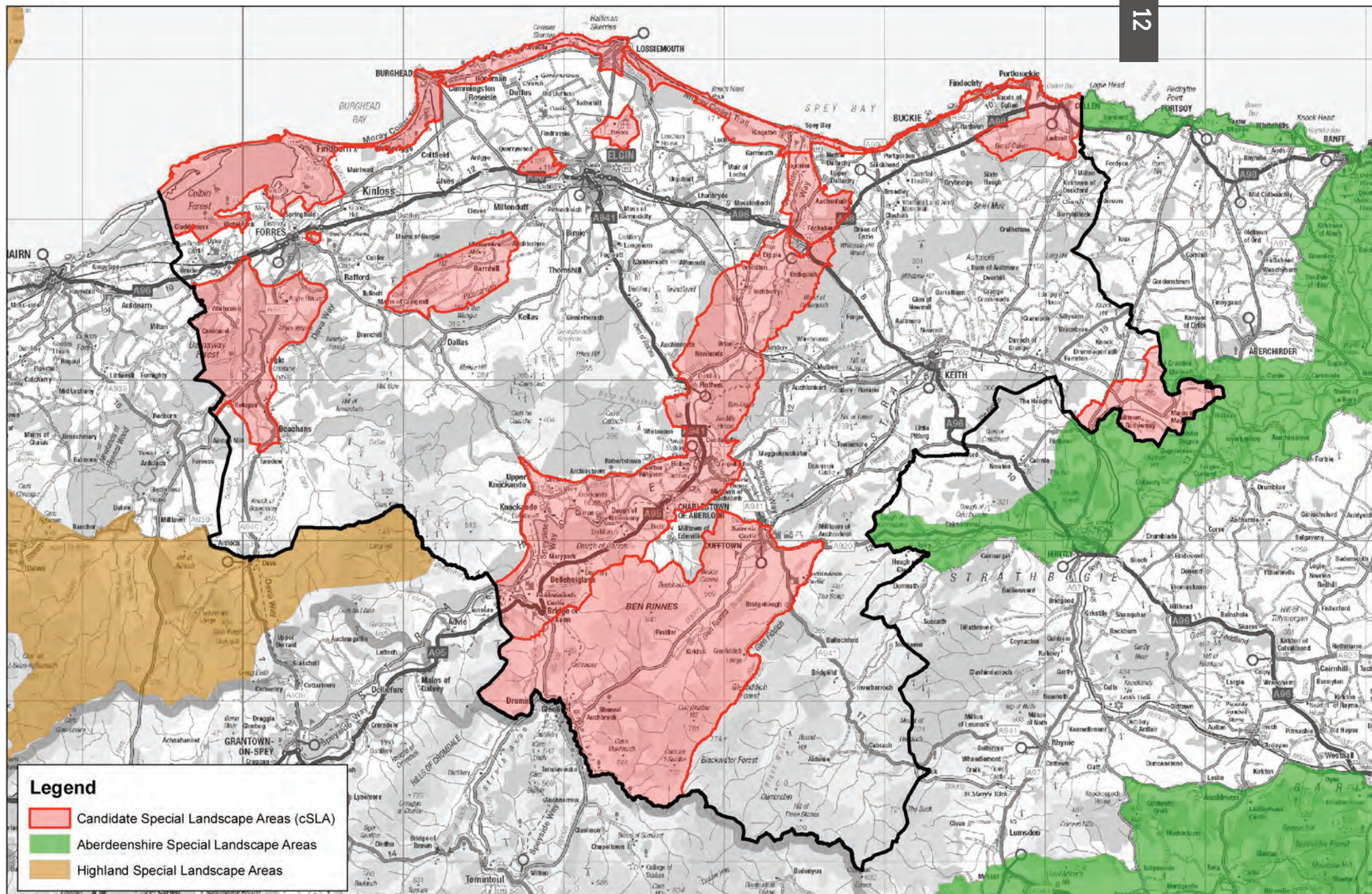


Candidate Special Landscape Areas with Area of Great Landscape Value

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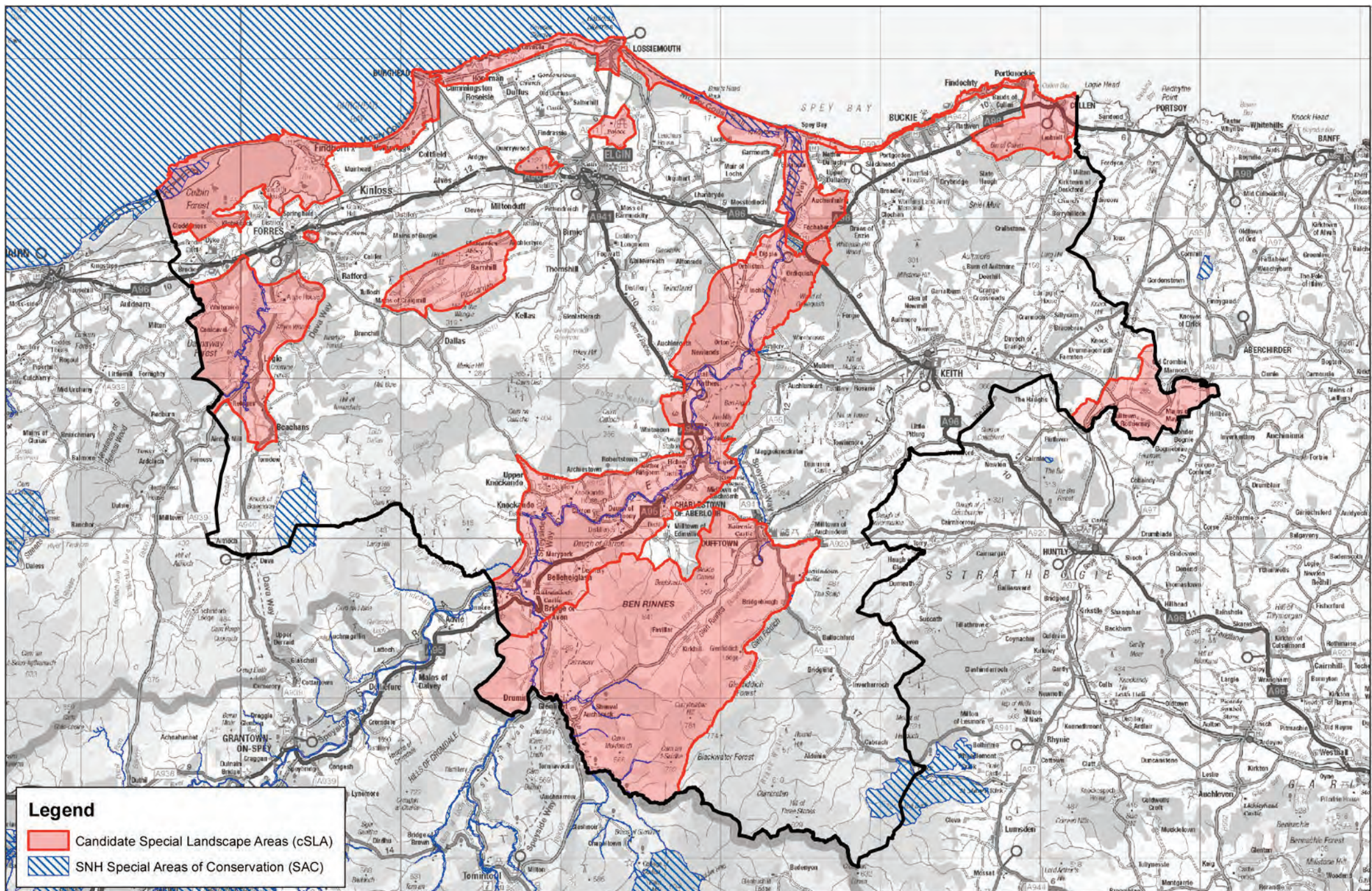


Candidate Special Landscape Areas with neighbouring Special Landscape Areas

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Chapter 2

Stage One Evaluation



STAGE ONE EVALUATION

Stage One evaluation tables for each of the 32 landscape units assessed in the study are contained in Annex A.

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A five-point scale was used when scoring landscape criteria. The overall scores attributed to each landscape character unit applies a simple numerical system of 1-5 as follows:

High	(5)
High-medium	(4)
Medium	(3)
Medium – low	(2)
Low	(1)

No weighting has been applied to individual criterion. A score of 18 was agreed with the Steering Group as being an appropriate threshold which captured the more consistently high scoring landscapes across the majority of the assessment criteria. Landscapes above this score proceeded to Stage Two for detailed assessment as candidate SLAs.





Landscape character type	Landscape character unit	Unit reference	Score	Other considerations
Soft Coast	Culbin to Burghead	1a	24	Connection with 1b, 3a and Roseisle Forest in 3b
	Lossiemouth to Portgordon	1b	21	Connection with 1a, 2b and parts of 3b
Hard Coast	Burghead to Lossiemouth	2a	24	
	Portgordon to Cullen	2b	21	SLA present west of Cullen in Aberdeenshire. Strong links to Bin of Cullen and Cullen House Inventory listed designed landscape.
Coastal Forest	Culbin	3a	22	
	Other coastal forests	3b	13	Part of Roseisle Forest well used for recreation and strongly connected to 1a. The coastal edges of forests lying next to the Lossiemouth to Portgordon coast (1b) provide a setting to the coast and accommodate some recreational routes and archaeological interest.
Coastal Farmland	Coastal Farmland	4	13	
	Deskford Valley	4a	15	
	Lower Spey/Gordon Castle policies	4b	24	Links with 7 but also with Gordon Castle Inventory listed designed landscape.
	Cluny Hills	4c	20	A relatively small unit adjacent to Forres
	Spynie	4d	23	Historic links to the coast (1b)
	Duffus Basin	4e	16	Historic links to the coast (1b)
Rolling Farmland and Forest	Rolling Farmland and Forest	5	7	
	Rolling Farmland and Forests: Valley Fringes	5a-i	14	
	Pluscarden valley	5a - ii	20	A strongly contained landscape with little connection with adjoining areas.
	Kellas Valley	5a - iii	15	
	Quarrelwood, Elgin	5a - iv	20	A relatively small unit adjacent to Elgin
	Darnaway	5b - i	22	Connection with Findhorn valley (6)
	Altyre/Newtyle Forests	5b - ii	19	Western part connected to Findhorn Valley (6)
Narrow Wooded Valley	Findhorn Valley	6	25	
Broad Farmed Valley	Spey valley	7	20	Links with 4b, 12a-l and high edge hills in 9 and 11

Upland Farmland	Upland Farmland	8	9	
	Upland Farmland LFH - + low plateaux	8a -i	9	
	Upland Farmland LFH – Landmark Hills	8a-ii	16	Small units. Cullen Bin visual connection to (2b).
Rolling Forested Hills	Rolling Forested Hills	9	12	
Upland Moorland and Forestry	Upland Moorland and Forestry	10	8	
Open Rolling Uplands	Open Rolling Uplands	11	13	SW adjacent to SLA in Highland. Consented Cairn Duhie wind farm will instigate major landscape change
Open Uplands with Steep Slopes	Ben Rinnes	12a - i	22	Connection with 13b, 7 (where it strongly contributes to scenic composition) and 12a-ii. Under-construction Dorenell wind farm will have a strong influence on views in eastern parts of this area.
	Uplands SE of Glen Rinnes	12a - ii	19	Connection with 13b and 12a-i
Open Uplands with Settled Glens	Open Uplands with Settled Glens	12b	12	Under-construction Dorenell wind farm will instigate major landscape change.
Narrow Farmed Valley	Deveron Valley	13a	18	SLA covering Deveron Valley in Aberdeenshire. SW area of upper Deveron less characteristic of Deveron as a whole, influenced by wind farm development located in adjacent uplands and does not adjoin similar SLA designation in Aberdeenshire.
	Glen Rinnes/Glen Livet	13b	20	Borders Cairngorms National Park and strong connectivity to Ben Rinnes 12a-I and 12a-ii
	Isla and Riddich Valleys	13c	14	





Chapter 3

Stage Two candidate Special Landscape Areas

STAGE TWO CANDIDATE SPECIAL LANDSCAPE AREAS

Consideration of the higher scoring landscape character types identified during the Stage One evaluation by the Steering Group resulted in the following candidate Special Landscape Areas being defined:

The **Culbin to Burghead Coast**, including Culbin Forest and the part of the Roseisle Forest which is most well-used for recreation.

The **Burghead to Lossiemouth Coast**.

The **Lossiemouth to Portgordon Coast**.

The **Portgordon to Cullen Coast**, including the Cullen House designed landscape and the Bin of Cullen.

Lower Spey including **Gordon Castle policies**.

The **Spey Valley**

Pluscarden Valley

Findhorn Valley and the Wooded Estates (including Darnaway and Altyre)

The **Deveron Valley**, which will continue the SLA within Aberdeenshire

Spynie

Cluny Hill, Forres

Quarrelwood, Elgin

Ben Rinnes, including Glen Rinnes, Glen Livet and the uplands to the south-east of Glen Rinnes.

The name of each of the candidate SLAs is highlighted in bold in the above list and they are shown on Figure 7.

Draft maps of each candidate SLA have been produced either at 1:50,000 scale or 1:25,000 scale. Detailed field survey has been undertaken to define boundaries of the candidate SLAs. Boundaries aim to follow firm physical features such as rivers, forest edges, roads and tracks in accordance with the SNH/HS guidance. In some instances, however, prominent ridgelines have been used as boundaries where they define a valley edge for example. Features which form distinct 'entry points' to a landscape, for example woodlands marking a clear change in character or steep slopes which contain a coastline or valley, were also considered in determining boundaries.

Draft Statements of Importance have been produced for each of these candidate SLAs. These accord with the SNH/HS guidance in being structured to initially explain the boundaries selected for the candidate area and to summarise the reasons for designation of the area. A fuller description of the character and special qualities of the candidate SLA is then provided and this, together with the reasons for designation, should be used to inform any decision on development which may adversely affect the designated landscape.

The sensitivity of the landscape to development and land use change is then addressed and this considers potential threats, largely in the form of development or land-use change. Management recommendations are then set out and principally aim to provide guidance on what types of development may be appropriate in the designated landscape; existing conservation and management measures are not addressed. The recommendations are specific to the designated landscape and more generic best practice in siting and design of developments will additionally apply and is not repeated in the Statement of Importance. The recommendations are not exhaustive and may need to be periodically updated to address any change that has occurred to the landscape and/or any new threats to its special qualities.

Figure 7 A3 here





STATEMENT OF IMPORTANCE: CULBIN TO BURGHEAD COAST

Location and boundaries

This candidate SLA extends along the coast from the administrative boundary with The Highland Council in the west to include the coastal settlement of Burghead to the east. Although it is predominantly coastal in character, it also includes adjoining areas of forest at Culbin and Roseisle which contribute to the diversity of this stretch of coastline and provide extensive recreational opportunities strongly linked to the coast.

While the boundaries of this candidate SLA trace the low water mark to the north, the wider Moray Firth comprises an essential part of the character of this coastal area. Findhorn Bay is included within the candidate area with the southern boundary following flood embankments and minor roads on the fringes of this dynamic tidal basin. The extents of the forests of Roseisle and Culbin largely form inland boundaries elsewhere with the proposed boundary constricting close to the coast to exclude the RAF Kinloss base west of Findhorn and following the dismantled railway line south of Burghead where, to the west, Roseisle Forest is more commercial in character and generally less well used for recreation.



Reasons for designation

This candidate SLA comprises part of the renowned Moray coast and the more diverse coastal forest which adjoins it. While all this coast is a popular destination for recreation, it is particularly well-frequented close to Findhorn. The Culbin area includes nationally important coastal features and wildlife habitats. The intriguing history of this stretch of the Moray coast also adds a further dimension to the richness of this landscape with nationally important WWII structures forming an important part of its character.



Description of character and special qualities

The coastal edge is diverse comprising sand bars, dunes, saltmarsh, a tidal basin and long sandy beaches. The dynamism of this coastline is particularly noticeable in the Culbin area where noticeable changes occur to the length and shape of sand bars and tidal marshes and beaches contract and expand dramatically with the tides, but also evident in the tidal fluctuations within Findhorn Bay. The coast at Culbin is designated a SSSI, in part, for its geomorphological interest.





The coastal forests of Culbin and Roseisle form the immediate hinterland to much of this coastline. Both forests predominantly comprise Scots and Corsican pine, largely planted on sand dunes. Culbin Forest is particularly valued for its rich variety of lichens being designated an SSSI for its biological interest. Dunes are higher and more complex closer to the coast although in the Findhorn area isolated dunes vegetated with grass, heather and gorse stand within flatter patchy heathland colonising stony sandy slacks behind the coastal edge. SPA and Ramsar designations apply to this part of the Moray Firth coast and the coast is particularly rich in wildlife in the quieter Culbin area where basking seals and a wide variety of birds including nesting terns are present.

The coast is very well used for recreation with sailing, walking on long beaches and the Moray Coast Trail and walking/cycling in the forests particularly popular activities. Formal recreational facilities are provided in both Culbin and Roseisle Forests. The more remote western end of Culbin is less frequented and has a distinct sense of wildness.



WWII defences are present along much of the coast with anti-glider poles a distinctive feature that has been designated a Scheduled Monument on the sands and saltmarsh of Culbin, and further defences such as anti-tank blocks and pillboxes aligning the coastal edge between Findhorn and Burghead. During WWII the beaches around Findhorn were used in rehearsals for the D-Day landings in Normandy, and several tanks were lost offshore with one off Findhorn Bay now a War Grave.

Another dimension to the cultural interest of this coast is related to the dynamism of this coast with notable sandstorms in the 17th and 18th century created by the removal of grasses from the dunes for thatching. An entire farming township was buried in 1694, and the role of local estates, followed eventually by the Forestry Commission, led to innovative tree planting techniques to help stabilise the sands. This has resulted in the look and feel of the current landscape today.

The present village of Findhorn village post-dates 1701 when an earlier settlement located on the north-western side of Findhorn Bay was washed away. The village comprises rows of fisherman's cottages laid gable end to the water with lanes called stryplies between them. Findhorn was once the principal port of Moray trading with Leith, Aberdeen and London in 1798 exporting salmon and grain and importing other goods. A salmon ice house is present in the village. On the foreshore lie wrecks of the Zulu fishing boats, once favoured by the herring fishermen of Findhorn before they were abandoned at the start of WWI when the men went off to fight. The Findhorn Community lies south-east of Findhorn village and features an eclectic collection of eco-buildings set within the confines of dunes and woodland.

Burghead is prominently sited on a narrow rocky headland at the eastern extent of this coastal area. This settlement has a rich history with the largest Pictish fort in Scotland occupying the promontory, and a distinctive grid pattern of buildings laid out in the 19th century when it was Moray's principal herring station.



Views across Moray Firth focus on the gap of the Cromarty Firth and the distinctive group of hills centred on Scarben and Morven in Sutherland. An overwhelming sense of light and space can be experienced on the expansive marshes and tidal sands of Culbin in the west. In the east the eye of the viewer follows the subtly curving arc of sand and dark pine forest edging Burghead Bay, focussing on the prominent rocky outcrop of old Burghead and the more hunkered down cottages of Findhorn sheltered by vegetated dunes which curl around the spit at the mouth of the Findhorn Bay.

Sensitivity to change

- The more remote and strongly natural character of the coast in the Culbin area would be sensitive to significantly increased numbers of visitors, potentially affecting wildlife and fragile saltmarsh habitat, and to most forms of development.
- This coast would be sensitive to offshore wind energy developments which were sufficiently close to adversely affect its character and which significantly intruded on views across the Firth to the Sutherland Hills.
- The character of Findhorn Bay (where marshy fringes merge gradually with low-lying farmland to the south) and views to and across the bay could be affected by any built development which interrupted its strongly horizontal and open character.
- The tightly clustered form and relatively small buildings within the settlement of Findhorn could be diminished by any new development of larger, widely-spaced buildings located on its periphery and visually juxtaposed with older housing. The traditional location of residential buildings set well back from the beach and dune slack area could also be eroded by the encroachment of development (whether housing or chalet parks) closer to the coast.
- RAF development at Kinloss currently influences the coast east of Findhorn and the introduction of additional tall structures could exacerbates effects on the natural character of beaches and the sea.

Management recommendations

- Ensure that the remote and strongly natural character of the Culbin coast is protected through continued visitor management which restricts vehicular access to the coast. Careful assessment should be undertaken to consider effects of any off-shore development which may adversely affect the highly sensitive western part of the coast in particular.
- Consider the pattern and scale of any new housing or tourism proposals in and around Findhorn in relation to the original core of the village and to avoid further eroding the remnant dune slack area.
- Careful assessment of any development proposals which may impact on the character of Findhorn Bay, considering views to and from the bay.





STATEMENT OF IMPORTANCE: BURGHEAD TO LOSSIEMOUTH COAST

Location and boundaries

Extending from Burghead in the west to Lossiemouth in the east, this candidate SLA focuses on the coast but also includes the low ridge, which provides the wider setting to the coast and accommodates footpaths linking the coast and inland areas, to the south. The expansive basin of the Moray Firth forms an essential component of this candidate SLA although the boundary traces the low water mark to the north. The B9040 forms the inland boundary to the east and the ridgeline of Clarkly Hill and urban edge of Burghead to the west.

Reasons for designation

This section of the coast is particularly scenic as it features the highest cliffs in Moray and comprises a richly complex array of other rocky landform features with some of these designated for their geological interest. This coast is also important in terms of early history with reptile fossils and evidence of early people's use of caves adding to its interest. Like all the Moray coast, this candidate SLA is well-used for recreation.



Description of character and special qualities

This is a coastline of great variety comprising cliffs, headlands and stacks, caves, small shingle bays edged by blocky rocks, low rocky platforms and occasional sandy beaches. The coastal edge becomes more uniformly sandy to the east near Lossiemouth. The highest cliffs occur in the Covesea area and these feature a particularly complex landform of sheer grassy slopes and dips, rocky stacks and headlands. The Cummingston Stacks in the western part of this coast are popular with climbers.

Low rocky platforms littered with huge rounded cobbles are interspersed with small secluded shingle and sand beaches contained by cliff-girt headlands. The diverse texture of rock contributes to the rich diversity of this coastline with bubbly slabs, smooth low fractured plates, containing numerous small pools, and fissured and twisted low cliffs. There are geological SSSIs at Burghead, Clashach and Lossiemouth recognising these coastal features which were formed from sandstone laid down 200-250m million years ago; several of which bear fossilised footprints of the ancient reptiles that roamed the land.



Caves are an intriguing feature of this coast, forming a focus when seen against a foreground of sandy beach in views from the coastal path. The caves have been used from the Neolithic (c3000BC) onwards, with particular importance being attached to them in the Bronze Age (c2000BC – 800BC) where they are an incredibly rare example of a surviving mortuary complex from this period. Later Pictish use of these caves is shown through symbols carved on the walls in the Sculptor's Cave.

Steep grassy slopes and headlands are smothered with primroses in the spring. Lichens and sea pinks colonise rocky ledges and outcrops while the immediate hinterland is dominated by gorse with pockets of species rich grassland.

The well-used Moray Coast Trail path is aligned on a former railway line in the west but comprises more of a winding path largely tracing the coastal edge, often through banks of gorse on higher ground further east. Footpaths link with Duffus inland over the ridge in the Covesea area.



The Skerries Lighthouse at Covesea, designed in 1844 by Allan Stevenson, sits on a rocky promontory undercut with caves. The WWII coastal defences which are such a feature of the Moray coast are evident in a headland look-out tower near Covesea and concrete anti-tank blocks closer to Lossiemouth.

The settlement of Hopeman was founded as a fishing port in 1805 with the harbour later expanded for export of stone from nearby quarries. Although this settlement has been considerably expanded on its periphery with modern housing development, it retains its distinct association with the coastal edge and has an intact historic core.



Views are exhilarating from the coast path, looking down precipitous slopes and rock faces and over the Moray Firth to the distant Sutherland hills. Expansive sea views are also a feature from footpaths on Clarkly Hill (and from the community woodland located on this ridge). A sense of wildness can be experienced in the Covesea area where the coast is more remote from settlement and where cliffs are higher, rugged and more dramatic.



Sensitivity to change

- The coastal edge would be sensitive to any built development or further quarrying which could detract from the sense of seclusion that can be experienced on more remote headlands distant from settlement and which may interrupt the continuity and integrity of the coast.
- The integrity of former fishing villages such as Hopeman could be affected by settlement expansion which may weaken its strong association with the coast and detract from its distinctive architectural character.
- This coast would be sensitive to offshore wind energy developments which were sufficiently close to adversely affect its character and which significantly intruded on views to the Sutherland Hills.

Management recommendations

- A quarry between Hopeman and Covesea interrupts the integrity of the coastal edge and the continuity of the Moray Coast Trail path along the cliff top although it forms part of the SSSI designated along this coast and is important for fossil reptile tracks. Explore the possibility of establishing footpath loops and interpretation post restoration of the quarry.
- Enhance the footpath on Clarkly Hill ridge by broadening its corridor, replacing unsightly fences with a hedgerow on the upside of the path/a new fence on the seaward side and encouraging species-rich grassland on verges.
- Maintain the focus of any new development within existing coastal settlements in order to retain the character and settlement pattern of this coastal area. Ensure that any built development does not adversely affect the integrity of existing settlement or the strong association with the coast by being located on the coastal shelf and not on rising slopes – the present distinct separation of existing settlements should be retained.
- Any new building should be of the highest quality and of a scale and style that reflects buildings within the original core of the settlement.



STATEMENT OF IMPORTANCE: LOSSIEMOUTH TO PORTGORDON COAST

Location and boundaries

This candidate SLA extends from Lossiemouth to Portgordon, marking a distinct change in the character of the coastal edge from the long, predominantly cobbled, beach of this candidate SLA to a rocky and settled coastline in the east. Although the seaward boundary follows the low water mark the Moray Firth forms an essential part of the character of this coastal area. Inland, the boundary follows the southern banks of the River Lossie in the west and keeps relatively close to the coast to exclude gravel quarrying operations. The boundary is aligned thereafter on forest tracks, and partially on the alternative routes of the Moray Coast Trail, to include Binn Hill in the east, which forms a local landmark feature close to the coast, and the settlement of Garmouth. The former railway bridge over the Spey forms the boundary between this candidate SLA and the Lower Spey Valley candidate SLA to the south. East of the River Spey the inland boundary is aligned on the edge of woodland and the Moray Coast Trail to the edge of Portgordon.

Reasons for designation

The braided mouth of the Spey and ridged cobble beaches of this candidate SLA are rare features within Moray and include areas designated for their geomorphological and nature conservation importance. Like all the Moray coastline, this candidate SLA is also well-used for recreation although a sense of seclusion is a key characteristic in the more remote middle sections of the coast where scheduled WWII defences have a particularly evocative quality.



Description of character and special qualities

This coast comprises a relatively narrow and very gently curving beach composed almost entirely of large smooth pale cobbles. The coastal edge gradually becomes sandier with dunes and spit at the mouth of the River Lossie. The beach forms steep-sided ridges of cobbles which are aligned parallel to the sea. A broad dip occurs between the beach and the forest edge and this is made up of smaller stones, sand and gravels colonised by patchy low grasses, sea pinks and gorse. The complex braided mouth of the river at Spey Bay is patterned by sand banks, vegetated islands and edged by wetlands with reeds and grassland and forms part of the Spey Bay SSSI and includes Natura sites which are internationally important for threatened habitats and species.



Pine forest forms the hinterland to this coast with some of this planted on dunes. The dynamism and hostile conditions of this coast are manifest in strewn bleached tree trunks and battered salt-browned trees on the forest edge. Binn Hill forms a locally prominent feature in the immediate hinterland of the coast. A ridgeline curves round to the west of the settlement of Garmouth to link with Binn Hill.

A consistent line of WWII anti-tank blocks, regularly interspersed with pill boxes, is aligned in the dip behind the beach. Look-out buildings are raised on dunes on the forest edge, and a coastal battery that once protected Lossiemouth from the threat of invasion all form one of the best surviving stretches of coastal defence from this period in Scotland. These defences are Scheduled for their cultural interest.



Lossiemouth forms a key feature seen along open beaches in part due to its location on a promontory elevated above the coast. The settlements of Kingston and Spey Bay sit either side of the mouth of the Spey, close to the coast. Low housing in Kingston is hunched down behind ridges of cobbles; this settlement was originally developed in the 18th century for shipbuilding with timber from Rothiemurchus/Glenmore processed for export at Garmouth until the diversion of the Spey in the 19th Century. Spey Bay was once the principal salmon fishing station on the Spey and a large ice house is present in the village and open to the public. Garmouth is sited inland but close to the Spey and had a history as a port from at least the 16th century until the river diverted its course during the 19th century. The irregular form of Garmouth is rare in Moray where many settlements are more formally laid out in a grid pattern, while many of the buildings are unusually constructed from beach boulders, straw and mud.



The former railway viaduct over the River Spey, finished in 1886, forms an instantly recognisable backdrop to the candidate SLA and is a surviving testimony to Victorian engineering which had to deal with the problem of how to cross the river with no stoney banks to bridge from.

Long views along the coast focus on the Binn of Cullen to the east and the distant, faint outline of the Sutherland Hills across the Firth. Pale cobbled beaches and an often intensely blue sea give rise to a distinct sense of brightness and clarity. This coast feels remote in its middle sections, despite there being views of distant Lossiemouth, and the WWII structures have an evocative quality.

Sensitivity to change

- Development such as quarrying operations in adjacent coastal forest which even if screened may be noisy, affecting the sense of seclusion which can be experienced in the more remote middle sections of this coast.
- This coast would be sensitive to offshore wind energy developments which were sufficiently close to adversely affect its character and which significantly intruded on views to the Sutherland Hills.
- The small settlements of Kingston and Spey Bay are sensitive to large individual houses sited on their periphery which contrast with the strongly linear pattern and compact low form of most existing buildings.

Management recommendations

- Ensure that any new development on the periphery of Kingston and Spey Bay reflects the compact low form and distinct linear pattern of the original settlement.
- Off-shore wind farm development should be located beyond the immediate setting of this coast appearing distant and associated more with the outer Moray Firth to conserve the expansive simplicity of the seascape.
- Ensure that any further quarrying operations are set well back from the coast and include noise reduction measures.
- Interpretation of the fascinating cultural heritage of this coast including the WWII defences and building on the popular guided walks offered by the Forestry Commission during the Moray Way Walking Festival.



STATEMENT OF IMPORTANCE: PORTGORDON TO CULLEN COAST

Location and boundaries

This candidate SLA extends from Portgordon to the Moray boundary in the east, where it adjoins the North Aberdeenshire Coast SLA defined by Aberdeenshire Council. Although the seaward boundary follows the low water mark the Moray Firth forms an essential part of the character of this coastal area. The inland boundary is drawn tightly in the west, largely following the A990 which is closely aligned to the low rocky coastal edge. At Portknockie, the inland boundary heads southwards following the A942, then along minor roads and water courses to include the north-facing slopes and ridgeline of the Bin of Cullen which exerts a strong influence on the coast. The designed landscape Cullen House and the settlement of Cullen are included in the candidate area in the east.



Reasons for designation

This candidate SLA continues the existing SLA designated area along the north coast of Aberdeenshire into Moray. The distinctive pattern and character of small settlements and their strong relationship to the rocky coastal edge are one of the key reasons for designation. The importance of the wider landscape setting to the coast is also recognised by the inclusion of the Cullen House wooded policies and the Bin of Cullen in the candidate SLA.



Description of character and special qualities

The coastal edge is low and rocky in the west and is largely modified to form harbours and quays. East of Findochty however the coast becomes more diverse with rocky headlands, cliffs, stacks and arches. Sandy beaches are also present with the largest of these occurring at Cullen Bay. The Bow Fiddle Rock at Portknockie is a celebrated natural arch of tilted banded quartzite lying off the coast. The coast around Cullen (and extending into neighbouring Aberdeenshire) is designated in part for its geological interest.



The coastal hinterland is largely settled in the west with the main road and stone houses tightly aligned at the foot of steep and often gorse slopes. The distinctive layout of houses orientated 'end on' to the sea is evident in many places. Further east the coastal settlements are more separated, occupying defined bays hemmed in by rocky headlands. Findochty, with its beautiful curved harbour fitting snugly into the bay, and Portknockie both display a striking consistency in their buildings with one and half storey stone houses, window and quoin stone details, and occasional walls, picked out in bright colour and slate and red-pantiled roofs giving a pleasing homogeneity when seen in elevated views.



The Bin of Cullen with its steep forested slopes and domed heather-clad summit is a prominent feature seen widely along the coast and, in clear conditions, across the Moray Firth from Ross-shire and Sutherland. The woodlands covering this hill merge with the bosky valley of the Cullen Burn which extends down to the sea. This valley provides a dramatic setting to the ornately turreted Cullen House and its designed landscape.



The Royal Burgh of Cullen comprises wide planned streets set out on the hillside above the bay and a separate tightly-knit 'seatown' of fishermen's cottages sited at the mouth of Cullen Burn and close to the beach. The 19th century stone railway viaducts which divide the town now accommodate a cycleway. The town was relocated closer to the coast and laid out in 1822. The smaller coastal settlements have a strong integrity in terms of their architecture and their relationship with the coast. These settlements, and the more dramatic natural features of the coast, including the sandy beach at Cullen, are popular with visitors. Views focus on the detail of settlements and on the Moray Firth in the confined raised beaches in the west of this candidate SLA. More expansive views over the coast are possible though from the viewpoint on Castle Hill – the remains of a medieval motte - behind Cullen and from the Bin of Cullen.

Sensitivity to change

- This coast would be sensitive to offshore wind energy developments which were sufficiently close to adversely affect its character and which significantly intruded on views to the Sutherland Hills.
- The Bin of Cullen forms a prominent 'landmark' feature which backdrops this coast and would be sensitive to wind turbines or other tall structures sited on or close-by this hill.
- The setting of small coastal settlements is sensitive to development which could fill the often small gaps between them resulting in coalescence and a loss of identity. Infill built development would be likely to additionally restrict open views to the sea from the coastal path and road.

Management recommendations

- Off-shore wind farm development should be located beyond the immediate setting of this coast appearing distant and associated more with the outer Moray Firth to conserve the expansive simplicity of the seascape.
- Discourage new built development within the open green spaces between coastal settlements to protect their individual identity.
- Settlements in this SLA are generally defined by its relationship to the sea, with buildings sited and oriented accordingly. Any development proposals should reflect the character of traditional fishing villages in terms of layout, scale and design.



STATEMENT OF IMPORTANCE: LOWER SPEY AND GORDON CASTLE POLICIES

Location and boundaries

This candidate SLA comprises part of the lower Spey valley between Fochabers and Garmouth. It abuts the Lossiemouth to Portgordon Coast candidate SLA which includes the mouth of the Spey and which is more open and coastal in character than the more wooded valley of the Lower Spey to the south. The former railway bridge near Garmouth, which is now used by walkers and cyclists, forms the northern extent of this candidate SLA. The boundary follows a minor road close to the Spey in the west and the B9104 in the north-east. In the south-east, the boundary accords with the extent of the Gordon Castle designed landscape's Inventory listing.

Reasons for designation

The two contrasting components of this candidate SLA, the lower Spey Valley and Gordon Castle policies, complement each other. The richness of the Spey for wildlife but also recreational pursuits is recognised in the designation as is the relationship of the nationally important Gordon Castle policies to Fochabers and its value in providing an attractive setting to the town and to the lower Spey.



Key qualities of the candidate SLA

The Spey gently weaves through the flat coastal plain north of Fochabers. The river is broad and fast flowing, noisy where it flows over stony shallows, and features huge banks of smooth river-washed cobbles and occasional islands. Small birds constantly dip and flit on the surface of the water and nest in the eroded sandy banks of the river. Gorse thickets and birch and alder scrub trace the river's banks with willow and alder colonising low islands. Woodlands of beech, pine and birch are a consistent feature within the valley.



Occasional purple beech and the presence of fishing huts along the Spey indicate an estate presence although Gordon Castle and its designed landscape are largely hidden behind a stone boundary wall and tree belts and inter-visibility between the two areas is limited.



The tower of the original 15th century Gordon Castle and the east wing of a formerly much larger 18th century grand house lies at the centre of a nationally important designed landscape. The designed landscape comprises parkland, a small lake, extensive mixed woodlands and a large, recently restored walled garden with ornamental, fruit and vegetable beds. There is a strong cultural connection between the estate and the nearby 18th century planned town of Fochabers. On the flatter plain to the north of the Castle lies the probable remains of Bellie Roman camp, visible as cropmarks in the fields leading up to the aptly named Romancamp Gate Cottage built in 1823. If proved as such without any doubt following on from antiquarian investigations, this would represent the most northerly known camp of the Roman Empire.





Wooded hills contain and provide a backdrop to the Gordon Castle designed landscape to the east and accommodate a network of tracks which are well-used by walkers. The Speyside Way traverses a diverse route through woodland and more open terrain close to the banks of the river. Traffic noise close to the A96 is quickly left behind and the valley has a serenity due to the enclosure provided by woodland and the low rushing sound of the river.

Management guidance

- Establish and promote links and circular walking routes between the Spey and Gordon Castle/Fochabers.
- Minimise noise and visual intrusion of any development aligned close to the Spey and the Gordon Castle policies.
- Plant trees on field boundaries and alongside tracks to enhance more open farmland in the north-eastern part of this landscape.
- Manage gorse close to the Speyside Way to allow more open views to the river.
- Plant trees to rejuvenate roundel and avenue plantings within parkland in the designed landscape of Gordon Castle.
- Replace sections of concrete block boundary walling to match the original stone and turf-topped wall around the Gordon Castle designed landscape.



Sensitivity to change

- Traffic noise adversely affects parts of the lower Spey and Gordon Castle designed landscapes and this candidate SLA would be sensitive to any exacerbation of this. This strongly contained landscape would also be sensitive to loss of mature policy woodlands and trees and visual intrusion of roads infrastructure and traffic associated with any future road improvement works.





STATEMENT OF IMPORTANCE: THE SPEY VALLEY

Location and boundaries

This candidate SLA comprises the broad valley of the Spey extending south of Fochabers to the boundary of Moray with Highland Council in the west. In the main, boundaries aim to reflect the containment provided to the Spey valley by adjacent uplands and therefore include more pronounced steep-sided hills which lie close to the Spey such as Ben Aigan. Where the valley is more open and its edge more fluid in the north-west, the boundary is defined along a distinct terrace raised above the broad floodplain near Dipple before being aligned on tracks and ridgelines where hills provide more definitive containment. The B9102 and minor roads are followed south of Rothes and around the Knockando area while the ridgeline of the twin wooded hills lying at the south-eastern foot of Roy's Hill forms the boundary opposite Ballindalloch. The eastern boundary of the candidate SLA follows the ridge of the Wood of Ordiequish and Ben Aigan before being aligned relatively close to the Spey at Craigellachie.

Although Ben Rinnes forms the core of a separate candidate SLA this hill, with its steep heathery slopes and distinctive long tor-studded curving ridgelines, provides a dramatic backdrop to the Spey Valley.

Reasons for designation

The diverse and handsome landscape of broad gently weaving river, floodplain farmland, wooded valley sides and distinctive settlements together with the romance associated with the Spey due to its connection with whisky distilling are key reasons for designation of this SLA.

Description of character and special qualities

The broad and open floodplain of the Spey south of Fochabers narrows further upstream where the valley is increasingly constrained by steep hillsides. The Spey is aligned close to a scarp on the lower slopes of Ordiequish Hill in the east where the bright orange-red rainwater eroded sandstone Earth Pillars form an arresting natural feature. The middle section of the valley is strongly contained on both sides by steep wooded slopes including those of the prominent heather-capped hill of Ben Aigan which looms over the valley. The river forms tight loops defining arcs of floodplain arable fields and pasture.



The Spey is wide and occasionally braided forming banks of cobbles and vegetated islands. Grassy verges and tracks commonly line the banks of the river and provide access for fishing while small timber fishing huts are a regular feature. Occasional rocky cliffs occur against the river and the valley is particularly incised west of Craigellachie with only small areas of floodplain present.



Relatively large farms are present in the Inchberry to Fochabers area raised on slightly elevated ground above the floodplain west of the Spey. Extensive clipped beech hedges edge fields and roads in the Dipple area. Smaller farms and houses are sited close to the minor road which forms the route for the Speyside Way on the east side of the valley between Fochabers and Boat o' Brig. Steep slopes and terraces, backed by extensive coniferous forest, accommodate small species-rich pastures and mixed woodlands fringed by ferns and gorse. This area has an intimate scale and more tranquil nature than the western side of the river in this area which is more intensively farmed and accommodates busy roads and the railway. Narrow shelves of farmland and the retained historic field patterns of small croft houses and farms are perched above the floodplain of the Spey to the north-east of Rothes although increasingly in the middle sections of the valley within this candidate SLA, the forested side slopes of hills dominate.



The candidate SLA area extends beyond the narrow confines of the more incised river valley west of Aberlour to include the broad stepped shoulders of land in the Archiestown and Knockando area. Again, around Knockando the historic field patterns survive, adding further to the sense of longevity of human activity in the landscape. Landform is notably complex in the Knockando area where a number of small tributary burns cut steeply down to the Spey. Woodlands accentuate the containment of the landscape and this area has an intimate scale and a timeless character enhanced by the presence of smaller distilleries, the restored Victorian woollen mill, a historic kirk and an old railway station set within folded hills and valleys.



The Spey Valley has a rich cultural heritage which complements the diversity of its woodlands and farmland. The Early Medieval period, survives as a series of Scheduled Pictish symbol stones overlooking the Spey at Inveravon Parish Church, Knockando Parish Church, and Arndilly House. The flat floodplain to the north of Craigellachie around Dandaleith – opposite Arndilly House - is also the site of the most recent discovery of a new Pictish stone in the region in 2013, one which is unique in terms of carving. Interesting architectural features enrich this landscape and include traditional (and not so traditional) distilleries, the 16th century Ballindalloch Castle, numerous estate lodges, Telford's graceful high arched bridge spanning the Spey at Craigellachie, the planned settlements of Aberlour and Archiestown and the Victorian settlement of Craigellachie.



The distilleries and their history of whisky production in Speyside has led to the area being called the heart of single malt distilling in Scotland. The quality of the water owing to low levels of dissolved minerals, combined with the areas lack of accessibility for whisky tax collectors until the arrival of the railway in the 19th century, led to a boom in distilleries being established along the river. They now form a regular and very recognisable landscape feature with the area.



The peaceful Winding Walks close to Fochabers weave through majestic conifers including tall noble fir and western Red cedar crowded into a narrow steep-sided glen. There are other forest walks at the Earth Pillars close-by and the Speyside Way follows minor roads, forest tracks and the banks of the river through this landscape. The association of the Spey valley with whisky distilling attracts visitors and conjures a romantic perception of the landscape and cultural heritage of the area.

Views are generally open in the north but become more confined upstream where the valley is contained by steep-sided hills. Adjacent uplands, and particularly the high and distinctive heather-clad Ben Rinnes with its ridgeline tors, are highly visible in the section of the valley west of Craigellachie and form part of the wider setting to this candidate SLA.

Sensitivity to change

- This landscape is sensitive to the accumulation of individual housing in the countryside especially where these are large and prominently sited.
- Large buildings, usually associated with the whisky industry, can impact on views and the character of the Spey Valley and conflict with the perception of the strongly rural qualities of this landscape.
- Felling and restocking of woodlands on prominent valley sides, such as Ben Aigan, which would be highly visible from major roads and settlement.
- Wind energy development sited in adjacent upland areas and visible on prominent skylines which would affect the character and views from this well-settled and visited valley.

Management guidance

- New housing should be associated with existing settlements to avoid exacerbation of the landscape and visual effects of cumulative built development in the countryside.
- Careful siting and the highest quality of design should apply to any further development or redevelopment associated with distilleries and other industrial operations.
- Woodland felling and restocking should take cognizance of effects on the character and views from the Spey Valley with continuous cover methods being encouraged in more sensitive river-side locations. More uniform and angular coniferous plantations should be enhanced when restocking by replanting to improved boundaries which respond to landform and using a greater proportion of native broadleaves and open space.
- Development proposed in surrounding upland areas should minimise the landscape and visual impact on the SLA, including views and vistas along the valley.





STATEMENT OF IMPORTANCE: PLUSCARDEN VALLEY

Location and boundaries

This landscape is strongly defined by the natural landform of the valley. The top of the steep scarp-like slopes of Heldon Hill form the north-western boundary of the candidate SLA – this largely marked by a forest track. The south-eastern boundary also comprises the ridgeline seen from within the valley and follows a mix of tracks, water courses and well-defined hill tops and spurs. The candidate SLA includes Torrieston Wood at the north-eastern end of the valley which is well-used for recreation while the tightly constricted gorge-like valley of the Black Burn is included at the head of the valley in the south-west with boundaries following the B9010 in part.

Reasons for designation

This designation recognises the strongly contained and diversely wooded setting this landscape provides to the Category A-Listed 13th century Pluscarden Abbey which lies at its heart.



Description of character and special qualities

The deep and strongly contained valley of Pluscarden has a distinct sense of isolation, seeming to be hidden within the heart of Moray. The presence of Pluscarden Abbey, founded in the 13th century by King Alexander II, heightens the feeling of mystery associated with this landscape.

The north-western side of the valley comprises steep scarp slopes with Heldon Hill forming an imperceptible high point on a long ridge. The slopes which contain the opposite side of the valley are more gently graded but still provide a high degree of

containment. The valley floor forms a broad floodplain in its lower reaches with more complex small knolls and ridges occurring at the foot of south-eastern slopes. The steep slopes of Heldon Hill are densely clothed with a rich variety of mature conifers and broadleaves. Woodlands are mainly associated with the tributary burns which cut down the south-eastern side slopes but become more extensive in the upper reaches of the valley. There is a profusion of trees and woodland within this valley with many different varieties including purple beech and lime in the area around the Abbey, large Douglas fir and larch within Heldon Wood. The upper valley has a more marginal character with extensive conifer and birch woodland fringed by gorse and broken by occasional pockets of rough, rush-stippled pasture.



The floodplain is particularly open in the lower valley, accommodating lush green pastures but with some riparian woodland tracing the visually insignificant Black Burn. The openness of farmland on the valley floor and on the more rolling lower south-eastern hill slopes, dramatically contrasts with the densely wooded steep side slopes.



The Category A-Listed Abbey itself was originally founded as a Vallisculian Priory, one of only three in the UK. Despite having undergone significant changes over the last 800 years, it still forms a key part of the national story of the development of Christianity in Scotland.



Mature plantings of beech, part of the designed landscape of the now demolished Westerton House, occur on steep banks and align the minor road through the lower valley. The Gothic revival style of



Pluscarden Parish Church and nearby Cowiesburn House and small farms sited on knolls and terraces raised above the floodplain in the lower valley further enrich the scenic qualities of this landscape which has at its core the imposing Pluscarden Abbey just visible above its setting of policy-influenced plantings and backdropped by the dramatic wooded scarp of Heldon Hill.

A 'pinch point' occurs when entering the valley on the minor road from the north-east where steep valley sides constrict, this accentuated by tall conifers, and the road crosses a bridge giving a distinct sense of a threshold having been crossed. The deep gorge-like channel of the Black Burn at the head of the valley is masked in part by dense conifer planting but still forms a dramatic feature particularly appreciated from the B9010. Long views, framed by the densely wooded valley sides, are possible to the Bin of Cullen from the minor road close to the top of the valley.

Sensitivity to change

- The accumulation of individual new (and often overly large) individual houses sited in the countryside which could adversely affect the secluded character of this valley and potentially also the setting to the Abbey.
- Felling and restocking operations on prominent steep slopes above the Abbey could intrude on views and the setting provided by woodlands.

Management guidance

- New housing should be associated with existing settlement (although not close to the existing intrusive housing estate located close to the Abbey) to avoid the cumulative effects of dispersed individual houses.
- Encourage the continuation and promotion of footpaths within the less well-used Heldon Hill woodlands creating opportunities to view Pluscarden Abbey at various angles from above and with circular routes including the course of the Black Burn. Distant views to the Moray Firth from more elevated parts of this landscape could also be opened up by judicious felling.
- Reveal the dramatic landform of the upper gorge-like section of the Black Burn by thinning or felling dense conifers which presently mask the landform.



STATEMENT OF IMPORTANCE: FINDHORN VALLEY AND THE WOODED ESTATES

Location and boundaries

The Findhorn Valley lies at the heart of this candidate SLA but it also includes the wooded estate lands, such as those of Darnaway and Altyre, which extend beyond the confines of the valley and contribute to the rich variety of woodland characteristic of west Moray. The boundary of the Darnaway designed landscape is largely adopted in the west for this candidate SLA, following minor roads, the local authority boundary and forest tracks. The former railway line, which now accommodates the Dava Way recreational route, forms the eastern boundary to the Divie viaduct in the south where the river Divie is crossed at a point where the deeply incised densely wooded character of the valley changes to a more open upland landscape.

Reasons for designation

This designation recognises the richly wooded character of the western part of Moray which is influenced by the long-established estates which border the dramatically incised River Findhorn. While the river, which is covered by national designations for its geological and wildlife value, forms the key feature of this candidate SLA, the woodlands and designed landscapes which lie either side of it, contribute to the richness of this landscape with built features associated with the estates further complementing the whole. The landscape is additionally very well-used for recreation, forming a major attraction within Moray.



Key qualities of the candidate SLA

The River Findhorn and its tributary, the Divie, are accommodated within dramatic deeply cut valleys. The swirling waters of the Findhorn twist and tumble between huge rocky slabs, deep pools and cobble beaches below cliffs overhung with mature ash, larch, Scots pine and oak. Tiny fields of pasture occupy shelves of land set above the river and between steep wooded slopes in the upper reaches of the valley. Broader areas of open farmland occur on flat floodplain areas downstream and include the Meads of St Johns within the Darnaway estate, reputed to have been used for jousting during Mary Queen of Scot's time. Woodlands within the river valleys merge into the neighbouring Altyre and Darnaway estates creating a strongly contained landscape where views focus on the detail of the landscape.



The valleys of the Findhorn and the Divie are particularly contorted close to their confluence. Randolph's Leap, a narrow rocky constriction of the Findhorn, is located in this area and is celebrated in folklore as well as for its geological interest. Just to the east of this overlooking the Divie lies the remains of an Iron Age fort. To the south lies the estate lands of Dunphail House, designed by William Playfair in 1828. Standing above the surviving Italianate mansion house lies the ruins of its predecessor, a medieval castle.



Long established woodland, that was formerly a royal hunting forest before being replanted from the 1780s, is now dominated by beech, oak and pine across the Darnaway estate. Open farmland and parkland lies at the centre of the designed landscape surrounding the Grade A listed 19th century Darnaway Castle. The estate of Altyre in the north-east of this landscape is also extensively wooded and accommodates rare tree species and spectacularly tall Douglas Fir. The woodlands of the estate contribute to the distinctive approach to Moray when travelling on the A940. The core of this estate is hidden by a densely wooded perimeter but reveals the secluded reed-fringed Loch of Blairs, an overgrown walled garden and the framework of an extensive designed parkland landscape.



The area has a distinctive heritage of estate buildings and structures including lodges, gatehouses, cottages and stone bridges crossing the Findhorn and Divie. Darnaway Castle features elements from the 15th century, including one of only two medieval halls in Scotland which retain their original medieval roofs. Although the original large Altyre House was demolished in 1962, this estate features a particularly eclectic collection of buildings including an Italianate Victorian farm steading designed by Archibald Simpson in 1835, Arts and Crafts style cottages and a Victorian timber chapel.



Edinkillie church which was built in 1741 and the early 19th century manse next to it form an attractive grouping of buildings set deep in the wooded valley of the Divie and encountered on the A940. The historic Dallas Dhu distillery also lies on the edge of the Altyre estate.

Well-used footpaths are aligned along much of the Findhorn, many of these elevated above precipitous wooded slopes, and the valley has an intimate secluded quality. An extensive network of tracks and paths also provides access for walkers within the Darnaway Estate (with these linking to the Findhorn valley) and within the Altyre estate. The Dava Way, which forms the eastern boundary of this candidate SLA, is also popular with cyclists and walkers and offers glimpsed views across woodland and small fringing pastures to distant western hills.

Sensitivity to change

- This landscape would be sensitive to any built development located on the small areas of open ground lying close to the Findhorn Valley as these are rare and provide a focus within often dense woodland.
- Wind farm development located in adjacent uplands which may intrude on views from rare open areas within woodland and potentially affect the setting of the river, designed landscapes and valued buildings.

Management guidance

- Careful consideration should be given to any wind farm development sited in adjacent uplands which may intrude (and have cumulative effects with operational wind farms) on views and adversely affect the perception of this landscape being strongly natural and minimally modified by development.
- Restoration of former roundels of trees often planted on low knolls and rises within the Altyre estate but commonly now moribund or overplanted with blocks of conifers.





STATEMENT OF IMPORTANCE: DEVERON VALLEY

Location and boundaries

The river Deveron extends from its mouth at Banff on the Moray Firth to its source near the Cabrach. Much of the Deveron valley lies within Aberdeenshire where it is largely designated as a Special Landscape Area. The loop of the Deveron between Marnoch and Rothiemay, which lies within Moray, forms the basis for this candidate SLA which would continue the Aberdeenshire designation. The upper reaches of the Deveron are excluded from this candidate area due to the influence of operational wind farm development and the generally less diverse character of the valley in this area.

The extent of this candidate SLA comprises the Moray/Aberdeenshire administrative boundaries in the main apart from in the north-west where a boundary has been selected to align with woodlands and minor roads and low ridgelines. The containment of the valley is less strong in this area as side slopes are gentler and views consequently more open.



Reasons for designation

Designation of the Deveron Valley acknowledges the high scenic quality resulting from its meandering river bounded by rolling wooded hills, which forms an important setting to settlements along the valley floor and sides, and backdrop to estates. The richly diverse yet harmonious balance of features in the SLA contribute to the special qualities of the area. The importance of the area for connectivity, in terms of roads, water catchments and woodland networks and the presence of an existing SLA covering the Deveron Valley within neighbouring Aberdeenshire is also recognised.



Description of character and special qualities

The Deveron has a convoluted alignment and this, together with its strong containment by steep slopes, lends it an intimate scale and instils a sense of seclusion. The valley is beautifully curvaceous and the diverse landcover of policy woodlands, shelterbelts, field and avenue trees and occasional native woodlands on undulating lower hill slopes and flat fields on the more open valley floor give it a richly diverse but harmonious character.

Broadleaved woodlands sweep down on steep slopes at the tight loop in the river opposite Tower Hill. The river is often briefly glimpsed through trees from the minor road which is perched on the southern slopes above the floodplain.





Rounded wooded and heathery hills (most of these located within the adjacent Deveron Valley SLA in Aberdeenshire) form a backdrop to the valley and contrast with the more patterned and settled valley floor and lower slopes. Long views are possible above Milltown of Rothiemay to the north towards Knock Hill where side slopes are gentler and the valley more open.



Settlements and individual buildings contribute to the richness of this landscape. The intact small granite-built settlements of Milltown of Rothiemay and Marnoch are located close to the river at bridging points. Overlooking Milltown of Rothiemay lie the remains of a Scheduled recumbent stone-circle while on the other side of the river adjacent to Corskellie lies the remains of a Scheduled cup-marked stone. Both sites are testament to the importance of this landscape in the later Neolithic and early Bronze Age. Sitting above the river downstream of Milltown of Rothiemay and next to the Kirktown Burn is the Scheduled ruin of St Drostan's Church, dedicated to St Peter in medieval times but which is thought to overlie an earlier 6th century church founded by St Drostan himself.

Some fine estate houses are also sited on lower slopes and include Mayen House, the survivor of a late Georgian villa, surrounded by ornamental grounds with stands of purple beech and exotic conifers and Mains of Mayen, a crowstepped one and a half-storey farmhouse.

Sensitivity to change

- Wind energy development sited in adjacent upland areas and visible on prominent skylines which would affect views and the intimate scale and sense of seclusion associated with this valley.
- Changes to landscape as a result of forest management and to agricultural practices in this area.
- Scattered and incremental development where individual dispersed houses could adversely affect the sense of place.

Management recommendations

- Opportunities should be taken during restructuring of existing woodlands to ensure a better integration between broadleaved woodlands on lower slopes and conifer woodland on upper slopes where these currently have little interlock and appear strongly layered.
- Maintain the current patterns of land use and settlement, with development focused within existing towns and villages.
- Development proposed in surrounding upland areas should be assessed to minimise the visual impact on the SLA, including views and vistas along the valley.
- Design of new development should be sensitive to the distinctive local granite architecture displayed in villages and towns, wider countryside.



STATEMENT OF IMPORTANCE: SPYNIE

Location and boundaries

The remains of Spynie Palace and Loch Spynie lie at the heart of this candidate SLA. The boundary to the north is formed by the Spynie Canal which separates the Loch, wetlands, and the wooded ridge upon which the palace sits, from flat open farmland. The western boundary is formed by the A941 while to the south the wooded polices of Pitgaveny House and the foot of the Hill of Spynie mark the extent of this landscape.

Reasons for designation

The reasons for designation relates to the variety of this landscape which is significantly enhanced by its distinctive cultural heritage and the nationally important nature conservation interests associated with Spynie Loch. In addition, the close location of this landscape to Elgin, and the presence of Spynie Palace and the loch makes this area attractive for bird watchers, walkers and visitors.



Description of character and special qualities

Although one of the smallest candidate SLAs, the Spynie area features a rich array of wetlands, loch, woodlands and farmland and also has a fascinating cultural and built heritage. The remains of the largely 14th century Spynie Palace and adjacent medieval village are located on the north-facing slopes of a low wooded ridge orientated east-west set above wetlands and swamp woodland which lie to the north. Farmland rises to the south to the top of the gently rolling ridge and long and very gently graded south-facing slopes are laid out with woodland belts of beech and oak, forming part of the policies of Pitgaveny House. These southern slopes were also once home to Iron Age and later Pictish settlement, now only evidenced by cropmarks.



Spynie Loch lies to the east of the Palace and this once comprised a five-mile long sea loch. This sea loch provided a safe anchorage for fishing boats and merchant ships until circa 1500 AD making the settlement of Spynie, located on its banks, a thriving seaport at the time. The mouth of Spynie Loch was gradually blocked up by shingle and the port business was slowly moved to the beach at the mouth of the Lossie during the 16th-17th centuries.



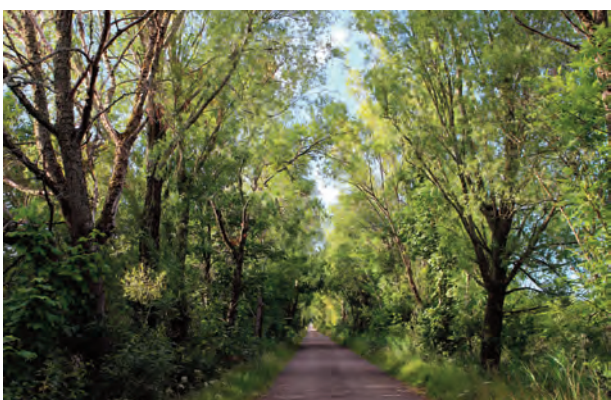
The Spynie Canal, which forms the northern boundary of this candidate SLA and extends some 7 miles, was constructed in 1808-12 to a design by the renowned Thomas Telford to drain the loch to create farmland. Windmills once worked pumps on the canal. The canal was deepened and strengthened in 1860 following flood damage. The canal has a naturalistic appearance where it edges Loch Spynie but is straighter and more open in the west. The low ridge of Scarffbanks, where Spynie Palace is situated, forms the original eastern shore of Loch Spynie.

Reedbeds, fen, swamp alder woodland and willow scrub fringe open water and add to the richness of this landscape. The loch and surrounding wetland is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest for wildfowl and its vegetation and it is jointly managed by the Pitgaveny Estate and the RSPB.



Spynie Palace was the residence of the bishops of Moray for five centuries. It is one of the best preserved medieval bishop's residences in Scotland. The oldest upstanding parts date from the 14th century and include a chapel and entrance gateway while the great hall and a large tower house date from 15th century – the latter, known as David's Tower, offers extensive views over Loch Spynie and the Laich of Moray farmland to the north. Spynie churchyard is set within rolling farmland to the south of Spynie Palace. The old Spynie Kirk which was once situated here was moved in 1736 to a site north of Quarrelwood due to the depopulation of this part of the parish following the silting up of Loch Spynie.

A network of quiet tracks and more informal overgrown footpaths provide access to the churchyard, palace and loch. Both the palace and Loch Spynie are promoted as key visitor attractions in Moray. The former Elgin to Lossiemouth railway line dissects this landscape being embanked over wetland between the loch and the palace. The line now forms a farm track edged with willow, ash and sycamore.



Sensitivity to change

- This landscape is sensitive to new housing (both associated with any future expansion of north Elgin and isolated houses in the countryside) which could adversely affect the setting to Spynie Palace and Churchyard and diminish the sense of containment and seclusion which can be experienced.
- Other development sited within the surrounding area which could adversely affect the seclusion, tranquillity and appreciation of cultural heritage within this landscape – this may include new roads and quarrying.

Management recommendations

- Ensure that any expansion of Elgin avoids intrusion on this landscape and additionally discourage the development of dispersed single houses in the rural area except where located close to existing clusters of development.
- Avoid any development, whether in this or the surrounding area, which adversely affects the qualities of seclusion and tranquillity that can be experienced in this landscape.
- Establish safe off-road walking routes between Elgin and the Spynie area (potentially utilising the line of the dismantled railway).
- Create a wildflower sward in Spynie cemetery to enhance this attractive feature and provide information about its history including the relocation of the church.
- Formalise and promote walking routes linking Spynie Palace with Spynie Loch, either constructing a timber boardwalk on the southern edge of wetland east of the farm track based on the former railway line or a footpath along a wooded terrace at the south-western end of the loch and/or along the Spynie Canal on the north-western side of the loch (linking with the dismantled railway track).
- Provide additional interpretation of the historical background of the Spynie area and circular links between the cemetery, loch and palace to enhance the experience and understanding of visitors and local walkers.





STATEMENT OF IMPORTANCE: CLUNY HILL

Location and boundaries

Grant Park and Cluny Hill are listed in the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes. The boundaries of this candidate SLA accord with this listing being defined by the minor road which circles the foot of Cluny Hill in the east, the edge of housing along the B9010 Rafford Road to the south-west and Victoria Road, the main street through Forres, to the north.

Reasons for designation

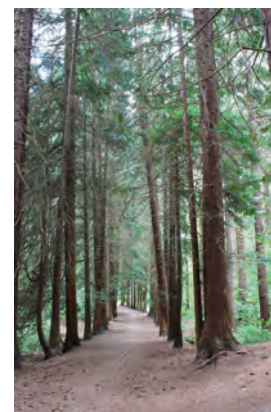
The close association and importance of this landscape to the setting of Forres, the local prominence of this wooded hill and its well-used network of woodland paths form the key reasons for designation.

Description of character and special qualities

Cluny Hill lies close to Forres. It was planted with woodland and a network of paths laid out during the early 19th century. The adjacent Grant Park which lies to the north-west of the hill was acquired by Forres Town Council in the 1920s, this area having formerly comprised the grounds of Forres House which burned down in 1971.



Cluny Hill has a complex landform of interlocking knolls separated by narrow valleys and dips. Although only rising to around 80m at its highest point, the hill forms a prominent landmark widely visible across the flat and open coastal plain in the area surrounding Forres and Findhorn Bay. Cluny Hill is wooded with beech largely covering steep north-facing slopes and stands of Scots pine on southern knolls. A more mixed collection of trees occurs within dips and valleys and an avenue of tall cypress trees lines a path winding around the edge of one of the knolls creating a distinctive dark tunnel.



The topography of Cluny Hill was taken advantage of in the Early Medieval period and probably even earlier in the Iron Age with the construction of a hillfort. The fort was formed by the building of a massive rampart and ditch, enclosing some six acres, and is a rare example within the region.

The pale-harled octagonal and crenellated Nelson's Tower, which is located on the highest summit, was completed in 1812 and is one of the earliest memorials in the UK to Vice Admiral Horatio Nelson (the foundation stone was laid on the 26th August 1806). An early 19th century cemetery is also situated in a dip in the hills, surrounded by dense plantings of cypress and other conifers. A remnant lodge house to Forres House is present in Grant Park and Cluny Hill House sited at the south-eastern foot of the hills, which was originally built in 1865 as a hydropathic establishment, now forms the Cluny Hill campus of the Findhorn Foundation.



Grant Park is set out on gently sloping ground to the north-west of Cluny Hill; the ornamental planting, cedar and lime avenues and open grassland of this park contrast with the densely wooded Cluny Hill which back-drop it.

A network of footpaths winds around the knolls and dips within Cluny Hill and these, together with sports and recreation facilities within Grant Park, are very well-used. The park and the wooded hills provide a highly scenic backdrop to Forres making a strong contribution to the attractive character of the town.



Sensitivity to change

- This landscape could be sensitive to any built development which intruded on key views to and from these wooded hills.

Management recommendations

- Carefully assess the effects of major development proposals in the surrounding area on the setting and views to and from this landscape.
- Underplanting of beech should be undertaken on northern hill slopes to ensure the longevity of woodland.



STATEMENT OF IMPORTANCE: QUARRELWOOD

Location and boundaries

Quarrelwood is located on a ridge which abuts the western edge of Elgin. The southern boundary is aligned against the A96 - where mature beech and oak woodlands on lower slopes form part of the attractive approach to Elgin and a strong edge to settlement. Minor roads which edge the wood form the western, northern and north-eastern boundaries of this candidate SLA while the woodland edge behind housing and a hotel form the south-eastern boundary.

Reasons for designation

The close association of this well-used community run woodland to Elgin and its diverse mix of oak, beech and pine together with the fascinating prehistoric and cultural heritage of this area form the key reasons for designation.

Description of character and special qualities

Quarrelwood comprises a mixed woodland sited on a low but prominent ridge on the western edge of Elgin. The ridge rises to 127m at its summit and has steeper slopes on its southern edge close to the A96. Gentle slopes gradually merge with the coastal plain of Moray to the north.

Oak dominated woodland on the lower south-eastern slopes are designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Stately stands of beech provide, with similar woodlands south of the A96, an attractive wooded approach to Elgin. Elsewhere the woodland largely comprises Scots pine but with a good understorey of scrubs and ground flora including honeysuckle and many young rowan, oak and beech saplings.

Cutties Hillock is a former quarry where a number of fossilised prehistoric reptiles, the best known of these being Elginia a dog-sized reptile from the Permian period, have been found.

Sitting high on the flanks of Quarrelwood lies the Scheduled site of Quarry Wood, originally thought to be a Neolithic henge. It is most likely to be an Iron Age settlement enclosure dating to circa 800BC-200BC and as such is a rare surviving example from North East Scotland.

Quarrelwood is a community woodland well-used by local people. It is also promoted by the Forestry Commission with a car park and a network of trails interpreting the rich prehistorical and cultural heritage spectrum of this landscape.

Sensitivity to change

- The attractive approach to Elgin from the west formed by woodlands of beech and oak would be sensitive to development.

Management recommendations

- Ensure the protection of woodlands lying on the outer fringes of this landscape which could be more vulnerable to development pressures.







STATEMENT OF IMPORTANCE: BEN RINNES

Location and boundaries

Ben Rinnes provides a dramatic backdrop to the Spey Valley which lies to the west but it also forms part of the relatively little modified uplands which extend to the east to Glen Fiddich and merge with the uplands south and east of Glen Livet within the Cairngorms National Park. The Spey Valley has been defined as a separate candidate SLA which adjoins this landscape.

This candidate SLA includes Glens Livet, Fiddich and Rinnes and the uplands which lie between these sparsely settled glens. The north-western boundary is aligned on the lower slopes of Ben Rinnes, following the upper margins of woodlands where present. The northern boundary follows forest tracks to include the small but distinctively rounded hills of Little Conval and Meikle Conval before picking up the River Fiddich near Dufftown which forms the eastern boundary of the candidate SLA as it loops around Auchindoun Castle. The eastern boundary then continues to be aligned along the upper reaches of the River Fiddich through Glen Fiddich and on the Right of Way through Glen Suie to Glen Livet where it joins the Cairngorms National Park boundary to the south.

The uplands between Glens Fiddich and Glen Rinnes are remote and little developed although the Dorenell wind farm, which was under-construction at the time of the field survey being undertaken for this review of local landscape designations, will have a strong influence on character and views from parts of this landscape.

Reasons for designation

This landscape forms part of the wider setting to Cairngorms National Park with remote uplands and sparsely settled glens displaying similar characteristics to the landscapes within the Park. It is important in comprising the remaining area of relatively little modified uplands within Moray as well as accommodating Moray's highest hill, Ben Rinnes, which is particularly popular with walkers.

Description of character and special qualities

Ben Rinnes forms a dominant landmark feature seen well beyond Moray's boundaries due to its height (840m), its isolation from other hills and its distinctive form. This hill can appear conical in views from the west where its sharp summit and steep slopes above Glen Rinnes are appreciated although from the east across the Spey Valley, its curving flanks, interrupted by occasional granite tors, give a broad and more bulky form. The smaller twin hills of Meikle Conval and Little Conval, which provide an attractive backdrop to the settlement of Dufftown, echo the smooth and steep-sided form of Ben Rinnes.



Uplands between Glen Rinnes and Glen Fiddich have a sinuous sculpted appearance with flowing slopes and rounded tops, deeply dissected by narrow valleys. The high twisting ridge stretching between Corryhabbie Hill and Carn an t Suidhe has a particularly dramatic presence in views from Glen Livet. The uplands within this candidate SLA are largely covered with heather moorland which produces a dazzling display during flowering in late July and August.



Glen Rinnes and Glen Livet form tranquil and relatively little developed glens which are strongly contained by steep-sided uplands. Small farms, undulating walled pastures and often extensive birch riparian woodlands are dramatically back-dropped by steep heathery hills. The narrow Glen Fiddich is more remote with the ruinous Glenfiddich Lodge nestling close to a tight curve in the river. Glen Suie, which continues over the bealach near Morton's Way to link with Glen Livet in the south, is similarly unsettled with some abandoned buildings.



The 14th century Auchindoun Castle, a former tower house with a great vaulted hall, occupies a strategic position, set on a knoll high above a loop in the River Fiddich. Extensive birch woodlands trace the river and extend into the steep-sided gullies which cut into the hills which provide a dramatic immediate setting to the castle to the south-east. Part of the National Inventory designated Battle of Glenlivet site (1594) extends into the south-western edge of these uplands. The battle is nationally significant as it represents the religious struggles between Presbyterians and Catholics in Scotland at the time and saw the first use of artillery in the Highlands.

The Corbett hill of Ben Rinnes and the two Conval Hills are very popular with walkers. The hills between Glens Rinnes and Fiddich are less frequented but accommodate a network of Heritage Routes used by mountain bikers and walkers. Distilleries are present within Glen Rinnes and Glenlivet with some of these comprising attractive historic buildings and adding to the romance associated with this landscape.

Beneath the heather on the lower flanks of this range of hills lie numerous remains of prehistoric settlement, including field clearance cairns and roundhouses, many of which are deemed regionally significant in importance. This sense of longevity of human activity within this wilder part of Moray is further enhanced with the remains of a prehistoric hillfort surrounding the summit of Little Conval.

Sensitivity to change

- This landscape would be sensitive to wind farm development located in adjacent upland areas particularly where turbines would be seen on containing skylines and could adversely affect views and the character of the secluded Glen Rinnes, Glen Livet and the dramatic setting of Auchindoun Castle.
- Increasing visitor access of Ben Rinnes which could exacerbate existing erosion and unsightly braided paths and affect the perception of naturalness associated with this hill.
- The accumulation of new single houses in the countryside which could affect the rural character of these generally sparsely settled glens and contrast with the scale and design of more traditional buildings.

Management recommendations

- Protect the setting to Auchindoun Castle formed by the largely unmodified hills which lie to the south-east and where a sense of naturalness can be experienced.
- Create footpath links between Auchindoun Castle and the attractive Fiddich valley which encircles it.
- Manage footpaths to Ben Rinnes to minimise erosion and the visual impact of braided paths.
- Encourage the extension of birch-dominated riparian woodland within the Fiddich valley and Glen Rinnes.
- Integrate broadleaved woodlands associated with the valley floor and lower slopes in Glen Rinnes (between Dufftown and the minor road which links with the A95 on the north-eastern edge of Ben Rinnes) with conifer plantations sited on upper slopes during felling and restocking operations to avoid the presently stark 'layered effect'.
- Care is needed to control new built development within Glen Rinnes to conserve its more secluded character and the scenic quality of this landscape. Proliferation of recent new housing, which often comprises large and prominently located buildings, has resulted in capacity being close to being reached.
- Encourage the establishment of native woodlands on the lower slopes of Ben Rinnes, supplementing and eventually replacing mature larch within Benrinnes Wood.



Annex A

Stage One Evaluation Tables

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: SOFT COAST - CULBIN TO BURGHEAD
Landscape character unit reference: LCT 1a

Criteria	Rating	Description
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Scored landscape criteria

Rarity/typicality	High-medium	Deposition coastal features at Culbin and tidal Findhorn Bay rare in Moray although extensive sandy beach east of Findhorn village a more common feature of Moray's coastline.
Scenic Qualities	High	Diverse saltmarsh, spits, dunes, tidal basin and long sandy beaches. Views across Moray Firth to Sutherland Hills
Enjoyment	High	Core Paths and network of well-used footpaths through Culbin and Roseisle Forests to the coast and both promoted as key visitor facilities in Moray by Forestry Commission. Moray Coast Trail along coast and watersports at Findhorn Marina. Cycle route along east side of Findhorn Bay.
Cultural qualities	High	WWII anti-landing obstacle scheduled monument on Culbin coast (other WWII defences along much of this coast). Interesting history of sandstorms and buried settlement. Historic village of Findhorn.
Naturalness	High	Culbin coast and Findhorn Bay internationally designated (SPA, RAMSAR). SSSI for flora and geomorphological features. A distinct sense of wildness can be experienced in the more remote Culbin area.

Other considerations

Variation in quality	Yes	RAF Kinloss, wind turbines and B9011 in Findhorn area influences character and views along part of this coastline.
Connectivity	Yes	Strong physical and visual links with Culbin Forest (3a) and Roseisle Forest (3)



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: SOFT COAST - LOSSIEMOUTH TO PORTGORDON		
Landscape character unit reference:		LCT 1b
Criteria	Rating	Description
Scored landscape criteria		
Rarity/typicality	High-medium	Diverse dunes and sand bar at mouth of Lossie and distinctive rocky outcrop upon which Lossiemouth is situated are relatively rare features in Moray. Relatively narrow beaches backed by coniferous forest are more typical of Moray's coastline
Scenic Qualities	High-medium	Scenically rich coastal features associated with the Lossie estuary. Less diverse further east but striking in its simplicity and huge sense of space with long views to Bin of Cullen and to distant Sutherland hills.
Enjoyment	High	Moray Coast Trail with some footpath links through hinterland forest. Well-used beach close to Lossiemouth although the coast becomes less frequented further away from settlements and roads.
Cultural qualities	High-medium	Cultural interest associated with Lossiemouth's historic harbour and fishertown and WWII defences (tank traps and gun emplacements scheduled) along much of coast.
Naturalness	High-medium	Moray Firth SAC. SSSI covers storm ridges of shingle on beaches and within the adjacent Coastal Forest (3b). The coast is not designated to the SE of Spey Bay and has a more developed hinterland with golf course, and caravan park. Quarrying operations in adjacent forest and RAF activities at Lossiemouth affect tranquillity in the NW. The less frequented middle sections of this coast can feel remote.
Other considerations		
Connectivity	Some	There are some links between parts of the Coastal Forest (3) and along the River Lossie and lower Spey. Also historic links between coast and Loch Spynie inland.
Variation in quality	Yes	The coast is richer in terms of nature conservation and feels more remote to the NW of Kingston.



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: HARD COAST - BURGHEAD TO LOSSIEMOUTH
Landscape character unit reference: LCT 2a

Criteria	Rating	Description
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Scored landscape criteria

Rarity/typicality	High	Higher cliffs between Hopeman and Covesea are a rare feature in Moray.
Scenic Qualities	High	A richly diverse coastal edge of cliffs, stacks, caves and small bays. Covesea lighthouse is a landmark feature
Enjoyment	High	Moray Coast Trail and golf course. Small sandy coves well-used and cliffs used by climbers.
Cultural qualities	High-medium	Historic harbour at Hopeman and forms setting to Burghead, Lossiemouth and Hopeman.
Naturalness	High	SAC designation over Inner Moray Firth and SSSIs at Covesea and Burghead. Rocky outcrop east Lossiemouth designated SSSI for geological interest. Rich flora on headlands and cliffs

Other considerations

Connectivity	Some	Historic connection with Coastal Farmland: Duffus Basin LCT 4d to south and with coastal units either side.
Variation in quality	Yes	Some variation close to Burghead and Lossiemouth where the scenery is less diverse and a quarry present close to the coast.



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: HARD COAST - PORTGORDON TO CULLEN**Landscape character unit reference: LCT 2b**

Criteria	Rating	Description
<i>Scored landscape criteria</i>		
Rarity/typicality	High - medium	Extensive low rocky coast but with some rarer features including historic settlement and structures in Cullen area and stacks/Bow Fiddle Rock at Portknockie.
Scenic Qualities	High-medium	A rocky coastline which is well-settled and particularly developed to the west around Buckie. The smaller more intact historic settlements such as Findochty, Portknockie and Cullen contribute to the scenic qualities of this coast. A highly visible section of coastline due to the presence of settlement and roads.
Enjoyment	High	Moray Coast Trail and occasional sandy bays used for recreation. Close to settlements so valued locally.
Cultural qualities	High	Historic fishing village and harbours, including Telford harbour and railway viaduct at Cullen.
Naturalness	Medium	SSSI covering a very small part of this coast east of Cullen (and extending along the Aberdeenshire coast). The sense of wildness is reduced due to developed character of coast.
<i>Other considerations</i>		
Connectivity	Some	There is a strong visual link in the east between the coast and the policies of Cullen House and the Bin of Cullen. The North Aberdeenshire Coast Special Landscape Area (SLA) also abuts the Moray boundary to the east. This SLA essentially comprises 'the juxtaposition of rugged coastal cliffs and headlands with traditional fishing villages'.
Variation in quality	Yes	Western part of this coast between Portgordon and Portessie characterised by dense built development and busy roads closely aligned to the coast. Cullen Bay covered by SSSI which extends into neighbouring Aberdeenshire.



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: COASTAL FOREST - CULBIN**Landscape character unit reference: LCT 3a**

Criteria	Rating	Description
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Landscape Quality Criteria

Rarity/typicality	High	Although extensive commercially managed coastal forestry is present in Moray, this forest is rare as it has been planted on sand dunes and has developed a rich flora – largest SSSI in Moray
Scenic Qualities	High-medium	An 'internalised' landscape of richly complex landform and vegetation cover closer to the coast appreciated at the local level – less diverse in more managed southern edges of forest. SSSI designation for geomorphological as well as floristic interest.
Enjoyment	High	Well-used footpaths throughout Culbin Forest and along coast. Promoted as key visitor destination by Forestry Commission
Cultural qualities	Medium	Interesting history of blown sand and submerged farmland although no formal designations
Naturalness	High	While not entirely natural as inland dunes planted with pine to stabilise sand, a rich eco-system of lichens and other plants has developed. Culbin Forest is designated a SSSI and borders the RAMSAR site on the coast (LCT 1a)

Other considerations

Connectivity	Yes	Strong links with Culbin Sands and Findhorn Bay within (1a)
Variation in quality	Yes	Less diverse where forest is more commercially managed in southern fringes



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: COASTAL FOREST - ROSEISLE AND LOSSIEMOUTH		
Landscape character unit reference:		LCT 3b
Criteria	Rating	Description
Score landscape criteria		
Rarity/typicality	Low	Extensive commercial forestry borders the coast in Moray and is not a rare feature.
Scenic Qualities	Medium	Primarily commercial pine plantations but with some more diverse areas present close to coast where mature retentions and regeneration on dunes creates a more irregular spacing of trees and a richer under-storey. Binn Hill forms a local landmark feature backing the coast. Quarrying within the forest SE of Lossiemouth is a detractive element.
Enjoyment	High-medium	Roseisle Forest has promoted footpaths and recreational facilities linking with the coast (1a) and is promoted by the Forestry Commission as a key visitor facility in Moray. The forest forming the hinterland to the coast between Lossiemouth and Kingston accommodates some alternative and circular footpaths linking with the Moray Coast Trail.
Cultural qualities	Medium-low	Largely undesignated although the WWII defences scheduled along the coast between Lossiemouth and Kingston extend into the forest.
Naturalness	Medium	No nature conservation designations in the coastal forest between Burghead and Findhorn although the storm ridges of shingle within the forest NW of Kingston is designated a SSSI.
Other considerations		
Connectivity	Yes	Strong connectivity with parts of the coast (1a) and (1b). Some limited physical connectivity with woodlands within the Coastal Farmland (4).
Variation in quality	Yes	Quarrying in Lossiemouth forest and areas of more commercially managed forest.



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: COASTAL FARMLAND - COASTAL FARMLAND
Landscape character unit reference: LCT 4

Criteria	Rating	Description
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Scored landscape criteria

Rarity/typicality	Low	An extensive area of intensively managed farmland – a common feature in Moray
Scenic Qualities	Medium	An open and very gently undulating intensively farmed and settled plain with occasional more scenically rich features generally associated with wooded policies, for example at Westfield.
Enjoyment	Medium	There are relatively few recreational facilities on intensively managed farmland although National Cycle Route 1 is aligned on minor country roads through this landscape and a number of Core Paths are also present.
Cultural qualities	High-medium	GDLs at Brodie and Innes House and many listed buildings.
Naturalness	Medium-low	Small areas SSSI designated but generally intensively managed farmland limits naturalness

Other considerations

Connectivity	Some	Physical and visual connectivity with lower Spey valley (4b)
Variation in quality	Yes	Pockets of more diverse landscape occur where wooded policies are present.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: COASTAL FARMLAND - DESKFORD VALLEY
Landscape character unit reference: LCT 4a

Criteria	Rating	Description
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Scored landscape criteria

Rarity/typicality	Medium	A farmed valley contained by forested hills – a relatively common feature in Moray although field pattern and wooded policies associated with Cullen House more diverse than other similar lowland farmed landscapes.
Scenic Qualities	High-medium	Diverse pattern of wooded policies and small settlements although no dramatic or notably scenically rich features
Enjoyment	Medium	Core Path Cullen to Lintmill but few paths indicated further south in this area.
Cultural qualities	Medium	Cullen House GDL
Naturalness	Medium-low	No nature conservation designations although small woodlands and hedgerows likely to provide habitat for wildlife. Intensively managed farmland limits the sense of wildness

Other considerations

Connectivity	Yes	Burn of Deskford and associated woodlands link to the coast. Strong connection between Cullen House policies and the coast (2b). Visual links with the Bin of Cullen (8a) which provides the backdrop to this landscape.
Variations in quality	Yes	The southern part of this landscape is influenced by large wind turbines. The consented Aultmore wind farm will significantly increase visibility of wind energy development across this landscape.



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: COASTAL FARMLAND - LOWER SPEY
Landscape character unit reference: LCT 4b

Criteria	Rating	Description
Scored landscape criteria		
Rarity/typicality	High	The braided course of the lower Spey with its associated wetlands and woodlands is a rare feature in Moray. The river tends to be hidden by riparian and other woodlands and this landscape has a strongly contained and often intimately scaled character.
Scenic Qualities	High-medium	A scenically diverse landscape featuring estuarine wetlands and shingle bars at its mouth and the braided course of the river, native woodlands and the associated wooded policies and parkland of Gordon further inland. The historic settlements of Fochabers, Garmouth, Kingston and Spey Bay add to the interest of this landscape. Some detractors in the Mosstodloch area.
Enjoyment	High	Spey Way, Moray Coast Trail, NCR 1.
Cultural qualities	High	Historic buildings in Spey Bay and Kingston and Gordon Castle GDL
Naturalness	High	The lower Spey is covered by RAMSAR, SAC and SSSI designations
Other considerations		
Connectivity	Yes	Links with Coastal Farmland (4) and with Soft Coast LCT (1b) where nature conservation designations extend west of the mouth of the Spey
Variation in quality	Yes	Industry and roads infrastructure in Mosstodloch area. A stronger sense of the coast and sea occurs towards the mouth of the sea as the landscape becomes less contained. The Spey becomes more braided and is characterised by wetland and scrub contrasting with the policy influenced pine and beech woodlands found further upstream.



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: COASTAL FARMLAND - CLUNY HILL**Landscape character unit reference:** LCT 4c

Criteria	Rating	Description
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Scored landscape criteria

Rarity/typicality	Medium	Small wooded hills are not a rare landscape type within Moray although this is a good example of a valued landscape close to settlement
Scenic Qualities	High-medium	While these small wooded hills are not especially high or dramatic, they are visually prominent, provide an attractive backdrop to the highly ornamental and well-managed Grant Park and a high-quality setting to the historic town of Forres.
Enjoyment	High	Very well-used network of footpaths and lies within Forres so easy to access.
Cultural qualities	High	Grant Park and Cluny Hill Inventory listed designed landscape of national importance.
Naturalness	Medium	No formal designations although woodland will provide some habitat for wildlife

Other considerations

Connectivity	Some	Some visual and physical links with extensive woodlands to south of Forres
Variation in quality	No	



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: COASTAL FARMLAND - SPYNIE**Landscape character unit reference: LCT 4d**

Criteria	Rating	Description
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Scored landscape criteria

Rarity/typicality	High	This area is unusual in its rich combination of landscape and cultural heritage elements within a relatively small area and because of its historic past.
Scenic Qualities	High	A well-wooded landscape within which the ruins of Spynie Palace form a focus. Spynie Loch and associated wetlands add richness to this small, intimately scaled landscape.
Enjoyment	High-medium	Spynie Palace is a promoted visitor attraction in Moray and Spynie Loch also draws visitors although recreational links between the two features are not strong. Public use of minor roads and tracks evident between Elgin and the palace/Spynie churchyard.
Cultural qualities	High	The area has a fascinating history. The present Spynie Loch forms the remains of a much larger sea loch and the area was once much more settled. Spynie Palace scheduled. Spynie churchyard and Spynie canal (designed by Thomas Telford) also of interest.
Naturalness	High-medium	Spynie Loch and wetlands nationally important as designated RAMSAR/SSSI. Woodlands of Pitgavnie Estate will also have some wildlife interest.

Other considerations

Connectivity	Some	Historic connectivity with the coast (2a) and (1b).
Variation in quality	Yes	Farmland to the north of Spynie Canal is very open and intensively farmed. The fringes of Elgin (including transmission lines and new housing) influence character to the south. A96 dualling Route Option O6 may adversely affect the setting of the Spynie area in future



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: COASTAL FARMLAND - DUFFUS BASIN		
Landscape character unit reference:		LCT 4e
Criteria	Rating	Description
Scored landscape criteria		
Rarity/typicality	Medium	While not rare in terms of present-day landscape character, this area is unusual because of its historic past. This very open and generally simple landscape tends to merge with the surrounding Coastal Farmland (4) forming part of an extensive basin with a less distinct 'sense of place' than some other landscapes in Moray.
Scenic Qualities	Medium	Designed landscapes of Gordonstoun and wooded policies of Duffus House, Inverugie and Westfield add interest to this generally simple open and intensively farmed basin. Duffus Castle forms a landmark feature.
Enjoyment	Medium	Core Paths linking with coast in the Duffus area although intensive farmland and the use of Gordonstoun as a school inhibits widespread recreational use of this landscape. Cyclists use minor roads in the Westfield area. Duffus Castle a key visitor attraction in Moray.
Cultural qualities	High	The area has an interesting history as the low-lying Duffus basin was once part of the sea before fluvial changes resulted in it being cut off and later drainage created agricultural land. Duffus Castle scheduled monument. Gordonstoun and other (non-Inventory listed) designed landscapes.
Naturalness	Medium-low	Intensive farmland is less valuable for nature conservation although estate woodlands will have some interest.
Other considerations		
Connectivity	Some	Historic connectivity with the coast (1b)
Variation in quality	Yes	RAF Lossiemouth influences character in places. Farmland south of Lossiemouth is less diverse and open. Tappoch Hill and ridge to north separating this area from the coast influenced by pig farming and Christmas tree cultivation.



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: ROLLING FARMLAND AND FOREST - ROLLING FARMLAND AND FOREST
Landscape character unit reference: LCT 5

Criteria	Rating	Description
Scored landscape criteria		
Rarity/typicality	Low	A commonplace landscape with no unique or rare features
Scenic Qualities	Medium-low	Rolling landscape of hill fringe farmland and coniferous forest. Few distinctive features and some localised detractors including modern distillery and new housing.
Enjoyment	Medium-low	Core Path and other paths mainly in woodlands although not promoted Moray wide for recreation.
Cultural qualities	Low	Few historic/archaeological features
Naturalness	Low	No nature conservation designations and little sense of wildness
Other considerations		
Connectivity	Some	Some connectivity with LCT 10 uplands which provide the backdrop to this landscape
Variation in quality	No	

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: ROLLING FARMLAND AND FOREST - VALLEY FRINGES
Landscape character unit reference: LCT 5a-i

Criteria	Rating	Description
Scored landscape criteria		
Rarity/typicality	Medium-low	While this landscape has no unique or rare features it is a good example of a well-managed farmed and wooded landscape.
Scenic Qualities	Medium	Diverse in places especially where a stronger policy character is present although mainly farmed hill slopes with a simple character. The Black Burn comprises one of the few more scenic features of this landscape where it is accommodated in a dramatic steep-sided wooded valley west of Dallas.
Enjoyment	Medium	Califer Hill viewpoint promoted, no Core Paths but a network of other paths in some woodlands.
Cultural qualities	Medium	Blervie Castle, Stone Circle and other archaeology on Califer Hill although no scheduled monuments
Naturalness	Medium	SSSI at Mains of Burgie
Other considerations		
Connectivity	Yes	Links with Lossie Valley, Pluscarden
Variation in quality	Yes	Deep wooded valley of the Black Burn



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: ROLLING FARMLAND AND FOREST - PLUSCARDEN VALLEY**Landscape character unit reference:** LCT 5a - ii

Criteria	Rating	Description
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Scored landscape criteria

Rarity or uniqueness	High	Rare in the dramatic containment of this narrow valley and the presence of the Abbey – a strong ‘sense of place’
Scenic Qualities	High-medium	Narrow valley contained by steep wooded slopes provides important setting to Pluscarden Abbey. Generally diverse woodlands and fluvial-glacial features in lower valley. Contrast of wooded slopes with small pastures on valley floor a key feature. Some inappropriate modern development locally detractive close to Abbey and in the upper valley.
Enjoyment	High-medium	Promoted walking routes within FC woodlands at Torrieston although few recreational features within core of valley. Pluscarden Abbey is a key visitor attraction.
Cultural qualities	High-medium	Pluscarden Abbey scheduled monument – the strongly contained nature of this valley may have been important in its siting.
Naturalness	Medium	No formal designations although mixed woodlands on lower slopes and valley floor and long-established conifer woodland likely to be of value for wildlife

Other considerations

Connectivity	Some	Some physical connectivity of woodlands with Hill of Wangie/Kellas policies and woodlands to west. Visual connectivity limited due to strong containment of valley.
Variation in quality	Yes	Detractive housing development close to Abbey. The valley becomes less well-managed and more upland fringe in character upstream.



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: ROLLING FARMLAND AND FOREST - KELLAS VALLEY
Landscape character unit reference: LCT 5a - iii

Criteria	Rating	Description
Scored landscape criteria		
Rarity/typicality	Medium-low	Policies associated with Kellas House and estate architecture interesting features although not unique in west Moray.
Scenic Qualities	Medium	Some diverse features relating to wooded policies of Kellas Estate and often estate-influenced architecture (including village of Dallas) however extensive wind farm development (operational and consented) in LCT 10 strongly influences character, affecting the setting of the upper Lossie valley
Enjoyment	Medium	No promoted recreational facilities but some local footpaths around Dallas
Cultural qualities	Medium	Kellas House, Dallas Castle
Naturalness	High-medium	Designations associated with Glenlatterach and Kellas Oakwood.
Other considerations		
Connectivity	Some	Some physical connectivity of woodlands with Pluscarden area although visual connectivity limited due to strong containment of valley.
Variation in quality	Yes	Wind farm development currently more prominent in eastern part of valley

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: ROLLING FARMLAND AND FOREST - QUARRELWOOD
Landscape character unit reference: LCT 5a - iv

Criteria	Rating	Description
Scored landscape criteria		
Rarity/typicality	Medium	Small wooded hills are not a rare landscape type within Moray although this is a good example of a valued landscape close to settlement
Scenic Qualities	High-medium	Although not high or dramatic, these wooded hills are prominent in views across the coastal plain of Moray and provide a distinctive feature in the setting of Elgin.
Enjoyment	High	Well used network of paths and promoted by the Forestry Commission for recreation
Cultural qualities	High-medium	Scheduled ancient henge/Iron Age settlement enclosure.
Naturalness	High-medium	Oak woods covered by SSSI and site of early reptilian fossil finds.
Other considerations		
Connectivity	Some	Some visual connectivity with estate-influenced woodlands to the south of the A96
Variation in quality	No	



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: ROLLING FARMLAND AND FOREST - DARNAWAY**Landscape character unit reference:** LCT 5b - i

Criteria	Rating	Description
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Scored landscape criteria

Rarity/typicality	High	This landscape largely comprises the extensive designed landscape and woodlands of the Darnaway estate. While there are other Inventory listed designed landscapes and similar extensive woodlands in Moray, this is a good example of well-managed and diverse long-established/ancient woodland (a key feature of west Moray)
Scenic Qualities	High-medium	Much commercial coniferous forestry but attractive because of its diverse age structure and spacing. Areas of mature oak and beech and the open farmland surrounding Darnaway Castle enhance the scene
Enjoyment	High	Concentrated network of footpaths within extensive woodlands and links with Findhorn Valley.
Cultural qualities	High	Extensive Darnaway Castle GDL
Naturalness	Medium	No formal designations although woodlands (particularly long-established woodlands provide habitat for wildlife

Other considerations

Connectivity	Yes	Strong links with Findhorn Valley (6) and similar in character to Altyre/Newtyle Forests (5b-ii) to east.
Variation in quality	Some	Some detractive agricultural buildings and shelterbelts close to the minor road near Newton of Darnaway.



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: ROLLING FARMLAND AND FOREST - ALTYRE/NEWTYLE FORESTS		
Landscape character unit reference:		LCT 5b - ii
Criteria	Rating	Description
Scored landscape criteria		
Rarity or uniqueness	High-medium	While not rare, the western part of this landscape is a good example of the well-managed estate woodlands characteristic of Moray and is an important feature on the approach to Moray on the A940
Scenic Qualities	High-medium	Similar to Darnaway in character in that commercial pine-dominated woodlands are diverse and well-managed. The wide spacing of trees allows an appreciation of the rolling landform from the A940 (a key approach to Moray). The parkland and policy plantings of Altyre House add diversity although these are not readily visible. Woodlands are generally less scenically diverse in the eastern part of this unit.
Enjoyment	High	Dava Way and an extensive network of paths through forest and the Altyre policies
Cultural qualities	Medium	Designed landscape of Altyre House (not Inventory listed) and cluster of listed buildings on/nearby this estate.
Naturalness	Medium	No formal designations although woodlands (particularly long-established woodlands) provide habitat for wildlife
Other considerations		
Connectivity	Yes	Strong links with Findhorn Valley (6) and similar in character to Darnaway Forest area (5b-i) to west.
Variations in quality	Yes	Woodlands are generally less diverse in the eastern part of this landscape. Option R3 of the A96 dualling project could adversely affect the northern part of the Findhorn Valley/Altyre Estate.



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: NARROW WOODED VALLEY - FINDHORN VALLEY**Landscape character unit reference: LCT 6**

Criteria	Rating	Description
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Landscape Quality Criteria

Rarity/typicality	High	Dramatic, deep and wooded valley rare in Moray – a strong ‘sense of place’.
Scenic Qualities	High	Richly scenic composition of river weaving through dramatic rocky gorge and pools and steep wooded banks with diverse mix of broadleaves and managed conifers.
native		
Enjoyment	High	Popular for recreation with promoted footpaths
Cultural qualities	High	Historic bridges, houses and many listed buildings with distinct estate character. Relugas GDL and legend associated with Randolph’s Leap
Naturalness	High	SAC and SSSI designations associated with River Findhorn and its woodlands

Other considerations

Connectivity	Yes	Physical and visual connectivity with upper Findhorn into Highland and Dorback Burn – also associations with Darnaway and Altyre estates in respect of character of well-managed policy woodlands (LCTs 5b – i and 5b – ii)
Variation in quality	No	



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: BROAD FARMED VALLEY - SPEY VALLEY**Landscape character unit reference: LCT 7**

Criteria	Rating	Description
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Scored landscape criteria

Rarity/typicality	High-medium	The middle section of the Spey valley cuts through rolling uplands. The broad farmed valley bottom and mix of woodland and pasture on valley sides contrasts with the narrow densely wooded Findhorn valley. Distillery buildings are a key feature and the backdrop of higher steep-sided, heather-clad hills in the more tightly contained SW valley (12a-i and 11) adds to the character and distinctiveness of the Spey valley in Moray.
Scenic Qualities	High-medium	Diverse with a rich pattern of woodlands and rolling fields, contrasting with backdrop of open higher hills. The broad winding river is a key attractor and at the detailed level features broadleaved woodlands, haughlands and occasional historic buildings. Some detractors on upper slopes of valley including industrial scale warehouses associated with distilleries and pockets of new housing and around the settlement of Rothes.
Enjoyment	High	Spey Way long distance path, fishing also whisky distilleries attract visitors
Cultural qualities	High-medium	Ballindalloch Castle, historic settlements and distilleries, Telford Bridge at Craigellachie – many listed buildings. Rare remnant crofting landuse pattern in Knockando area.
Naturalness	Medium	River Spey designated SSSI and SAC although valleys sides generally intensively farmed

Other considerations

Connectivity	Yes	Physical links with Lower Spey Valley (4b). Visual connection with Ben Rinnes (12a-i) and higher hills fringing LCT 11 which form a striking backdrop to the Spey Valley. The Spey Valley is not designated within Highland region SW of Moray's boundary although the CNP lies approximately 4km beyond.
Variation in quality	Yes	Large scale modern distillery buildings and a proliferation of new housing in the countryside has locally affected landscape character. The valley is less scenic in the north where the containment of the valley is less pronounced.



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: UPLAND FARMLAND
Landscape character unit reference: LCT 8

Criteria	Rating	Description
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Scored landscape criteria

Rarity/typicality	Low	Extensive area of open farmland not rare in Moray
Scenic Qualities	Low	Open elevated farmland with limited diversity. Strongly influenced by large wind turbines in places.
Enjoyment	Medium-low	Some Core Paths but intensive farmland generally limits widespread recreation
Cultural qualities	Medium	Not notably rich in historic built features and few cultural associations
Naturalness	Medium-low	Very small areas SSSI designated but generally intensively managed farmland limits naturalness

Other considerations

Connectivity	Some	Some visual connectivity with the Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland (8a) of which Knock Hill and Cullen Bin are most prominent in views from this lower-lying farmland
Variation in quality	No	

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: BROAD FORESTED HILLS IN UPLAND FARMLAND-LOW PLATEAUX
Landscape character unit reference: LCT 8a-i

Criteria	Rating	Description
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Scored landscape criteria

Rarity or uniqueness	Low	Low forested plateau-like uplands are a predominant feature of this landscape type and are not rare in Moray.
Scenic Qualities	Low	Low hills predominantly covered with commercially managed and often uniform forestry. Woodlands on the outer fringes of Whiteash Hill and Wood of Ordiequish is more diverse. Consented wind farm development is sited in the Aultmore area.
Enjoyment	Medium	Some areas of woodland are popular for recreation, particularly those close to Fochabers although more densely forested hills have few promoted recreational routes
Cultural qualities	Low	Uninhabited uplands which are mostly forested
Naturalness	Medium	No designations although woodland is likely to have some value for wildlife.

Other considerations

Connectivity	Some	Visually associated with Upland Farmland (8) Openness of surrounding farmland inhibits physical connectivity of habitats. Woodlands in Fochabers area have some connectivity with Gordon Castle policies
Variation in quality	Yes	The Bin of Cullen and Knock Hill are more scenically distinctive



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: BROAD FORESTED HILLS IN UPLAND FARMLAND – LANDMARK HILLS		
Landscape character unit reference:		LCT 8a-ii
Criteria	Rating	Description
Scored landscape criteria		
Rarity or uniqueness	Medium	Pronounced isolated hills of Knock Hill, Cullen Bin form landmark features although these occur across Moray and often form isolated (and small) features.
Scenic Qualities	High-medium	Knock Hill has a particularly distinctive form and Bin of Cullen also has some scenic qualities, particularly when seen from the coast. Meikle Balloch less scenic as densely forested but prominent.
Enjoyment	High	Popular with walkers
Cultural qualities	Low	Uninhabited uplands which are mostly forested
Naturalness	Medium	SWT Reserve on Bin of Cullen although no other designations. Woodland also likely to have some value for wildlife
Other considerations		
Connectivity	Some	Visually associated with Upland Farmland (8) but these mostly wooded hills isolated and small in area. Openness of surrounding farmland inhibits physical connectivity of habitats
Variation in quality	Yes	The Bin of Cullen and Knock Hill are more scenically distinctive. These hills are relatively small in area and isolated.



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: ROLLING FORESTED HILLS**Landscape character unit reference: LCT 9**

Criteria	Rating	Description
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Scored landscape criteria

Rarity/typicality	Low	Rolling forested hills are a commonplace feature in Moray – these are relatively simple in terms of form and landcover so not the best example of this landscape type
Scenic Qualities	Medium	Lower forested hills (eastern area additionally strongly influenced by wind farm development) of lower scenic quality although Ben Aigan is important in terms of the backdrop and contrast it provides to the Spey Valley. Hill of Towie wind farm occupies one of the upland areas.
Enjoyment	Medium	Ben Aigan popular with walkers and mountain bikers and promoted by Forestry Commission. Speyside Way aligned on northern slopes of this hill. Other hills appear to be less popular for recreation.
Cultural qualities	Medium	Generally very sparsely settled upland and forests although the scheduled Auchindoun Castle lies in the Fiddich Valley on the southern boundary of this landscape.
Naturalness	Medium-low	No formal designations. Commercial forestry likely to have some limited nature conservation value. Wind farm development in part of this landscape reduces the sense of wildness.

Other considerations

Connectivity	Yes	Some visual and physical links with Spey Valley (7) and Fiddich valley. Ben Aigan forms a key feature backdropping the Spey
Variation in quality	Yes	Wind farm development at Hill of Towie



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: UPLAND MOORLAND AND FORESTRY		
Landscape character unit reference:		LCT 10
Criteria	Rating	Description
Scored landscape criteria		
Rarity/typicality	Low	These uplands are extensive and have a more modified character as they accommodate wind farm development. This is not the best example of Moray's uplands due to the relatively low diversity of the landscape and its more developed character.
Scenic Qualities	Low	Gently undulating moorland, bog and commercial, generally even-aged, low diversity forestry has a simple character and is of limited scenic quality. Extensive wind farm development is also a key characteristic of this landscape
Enjoyment	Medium-low	A Core Path is aligned through the eastern part of this landscape although recreational use is likely overall to be minimal.
Cultural qualities	Low	There are no built features or strong cultural associations
Naturalness	Medium	SSSI near Pikey Hill. Open moorland may support wildlife but sense of wildness significantly diminished by extensive wind farm development
Other considerations		
Connectivity	Yes	The outer edges of these uplands form a generally subtle backdrop to the Spey Valley (7). There are some physical links with woodlands within adjacent valleys.
Variation in quality	No	



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: OPEN ROLLING UPLANDS**Landscape character unit reference:** LCT 11

Criteria	Rating	Description
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Scored landscape criteria

Rarity/typicality	Medium-low	These uplands are extensive and have a more modified character as they accommodate extensive wind farm development. This is not the best example of an upland landscape in Moray although some individual features such as Lossie Glen are more unusual.
Scenic Qualities	Medium	Gently undulating moorland and commercial, generally even-aged, low diversity forestry has a simple character and is of limited scenic quality. Extensive wind farm development is a key characteristic of this landscape and this reduces scenic quality. The landform is more varied in places however and the landmark hill of Knock of Braemorary and the small-scale complex landform associated with Glen Lossie and the upper Dorback Burn are of increased scenic value.
Enjoyment	Medium	The Dava Way is aligned in the western part of this landscape although recreational use of other parts of this landscape is unlikely to be significant
Cultural qualities	Medium-low	There are a few listed buildings close to the A940 and Dorback Burn but little cultural heritage interest within much of this unsettled upland area.
Naturalness	Medium	SAC designation on Moidach More bog, elsewhere open moorland may support wildlife although extensive wind farm development significantly diminishes the sense of wildness

Other considerations

Connectivity	Yes	Hills on the western and southern edges of this landscape provide a distinctive backdrop to Dava Moor and the Spey Valley (7). The Drynachan, Lochindorb and Dava Moor Special Landscape Area abuts the south-western boundaries of this landscape.
Variation in quality	Yes	Landmark hills of Knock of Braemorary and Roy's Hill and Lossie Glen are more scenically diverse. The consented Cairn Duhie wind farm will change the character of the western part of this landscape if constructed.



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: OPEN UPLANDS WITH STEEP SLOPES: BEN RINNES		
Landscape character unit reference:		LCT 12a - i
Criteria	Rating	Description
Scored landscape criteria		
Rarity/typicality	High	These open uplands are rare in Moray in that they are the only upland landscapes which do not accommodate wind farm development and therefore retain a sense of naturalness. They are also the most scenically dramatic of the Moray uplands.
Scenic Qualities	High	Steep-sided, sculptural hills which rise dramatically from settled valleys. Ben Rinnes attains 840m and forms a prominent and distinctive backdrop to the Spey Valley. Meikle Conval and Little Conval are lower but important in providing the setting to Glen Rinnes and Dufftown.
Enjoyment	High	The Corbett hill of Ben Rinnes and the two Conval hills are very popular with walkers.
Cultural qualities	Medium	Hill fort on Little Conval although generally few built features
Naturalness	High-medium	No formal designations although the open heather moorland covering these hills and the lack of obvious development such as wind farms gives a distinct sense of wildness unusual in Moray
Other considerations		
Connectivity	Yes	Ben Rinnes has a visual link with the Spey Valley and Glen Rinnes. There is also connectivity with similarly steep-side, open and undeveloped uplands containing the south-eastern side of Glen Rinnes (12a-ii)
Variation in quality	No	



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: OPEN UPLANDS WITH STEEP SLOPES: SE OF GLEN RINNES**Landscape character unit reference:** LCT 12a - ii

Criteria	Rating	Description
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Scored landscape criteria

Rarity/typicality	High-medium	These open uplands are rare in Moray in that they are the only upland landscapes which do not accommodate wind farm development and therefore retain a sense of naturalness.
Scenic Qualities	High	Steep-sided open hills lying between Glen Rinnes and Glen Fiddich, providing a dramatic backdrop to Glen Rinnes.
Enjoyment	High-medium	Core Path in Glen Fiddich and some hills in this area accessed by walkers
Cultural qualities	Medium	Part of the Battle of Glenlivet 1594 site extends into the SW edge of these uplands.
Naturalness	Medium	No formal designations although the open heather moorland covering these hills will provide habitat for wildlife. While the present lack of obvious development such as wind farms gives a distinct sense of wildness, this is likely to be diminished by the proximity of the consented Dorenell wind farm

Other considerations

Connectivity	Yes	A strong visual connection with Glen Rinnes
Variation in quality	Yes	The south-eastern edge of these uplands lie close to the consented Dorenell wind farm. This wind farm is not visible from roads and settlement within Glen Rinnes.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: OPEN UPLANDS WITH SETTLED GLENS**Landscape character unit reference:** LCT 12b

Criteria	Rating	Description
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Scored landscape criteria

Rarity/typicality	Medium-low	This character type is extensive and although it is presently unusual in forming an extensive area of little developed uplands, the consented Dorenell wind farm will change this.
Scenic Qualities	Medium-low	The present scenic drama associated with the huge bowl landform of the Cabrach will be significantly diminished by the consented Dorenell wind farm.
Enjoyment	Medium	Core Paths in Glen Fiddich and across the uplands to the Cabrach. The Buck and other hills are accessed by walkers.
Cultural qualities	Medium-low	Some listed buildings in the Cabrach area but little cultural heritage interest in the sparsely settled uplands.
Naturalness	Medium	SAC (extending into Aberdeenshire) and moorland elsewhere valuable for wildlife. Extensive operational/consented wind farm development in Moray and neighbouring Aberdeenshire has/will significantly diminish(ed) the sense of wildness

Other considerations

Connectivity	Yes	Visual and physical connectivity with LCT12a-ii
Variation in quality	Yes	Areas less affected by the consented Dorenell wind farm



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: NARROW FARMED VALLEY		
Landscape character unit reference:		LCT 13a: Deveron Valley
Criteria	Rating	Description
Scored landscape criteria		
Rarity/typicality	High-medium	This valley is unusual in Moray because of its relative narrowness, sinuousness and the harmonious nature of its farmland, woodlands and buildings, particularly in the northern area. The southern area is less influenced by estate policies, having more of an upland glen character.
Scenic Qualities	High	Settled narrow valley weaving between steep-sided rolling hills. The scenic contrast between farmed valley floor, richly diverse estate policies and wooded/moorland hill slopes is pronounced in the northern area with the upper Deveron in the south of Moray comprising more of an upland glen.
Enjoyment	Medium-low	No Core Paths and relatively few other paths in this landscape. Area not promoted for recreation
Cultural qualities	High-medium	A number of listed buildings and a sense of timelessness in terms of the general absence of modern built development.
Naturalness	Medium	No formal designations. A settled farmed landscape which will limit nature conservation value although the river and occasional woodland increases diversity.
Other considerations		
Connectivity	Yes	Strong similarity with the Deveron Valley SLA in Aberdeenshire although gap between SLA and Moray boundary in SW (finishes at Haugh of Glass). Surrounded by SLA designation in Marnoch/Milltown of Rothiemay section of Deveron.
Variation in quality	Yes	Narrower and less richly diverse in south-west near Carbrach - less of a contrast between hill slopes and valley floor and additionally influenced by the Clashindarroch wind farm.



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: NARROW FARMED VALLEY**Landscape character unit reference: LCT 13b: Glen Rinnes/Glen Livet**

Criteria	Rating	Description
Scored landscape criteria		
Rarity/typicality	High	A narrow, tranquil and little developed glen which is strongly contained by steep-sided uplands – rare in Moray.
Scenic Qualities	High	This narrow glen contributes to the rich scenic composition in the Ben Rinnes area. Small farms and walled pastures have a little developed character and are dramatically back-dropped by steep heathery hills. This landscape also borders Glen Livet in the Cairngorms National Park.
Enjoyment	Medium	The Speyside Way crosses the western end of this landscape and likely to be some tourist traffic associated with distillery trails.
Cultural qualities	Medium	A few listed buildings. The Glen Livet battlefield site lies partially in this unit.
Naturalness	High-medium	Although no designations, the Rivers Livet, Avon and Dullan Water and their associated riparian woodlands likely to provide rich habitats for wildlife. Less intensively farmed hill fringes also of value. Although settled, these glens are generally tranquil and feel secluded.
Other considerations		
Connectivity	Yes	Strong connectivity with Ben Rinnes (12a-i) and the Open Uplands with Steep Slopes SE of Glen Rinnes (12a-ii). Also abuts the CNP
Variation in quality	No	



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT NAME: NARROW FARMED VALLEY		
Landscape character unit reference:		LCT 13c: Isla and Riddich Valleys
Criteria	Rating	Description
Scored landscape criteria		
Rarity/typicality	Low	There are many settled river valleys in Moray – these are more developed than others and are less dramatically contained than
Scenic Qualities	Medium	There is some scenic contrast between the flat farmed valley bottom and steep-sided, rounded and largely forested containing hills. Some detractors are present north of Dufftown and the Hill of Towie wind farm has a strong influence on character and views.
Enjoyment	High-medium	Speyside Way long distance route and local paths in and around Dufftown. On the distillery trail so visited by tourists.
Cultural qualities	High-medium	There are a cluster of listed buildings associated with these settled valleys including those within the Drummur Castle estate and on the western edge of the Fiddich. Historic distillery and castle in the planned settlement of Dufftown.
Naturalness	Medium-low	While the rivers and associated riparian habitats will be of value there are no formal designations
Other considerations		
Connectivity	Some	Some connectivity with Glen Rinnes (13b) and the Spey Valley (7)
Variation in quality	Yes	The Isla valley is already strongly influenced by wind farm development in LCT 9. A consented extension to the Hill of Towie wind farm will increase this influence.

