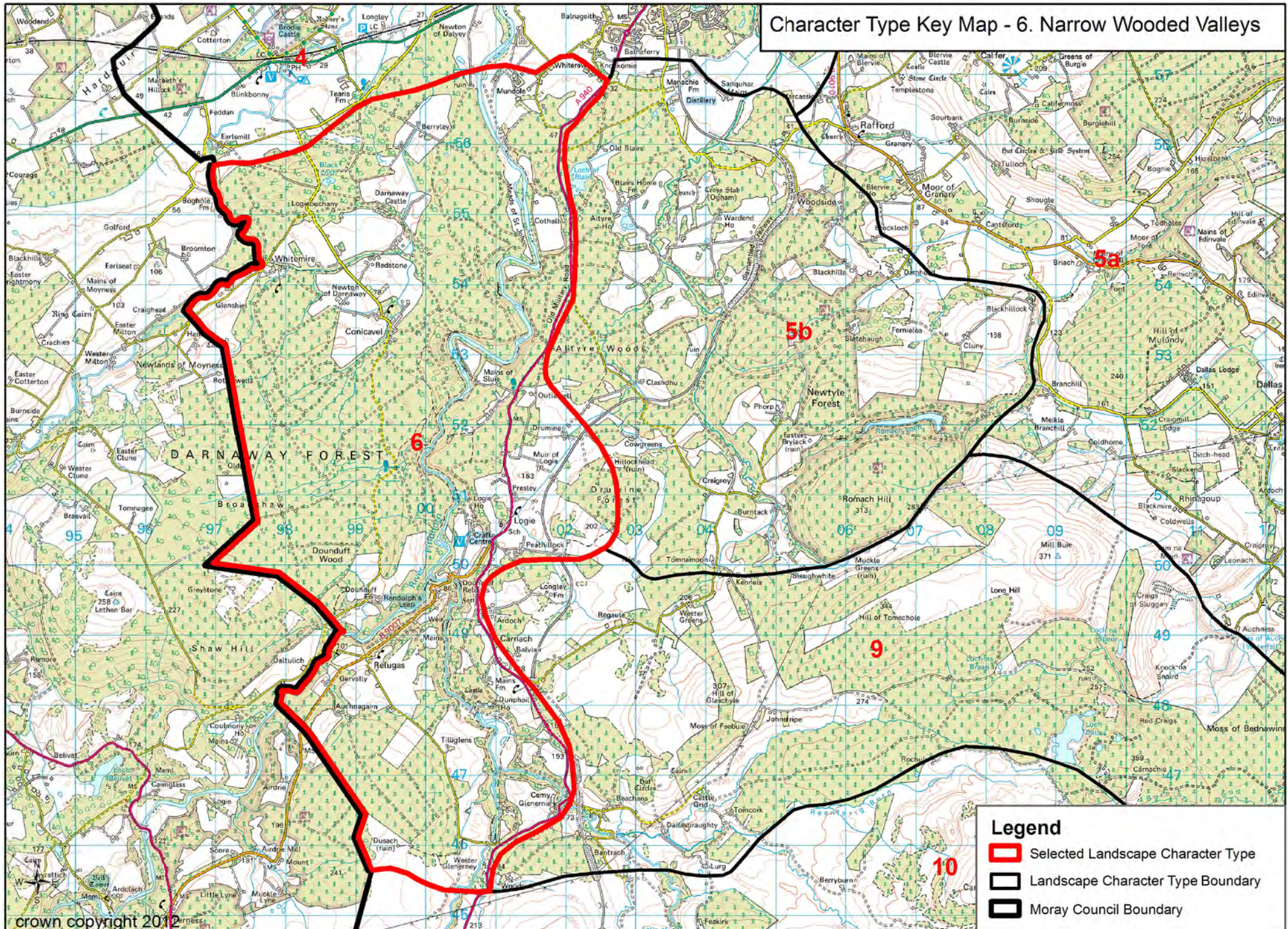


Character Type Key Map - 6. Narrow Wooded Valleys



Character Type 6: Narrow Wooded Valley

Introduction

The Narrow Wooded Valley (6) landscape character type extends either side of the River Findhorn and its significant tributary, the Divie Burn, from just south west of Forres to the Council boundary. It forms the western edge of Rolling Farmland and Forests with Low Hills (5b) and is partly overlooked by the western end of Upland Moorland and Forestry (9). Broad undulating slopes frame the deeply incised river valleys and extend widely across the area. The landscape is extensively wooded, although there are large open areas of arable fields across elevated slopes. The character is strongly influenced by the management priorities and setting of the sequence of individual estates located along the valley.

Existing/consented wind farm development

No operational wind farms or turbines were noted within this character type during the site visit.

Summary of capacity

This character type forms broad undulating slopes which extend either side of steep-sided gorges enclosing the River Findhorn and the Dorbach Burn. It is located on the western boundary of Moray, adjacent to the Rolling Farmland with Low Hills (5b), Upland Moorland and Forestry (9) and a sliver of the Open Uplands (10). To the north it lies next to the Coastal Farmland (4). The undulating terrain and broad slopes are well wooded, with fields on gentle slopes forming open spaces which vary in size from a single field to larger areas occupied by several farms. The sequence of open space to enclosed woodland forms a key characteristic.

The area is managed by several estates, and this strongly influences the historic character of this landscape, which is punctuated by historic buildings and features. The gorges themselves are a key focus, with several large houses overlooking dramatic bends in the rivers. Otherwise, the area is sparsely settled, with farms associated with the clearings.

The Narrow Wooded Valley (6) character type is only partially settled and not extensively roaded. Views within the area are limited by woodland which forms extensive enclosure offering intermittent views of the open spaces. However, where long views can be experienced, for example to Knock of Braemoray, these are sensitive. Additional sensitivities include views from the A940 and the 'gateway' to Moray from the Dava Moor, the setting of the gorges and historic features.

The dramatic gorges and their setting, the low relief, the pattern of spaces set in woodland and the historic character of this landscape are key sensitivities of this character type. This landscape therefore has a **High** sensitivity to both the large (80m – 130m) and the medium (50m – 80m) typologies, **High-Medium** sensitivity to the small-medium (35m – 50m) typology, which reflects the sensitivity to scale in this landscape and the setting of historic features, and **Medium-low** sensitivity for small (20 – 35m) typology, reflecting that there are likely to be more opportunities to accommodate smaller turbines which with careful siting are less likely to impact on the small scale and historic character of the landscape character.

Turbines of less than 20m in height could readily be accommodated within the farmed areas and would be likely to be less visible within the woodland and landform of this character type.

Potential cumulative issues

There is limited potential for cumulative landscape and visual effects to arise in the future with turbines located in adjacent character types. While the Upland Moor and Forest (9) has been identified as having some potential for wind turbines, including the large and medium typologies, the boundary with this type is small in extent, and inter-visibility is limited to views of the low western hills which can be seen from open spaces within this character type and from the A940.

The farmed clearings which are likely to be the focus for the smaller typologies identified as being the most appropriate for this landscape type are dispersed and not easily inter-visible, which is likely to minimise potential for simultaneous cumulative visual impacts. The effects of turbines on sequential visual impacts when travelling through the landscape from space to space should be carefully monitored. Care should be taken to develop a careful and consistent approach to turbine style and siting to avoid negative impacts on landscape character.

Well-sited turbines of less than 20m and a consistent relationship between these small turbines and the farm cluster are likely to further minimise potential cumulative impacts. Small turbines are also more readily visually screened by topography and woodland, which is likely to limit their cumulative visual impact.

Key cumulative issues that may arise within the Narrow Wooded Valley (6) are likely to include:

- Variations in the type and size of single and small groups of small turbines proposed within the landscape type;
- Inconsistent relationship with other elements in this landscape which has frequent historic features, and which has a strong integrity and could be come fragmented;
- Sequential visual impacts experienced when travelling through the landscape

Constraints

- The low relief, small landforms and steep sided gorges which characterise of much of this landscape
- The open spaces, particularly the smaller spaces surrounded by trees where the enclosure reinforces a sense of intimacy and discovery when travelling from space to space
- The centre of the open spaces and clearings in the woodland, where turbines will be more likely to be visually prominent and become the focal point of views into the spaces
- The sense of naturalness and drama associated with the wooded gorges
- The setting of historic buildings, features and wider designed landscapes which contribute to the character of this area
- Views from the A940, and the 'gateway' to Moray on arrival from the south over Dava Moor
- The occasional long views out of this area to low adjacent hills, and especially the landmark hill of Knock of Braemoray

Opportunities

- Gently graded slopes set away from the more complex landforms and setting of the gorges;
- The edges of clearings, next to farm buildings, which create 'clusters' of development;
- Larger stretches of open fields, especially when back-dropped by higher land or forestry

Guidance on development

No scope for the large (80m-130m) and medium (50m – 80m) typologies has been identified in this landscape sensitivity assessment.

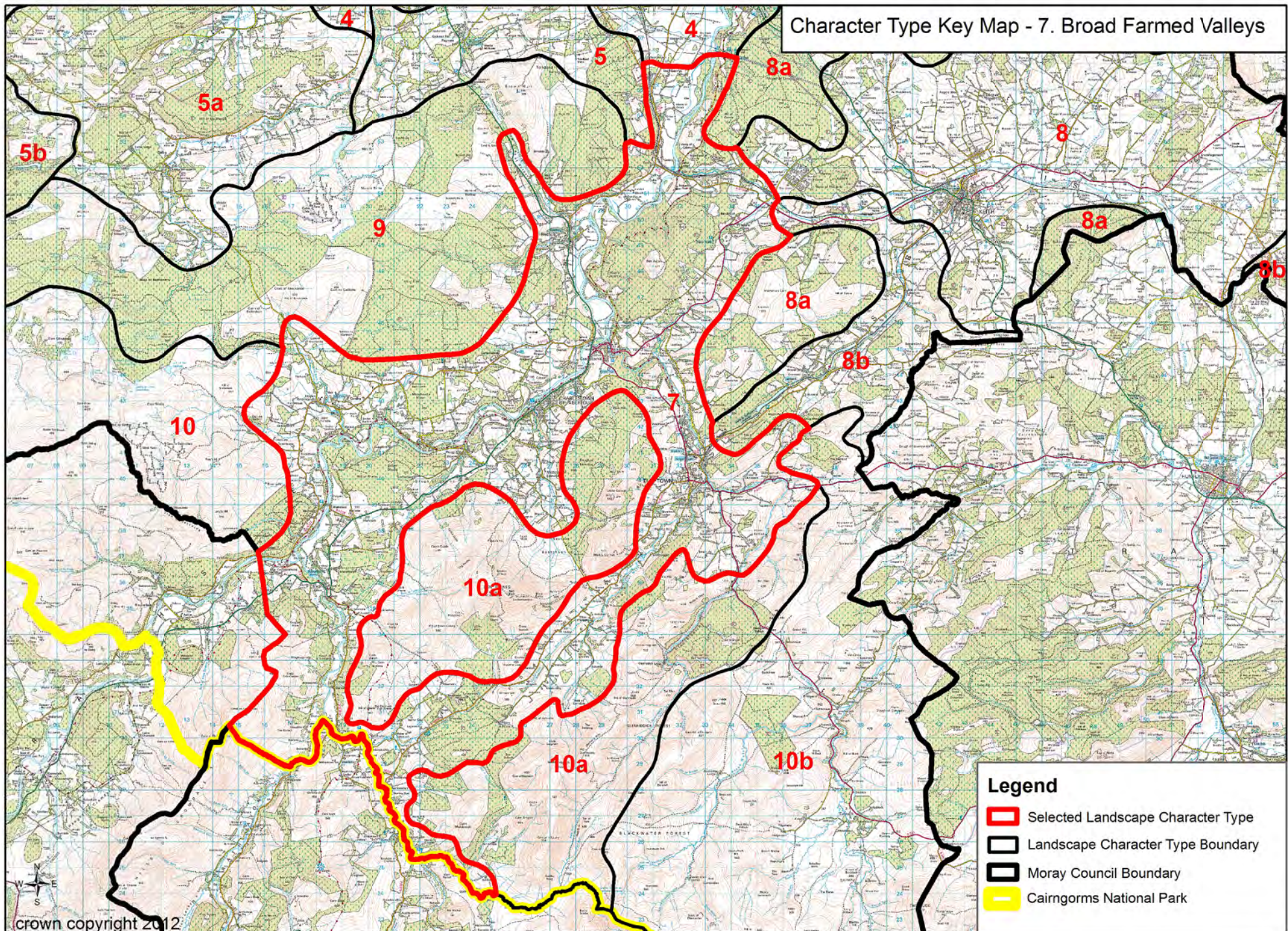
There is likely to be **limited** scope for the small-medium (35m - 50m) development typologies to be sited within this character type due to the adverse impacts likely to occur on the small scale landscape, the historic character and features and the setting of the gorges. Scope is limited to the larger spaces associated with broader, very gently sloping landform within or adjacent to the more extensive wooded areas. Individual turbines are likely to be easier to accommodate than groups, and care should be taken to avoid cumulative sequential effects.

There are opportunities for the small typology (20m – 35m) to be located on gently graded slopes and the edges of farmland within the Narrow wooded valley (6). Individual turbines are likely to be easier to accommodate than groups, which should be limited to no more than three turbines. Turbines sited in these areas should avoid intruding into the centre of the open spaces, the setting of key features and the setting of the gorges or other more complex landforms.

Well-sited turbines of less than 20m could be sited to reflect the scattered settlement pattern, and would fit in well with the scale of this landscape. Turbines should be located to avoid impacts on the settings of, and views from and to, historical buildings and features, including sites of archaeological interest.

Micro siting should follow the guidance set out in Section 5 of this report.

Character Type Key Map - 7. Broad Farmed Valleys



Legend

- ▬ Selected Landscape Character Type
- Landscape Character Type Boundary
- Moray Council Boundary
- Cairngorms National Park

Landscape Character Type 7: Broad Farmed Valley

Introduction

The Broad Farmed Valley occurs in a single area within Moray where it covers the more enclosed valley of the Spey in the Moray and Nairn landscape character assessment. The valley of the River Fiddich between Dufftown and Craigellachie, Glen Rinnes, part of Glen Livet and the valley east of Ben Aigan have been incorporated into this character type due to their similarities of landform, land cover and scale. These areas were either classified as Upland Farmland (8) or Open Uplands (10) in the Moray and Nairn landscape assessment or extend beyond the boundary of the area considered in this assessment. Ben Aigan has also been included in this character type because it forms an integral part of the scenic composition of the Spey and Fiddich Valleys and a key focus in views. This hill is defined in this study as a 'landmark Hill' of significance across the wider the Moray landscape (see section 6).

This assessment considers the sensitivity of both larger and smaller development typologies.

Existing/consented wind farm development

There are no wind farm developments sited within this character type. A single small turbine was noted near Archiestown during the field survey. A 67m high consented turbine is located within this character type at Ardoch Farm, close to the A95 (see Figure 2).

The Hill of Towie wind farm, located in the adjacent 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a) character type, is currently under construction. The Paul's Hill wind farm is sited within the 'Open Uplands' (10) and the operational and consented Rothes wind farm within the 'Upland Moorland and Forestry' (9). All these developments are visible from this character type. A consented 67m high turbine is located on Hunt Hill within the 'Upland Moorland and Forestry' (9) but close to the transition with the Spey Valley within the 'Broad Farmed Valley' (7).

Summary of sensitivity

The Broad Farmed Valley (7) character type includes the valleys of the Spey, the Riddich and the narrower tributaries of Glen Rinnes, Glen Livet and the River Avon. These river valleys abut the upland character types of the Open Uplands (10) and the Upland Moorland and Forest (9). Ben Aigan forms a landmark hill included within this character type because it forms an integral part of the scenic composition of the Spey and Fiddich Valleys and a key focus in views. The enclosure of the valleys, which is reinforced by the diverse vegetation pattern, is a key sensitivity. They are particularly strongly contained in their upper reaches and within the side glens, where they are often scenically juxtaposed with the steep-sided slopes of Ben Rinnes and other nearby hills. The main valleys of the Spey and Fiddich have broader undulating terraces and side slopes in places. The valleys are well-settled and feature a number of distinctive settlements, landmark castles and historic distillery buildings. Operational wind farm development located in adjacent upland landscapes is visible from the Spey and Fiddich valleys and the potential for cumulative landscape and visual effects to occur increases sensitivity, particularly to larger typologies.

This character type has an overall **High** sensitivity to the large and medium typologies, a **High-medium** sensitivity to the small-medium typology and a **Medium** sensitivity to the small typology.

Potential cumulative issues

The Hill of Towie wind farm, currently being constructed in the adjacent 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a) character type, is visible in close proximity to Dufftown but also in views from the broader section of the Spey Valley between Aberlour and Knockando. The Paul's Hill wind farm sited within the 'Open Uplands' (10) and the operational and consented Rothes wind farm developments within the 'Upland Moorland and Forestry' (9) are also visible from the Knockando area within the Spey Valley.

The Paul's Hill wind farm forms a fairly tight cluster of turbines located on lower ground which is partially contained by the higher Roy's Hill thus limiting its visual impact when seen from the Spey valley within Moray. The operational Rothes wind farm is similarly contained by the hill of Carn na Cailliche and is set back into the core upland area, reducing impacts on the Spey Valley, although the consented extension will increase the extent of visibility of this development in the Knockando area. The Hill of Towie wind farm is visible along a more open, but relatively low, section of skyline from parts of the Spey valley and near Dufftown and is particularly prominent when visible close to the immediate ridge which contains the narrow valley east of Ben Aigan.

Consented single turbines (67m high), located within this character type and the adjacent 'Upland Moorland and Forestry' (9), are likely to be widely visible.

Key cumulative landscape and visual issues include:

- Multiple developments extending along the skylines of the 'Open Uplands' (10), the Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a) and the Upland Moorland Forest' (9) which contain these valleys which could dominate views from these well-settled and traversed landscapes – protection of the key landmark hills will be essential to reduce impacts on sensitive skylines and limit the extent of development visible with the majority of upland skylines remaining open.
- Potential sequential effects on views from the A95 and other routes within the wider study area, particularly given the linearity of these valleys where multiple developments would be seen sequentially.
- Visual confusion and an absence of rationale which could occur between large turbines sited in less settled simple and more expansive upland areas and the same size of turbines also sited within these more settled smaller scale valleys.
- Variations in the type and size of single and small groups of small turbines proposed within the landscape type.

Constraints:

- The scenic juxtaposition of parts of these valleys with the dramatically steep-sided Ben Rinnes and associated hills.
- The relatively small extent, enclosure and containment of some of these valleys which reduces their scale.
- More complex landform features including incised sections of valley, rolling lower hill slopes, occasional rocky scarps but also the open flat floodplain which contributes to the diversity of these valleys.
- The consistent presence of small scale features such as farms and houses and enclosed fields and woodlands which provide ready scale references.
- Cumulative effects with larger typologies which currently have a clear association with broader, simpler upland areas.

- Views of the distinctive landmark hills of Ben Rinnes, Roy's Hill, Carn na Cailliche, Meikle Conval, Little Conval and Ben Aigan from roads and settlement.
- The setting of settlements, castles, traditional distilleries, mansion houses and their designed landscapes.
- The distinct sense of place associated with whisky production.

Opportunities:

- Broader, upper valley sides at the transition with the less dramatic upland areas with a simple gently undulating landform and medium scale which could best relate to the size of smaller typologies

Guidance on development

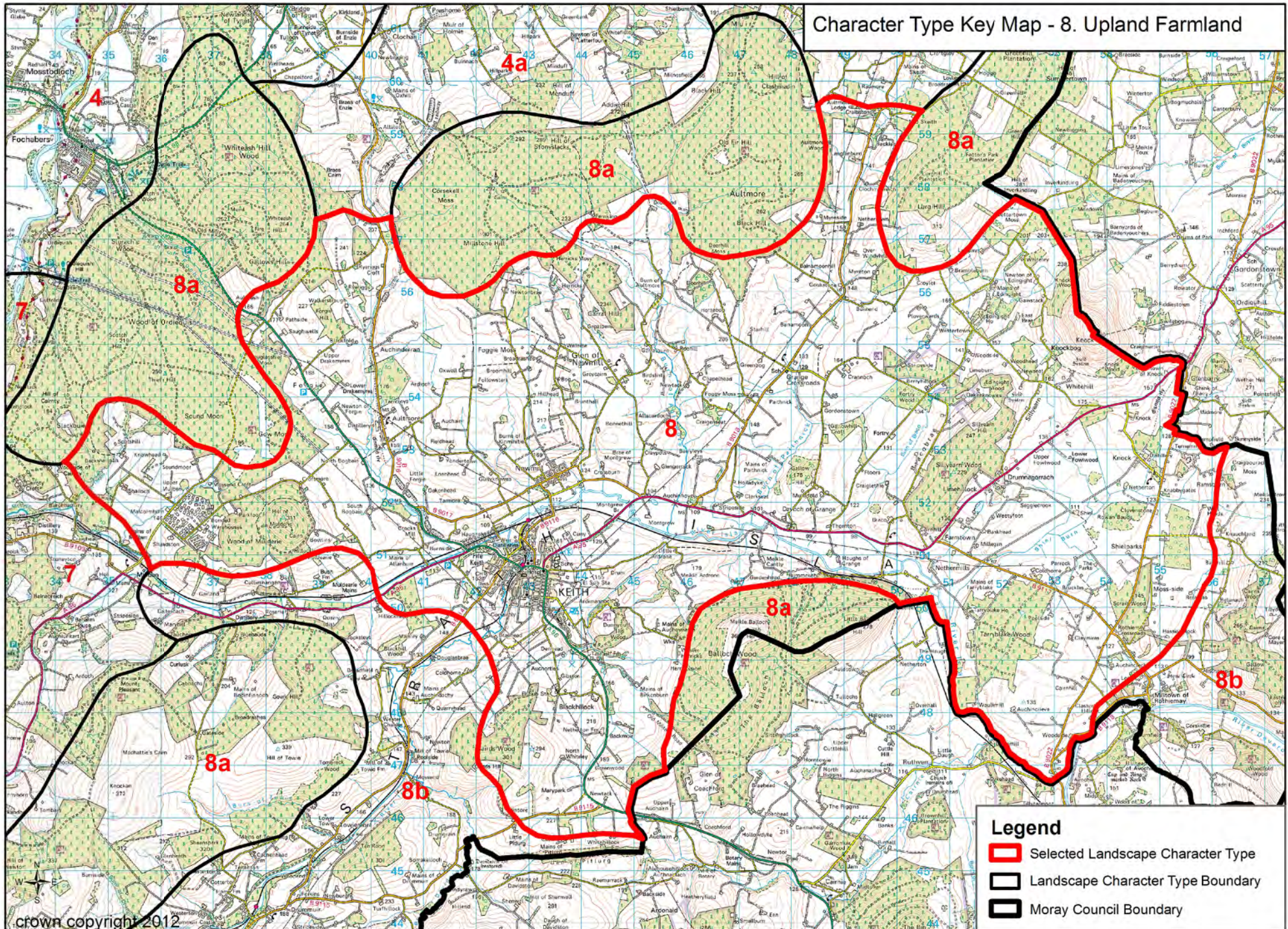
There is no scope to accommodate the larger typologies within this landscape due principally to their likely significant effects on landscape scale, the setting of settlement and because of cumulative landscape and visual effects that would arise with existing wind farm developments sited in the adjacent 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a), 'Upland Moorland and Forestry' (9) and the 'Open Uplands' (10).

There is some limited scope to accommodate the small-medium typology (turbines 35-50m high) but only within broader valleys and on gently undulating upper slopes and the more expansive terraces that sit above the more enclosed lower river valleys. Care should be taken to avoid impact on the more dramatic steep-sided hills and key views to them. They should also avoid impacting on the setting of settlements, landmark historic buildings and designed landscape by being sited within less densely settled areas at the transition with the adjacent uplands. This typology should not be sited on upper hill slopes close to operational/consented wind farms located within adjacent upland landscapes.

There are greater opportunities to site the small typology (turbines 20-35m high) within these landscapes although the more contained narrow and incised glens and the open floodplains would still be sensitive. Turbines of this size would be better sited on the hill slopes above fields and below more extensive woodlands as this would accord with the consistent pattern of settlement found within these upper hill slopes and terraces.

Further guidance on the siting of smaller turbines is provided in section 5 of the main report.

Character Type Key Map - 8. Upland Farmland



Landscape Character Type 8: Upland Farmland

Introduction

The Upland Farmland character type occurs in a single area within Moray. This is an extensive area with considerable variation in character as it comprises narrow contained valleys, more extensive farmland and sparsely settled forested plateau and hill tops.

The valley of the River Fiddich between Dufftown and Craigellachie and the valley east of Ben Aigen, which were classified as Upland Farmland (8) in the Moray and Nairn landscape assessment, has been incorporated into the adjacent 'Broad Farmed Valley' (7) character type due to their similarities of landform, land cover and scale. The more extensive areas of gently undulating farmland situated at the core of this character type have been retained as character type 8 Upland Farmland while the remainder of this landscape has been sub-divided as follows:

- 8a: 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland'
- 8b: 'Narrow valleys within Upland Farmland'

This assessment considers the sensitivity of both larger and smaller development typologies within the Upland Farmland (8) character type.

Existing/consented wind farm/turbine development

Two operational single turbines, one at Balnamoon (70m) and one 80m high at Myreton Crossroads are located in this character type, within approximately 3km of each other. Further developments of 4 additional turbines, ranging from 89m to 92m high have also been consented close to one of these operational single turbines, on the lower south west facing slopes of Lurg Hill. A number of smaller single turbines below 35m high are located in this character type.

The Hill of Towie wind farm (21 turbines at 100 m height) is currently being constructed in the adjacent 'Broad Forested Hill Tops within Upland Farmland' (8a) character type and is clearly visible from the Upland Farmland (8).

Summary of sensitivity

The Upland Farmland character type encompasses the broad shallow valleys largely lying to the north of the River Isla. This landscape has a simple land cover of open farmland with large fields of pasture predominantly enclosed by post and wire fences. There is an even distribution of farms across this extensive area, accessed by a close network of minor roads. This farmed and well-settled landscape is edged by the densely forested broader upland plateau and hill tops of the 'Broad Forested Hills within the Upland Farmland' (8a) which forms a low dark backdrop with occasional more distinctive conical hills such as Meikle Balloch and the Bin of Cullen forming landmark features in views from the 'Upland Farmland' (8). While some key characteristics of this landscape could relate to larger development typologies, the presence of an even dispersal of small farms and houses and the potential cumulative effects with large turbines sited both within this character type, and in adjacent simpler and larger scale upland landscapes, increases sensitivity.

This landscape has an overall **High** sensitivity to the large and medium development typologies. There would be a **High-medium** sensitivity to the small-medium typology and a

Medium-low sensitivity due to its reduced effect on landscape scale and cumulative effects with larger turbines sited in this and adjacent character types.

Cumulative issues

The two operational single turbines located on Lurg Hill and at Balnamoon are highly visible from settlement and roads across this landscape. The consented developments for four additional turbines in the general Lurg Hill area have not been designed in an integrated manner as they form different applications. A number of operational smaller turbines >30m high sited in this character type have a better fit with the scale of this landscape and are likely to have fewer cumulative effects.

The wind farm development of Hill of Towie in the adjacent 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a) is under construction and is highly visible from this landscape. The 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a) character type has been identified in this study as having potential for accommodating the Medium typology (turbines 50-80m).

Key cumulative landscape and visual issues include:

- Multiple turbines associated with the majority of land holdings across this well-settled landscape would result in significant visual clutter and confusion and would detract from the key features of this landscape. Turbines over 35m will create this effect more quickly than smaller turbines.
- Turbines visible on every hill top/upland plateau within the adjacent 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a) could have a dominant and 'over-bearing' effect on this character type and create further potential for visual clutter with any larger turbines located within this character type.
- Potential sequential cumulative visual effects on views from the A95 through Moray and into Aberdeenshire where a number of operational wind farms and small groups of larger turbines are sited (the screening provided by ridges and hills on the Aberdeenshire/Moray border limits inter-visibility).
- Visual confusion and an absence of rationale which could occur between large turbines sited in the adjacent less settled, simple and more expansive 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a) and this character type and the same size of turbines also sited within this more settled, smaller scale landscape.
- Variations in the type and size of single and small groups of small turbines proposed within the landscape type.

Constraints:

- The presence of small scale features such as farms and houses and enclosed fields and woodlands which provide easily understood scale references.
- Cumulative effects with larger typologies which are predominantly associated with broader simpler upland areas.
- The openness of this landscape which allows extensive views.
- Views of the distinctive landmark hills in this and adjoining landscapes, which include the Bin of Cullen, Knock Hill and Meikle Balloch, seen from settlement and roads but also the smaller hills and ridges which form key features within the generally gently undulating landform of this landscape.
- Potential cumulative visual and landscape affects associated with multiple developments of the large, medium and small-medium typologies where they could

exacerbate visual clutter around Keith and in the north-east of this character type where existing transmission lines and large turbines are present.

Opportunities:

- The simple gently undulating landform and medium scale of this landscape which could best relate to the size of smaller typologies

Guidance on development

There is no scope to accommodate the larger typologies within this landscape due principally to their likely significant effects on landscape scale, the setting of settlement and because of potential cumulative landscape and visual effects with large turbines.

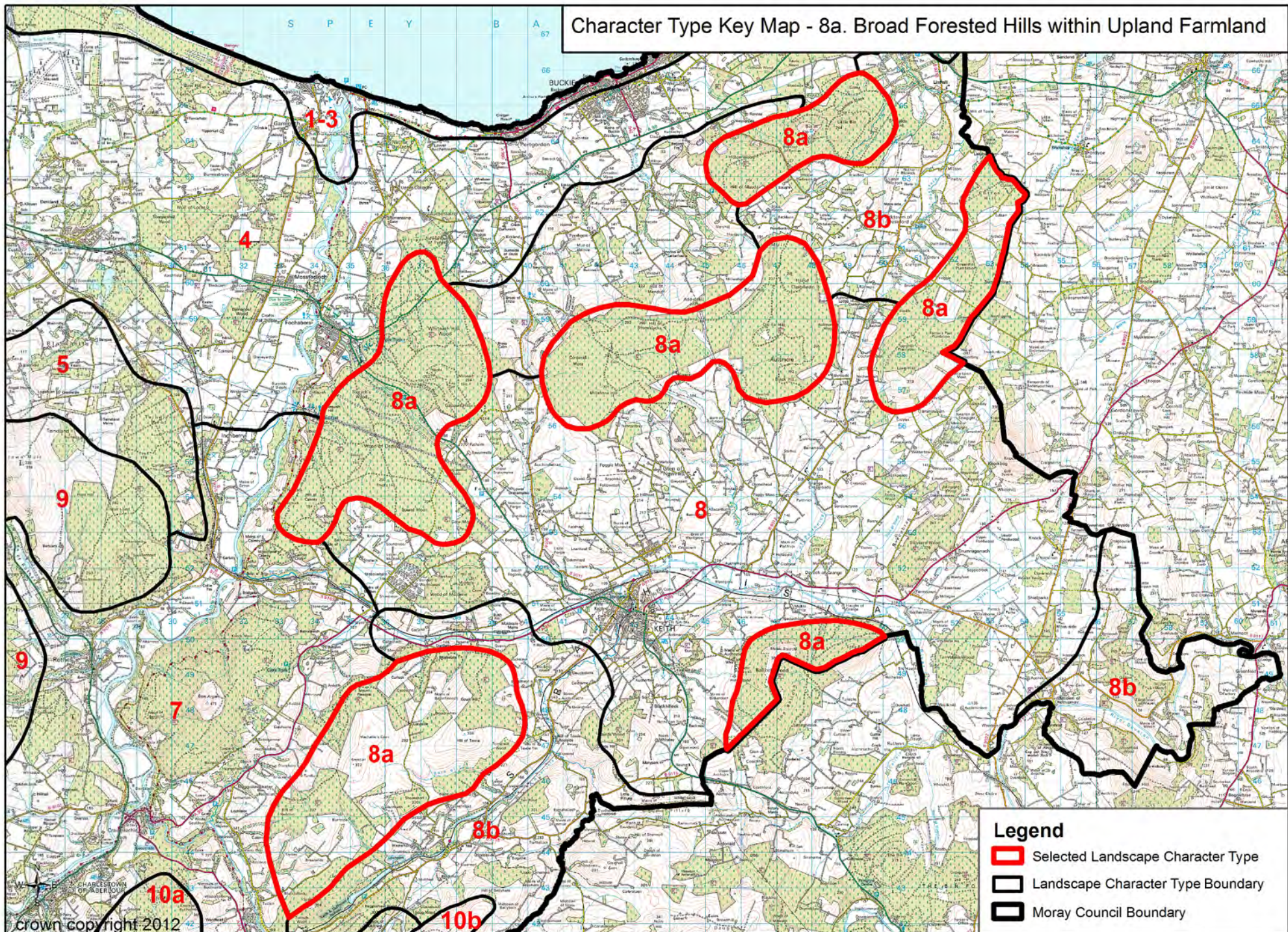
There is **limited** scope for the small-medium typology (turbines 35-50m) to be accommodated in this character type. Turbines of this size should be located on broad, more gently undulating slopes, avoiding impact on the landmark hills (Figure 4) and being sited away from the smaller hills and ridges which form occasional landform features within this landscape. The potential for cumulative effects with transmission lines and operational and consented turbines (but also with any potential wind farm developments which may be sited in the adjacent 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a)) is likely to severely restrict opportunities for this typology. The even distribution of settlement across this landscape also offers a potential constraint given the significant cumulative effects if a number of farms/land holdings featured a turbine of this size.

There are greater opportunities to accommodate turbines below 35m height in order to minimise potential cumulative impacts with larger turbines sited both in this landscape and within the adjacent 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a). Multiple turbines of this height could also be accommodated more successfully in terms of reducing visual clutter and dominance across this open and well-settled landscape. Turbines should be sited on gentler slopes above fields and on slight ridges and terraces which often occur below woodlands. They should avoid being sited close to the 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a) where they could be seen in close proximity to existing larger typologies.

Detailed guidance on the siting of smaller turbines is set out in section 5 of this report.

Given the number and range of turbines already sited in this landscape character type and the adjacent 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a), it is recommended that periodic monitoring should be undertaken to review cumulative effects and gauge potential limits of capacity.

Character Type Key Map - 8a. Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland



Landscape Character Type 8a: Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland

Introduction

The Upland Farmland character type occurs in a single area within Moray. This is an extensive area with considerable variation in character as it comprises narrow contained valleys, more extensive farmland and sparsely settled forested plateau and hill tops.

The valley of the River Fiddich between Dufftown and Craigellachie and the valley east of Ben Aigen, which are classified as Upland Farmland (8) in the Moray and Nairn landscape assessment, have been incorporated into the adjacent 'Broad Farmed Valley' (7) character type due to their similarities of landform, land cover and scale. The more extensive areas of farmland situated at the core of this character type have been retained as character type 8 Upland Farmland while the remainder of this landscape has been sub-divided as follows:

- 8a: 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland'
- 8b: 'Narrow valleys within Upland Farmland'

This assessment considers the sensitivity of larger development typologies in detail and summarises key constraints and opportunities for smaller typologies within the Broad Forested Hill within Upland Farmland (8a) character sub-type only.

Existing/ consented wind farm development

The Hill of Towie wind farm (21 turbines at 100 m height) is currently being constructed in this character type.

Two operational single turbines, one at Balnamoon (70m) and one 80m high at Myreton Crossroads are located in the adjacent 'Upland Farmland' (8) character type. A further 4 turbines, ranging from 89m to 92m high, have also been consented close to one of these operational single turbines, on the lower south west facing slopes of Lurg Hill. A number of smaller single turbines below 35m high are additionally located in the 'Upland Farmland' (8) character type.

Summary of sensitivity

This character type comprises the predominantly forested broader hills and upland plateaux which contain the lower and more settled 'Upland Farmland' (8) within the Isla Valley and its northern tributaries. Although the majority of these more elevated upland areas have a simple landform of gentle slopes, broad indistinct summits and rounded ridges, the more defined conical 'landmark' hills of the Bin of Cullen and Meikle Balloch also occur and these are highly sensitive to turbine development. These upland landscapes are very sparsely settled although they are not extensive and are surrounded by well settled and farmed lowland landscapes increasing sensitivity in relation to wider landscape context and views. While the landmark hills within this character type are visually prominent, forested plateaux and broad ridges form relatively low and even containing skylines to adjacent character types. Sensitivity is increased where parts of these upland areas form the backdrop to Fochabers and Gordon Castle designed landscape. An operational wind farm is located within this character type.

This landscape has an overall **High-medium** sensitivity to the large development typology and a **Medium** sensitivity to the medium typology.

Smaller typologies

Smaller turbines (below 50m high) would incur similar sensitivities to larger typologies within these landscapes. The more distinct and defined hills and lower plateaux important in providing landmark features and/or the setting to Fochabers and the Gordon Castle designed landscape would remain sensitive. Smaller typologies would be likely to have less of a visual effect on the adjoining 'Upland Farmland' (8) and especially so if sited on lower slopes so back-dropped to some degree by rising ground. Both larger and smaller typologies sited in close proximity within this character type could result in cumulative impacts and these are discussed below.

Cumulative issues

The wind farm development of Hill of Towie is under construction and is/will be highly visible from the 'Broad Farmed Valley' (7), the 'Upland Farmland' (8) and 'Valleys within Upland Farmland' (8b). The two operational single turbines, at Myreton (on Lurg Hill) and at Balnamoon within the adjacent 'Broad Farmed Valley' (8) are highly visible from settlement and roads. Consents for four additional turbines in this area will be likely to accentuate this effect.

Key cumulative landscape and visual issues include:

- Wind farm developments located on the majority of upland plateaux and ridges within this character area which would impact on views from the adjacent 'Upland Farmland' (8), potentially creating a dominant or 'overbearing' effect.
- Close inter-visibility of operational and consented larger turbines sited in the adjacent 'Upland Farmland' (8) character type and any larger typologies sited in nearby parts of the 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a) which could exacerbate visual clutter and domination of turbines in views from the B9018 and from settlement.
- Additional developments inter-visible with the existing Hill of Towie wind farm on skylines in adjacent character types such as the lower Spey Valley within the 'Coastal Farmlands' (4).
- Potential sequential cumulative visual effects on views from the A95 through Moray and into Aberdeenshire where a number of operational wind farms and small groups of larger turbines are sited.
- Cumulative effects from popular walking routes and hill tops including from the Bin of Cullen and Knock Hill where multiple wind farms and large turbines sited in both Moray and Aberdeenshire would be seen in relative proximity.

Constraints:

- The landmark hills of Meikle Balloch and the Bin of Cullen which have conical and confined open summits which form key foci in views.
- The relatively limited extent of these uplands areas increasing the potential for landscape and visual impact on smaller scale settled landscapes.
- Whiteash Hill which is important in providing the wider setting to Gordon Castle designed landscape and Fochabers.

Opportunities:

- The simple gently undulating landform, uniform land cover, very sparse settlement and medium to large scale of the plateau-like hills of this landscape

Guidance on development

There is no scope to accommodate the large typology due principally to the limited extent of these upland landscapes which increases the potential for impacts on adjacent settled landscapes.

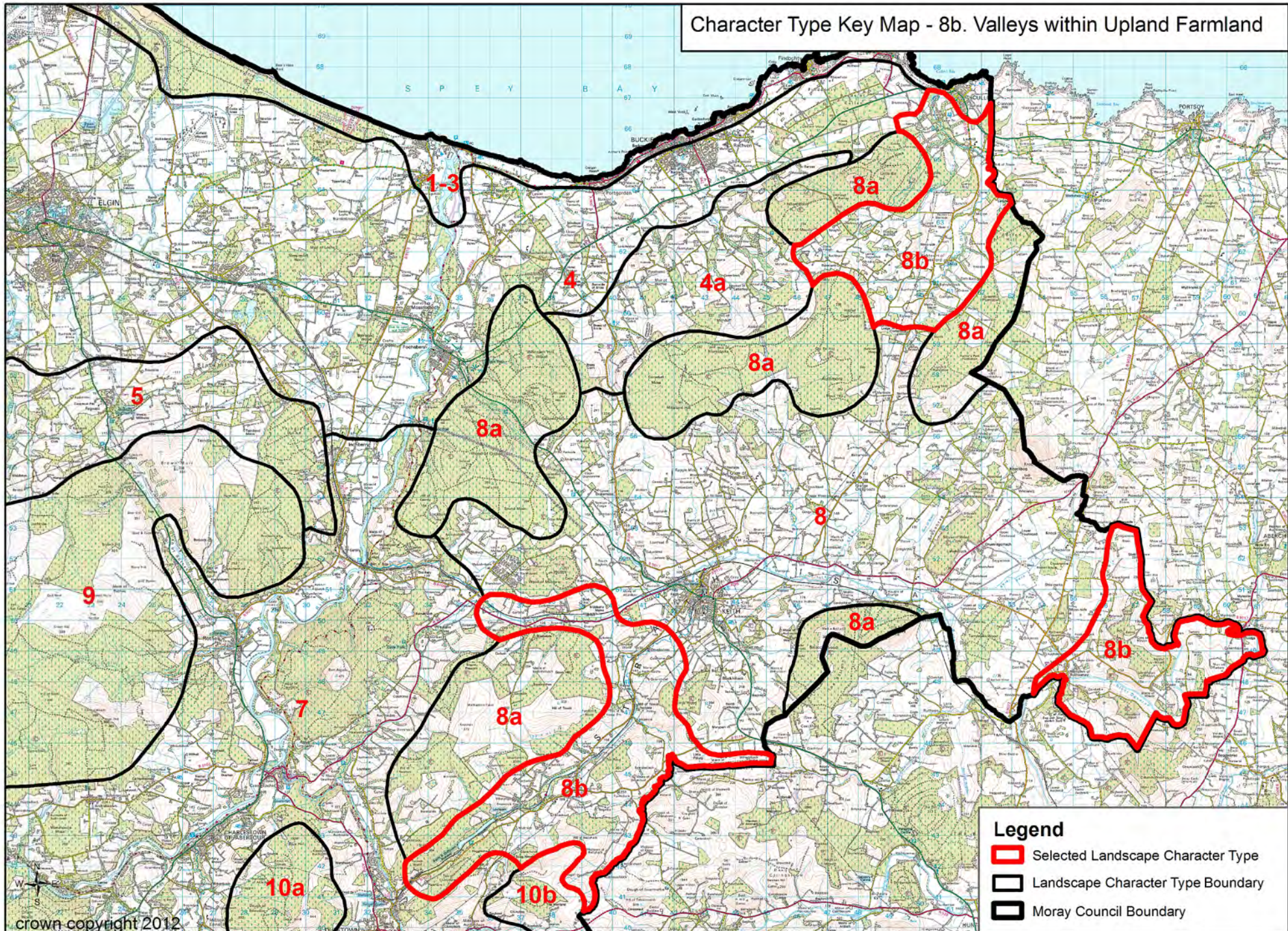
There is some scope to accommodate the medium typology (turbines 50-80m) within this landscape. Turbines should be set well back into the interior of the more extensive undulating upland plateau where gentle undulations in landform would provide a degree of containment and allow for adequate separation to occur, thus minimising intrusion on adjoining well-settled character types.

Smaller typologies would fit better with the reduced scale of narrower ridges and lower hill slopes (which tend to immediately overlook more settled landscapes) in this character type. Care should be taken to avoid close inter-visibility between smaller and larger typologies and on-going monitoring will be necessary to consider cumulative effects and capacity both within this character type and the adjacent 'Upland Farmland' (8).

All turbines should avoid being sited on, or close by, the more defined landmark hills of Bin of Cullen and Meikle Balloch. Development should also be sited to avoid significant intrusion on the designed landscape of Gordon Castle and on the setting of Fochabers.

Further guidance is provided on the siting and design of smaller typologies in section 5 of this report.

Character Type Key Map - 8b. Valleys within Upland Farmland



Landscape Character Type 8b: Valleys within Upland Farmland

Introduction

The Upland Farmland character type occurs in a single area within Moray. This is an extensive area with considerable variation in character as it comprises narrow contained valleys, more extensive farmland and sparsely settled forested plateau and hill tops.

The valley of the River Fiddich between Dufftown and Craigellachie and the valley east of Ben Aigen, which were classified as Upland Farmland (8) in the Moray and Nairn landscape assessment, have been incorporated into the adjacent 'Broad Farmed Valley' (7) character type due to their similarities of landform, land cover and scale. The more extensive areas of farmland situated at the core of this character type have been retained as character type 8 Upland Farmland while the remainder of this landscape has been sub-divided as follows:

- 8a: 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland'
- 8b: 'Narrow valleys within Upland Farmland'

This assessment considers the sensitivity of both larger and smaller development typologies within the 'Valleys within Upland Farmland' (8b) character sub-type. This landscape comprises the valleys of the River Deveron in the far eastern corner of Moray, the River of Deskford (which is partially defined as the 'Coastal Farmland' (4) in the Moray and Nairn Landscape Assessment), the Burn of Mulben and the upper reaches of the River Isla.

Existing/consented wind farm development

No existing commercial wind farm developments are located in this character type although some single small turbines were noted during our field work.

The Hill of Towie wind farm (21 turbines at 100 m height) located in the 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a) is visible in close views from parts of the Isla Valley.

Two operational single turbines, one at Balnamoon (70m) and one 80m high at Myreton Crossroads are located in the adjacent 'Upland Farmland' (8) character type. A further 4 turbines, ranging from 89m to 92m high, have also been consented close to one of these operational single turbines, on the lower south west facing slopes of Lurg Hill and these developments may be visible from parts of the Deskford Valley.

Summary of sensitivity

The valleys of the upper Isla, Deskford, Deveron and Mulben are strongly contained by steep farmed and wooded slopes. They are generally narrow and have a small to medium scale which is reinforced by their well-settled character. The adjacent 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a) form immediate skyline ridges seen from these valleys. These valleys often have a diverse land cover with mixed policy woodlands and a distinctive pattern of shelterbelts and avenue trees adding to the richness of well-managed farmland. Although these valleys are not readily visible from adjacent character types due to their visual containment, they are well-settled and contain a number of main roads increasing visual sensitivity.

This landscape has an overall **High** sensitivity to both the large and medium typologies. It has a **High-medium** sensitivity to the small-medium typology and a **Medium** landscape sensitivity to the small typology.

Cumulative issues

The wind farm development of Hill of Towie in the adjacent 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a) is under construction and is highly visible from this settled area. Two single turbines and 4 additional consented turbines (all between 70-92m high) lie close to the Deskford valley in the Hill of Lurg area within the 'Upland Farmland' (8).

Key cumulative landscape and visual issues include:

- Multiple turbines of even the small typology (20-35m) could result in significant visual clutter and detract from the often richly patterned character of these valleys, particularly where they are narrow and strongly confined by steep slopes.
- Wind farm developments located on the adjacent 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a) where large turbines could have a dominant and 'over-bearing' effect on this character type, especially if 'perched' close to the edge on immediate skylines which contain these valleys.
- An absence of rationale between large turbines sited in the less settled, simpler and more expansive 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a) and also within these more settled smaller scale valleys which could lead to visual confusion and erode perceived differences in landscape character.

Constraints:

- The presence of small scale features such as farms and houses, enclosed fields and woodlands which provide ready scale references.
- Incised and narrow valley floors and the more complex rolling landform of upper slopes and shapely small hills within the upper Isla and Deveron valleys
- The often rich diversity of land cover which includes policy woodlands, a strong pattern of shelterbelts, field and avenue trees, enclosed fields and occasional pockets of wetland within valley floors.
- The setting to grand houses/castles and their policies.
- Cumulative effects with larger typologies clearly associated with broader simpler upland areas.
- Views to the landmark hill of the Bin of Cullen from the Deskford valley.
- Consideration of cumulative effects associated with multiple turbines which could potentially be associated with the majority of land holdings.

Opportunities:

- Broader, more gently sloping upper valley sides and more extensive undulating terraces, usually at the transition with the 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a) which could best relate to the size of smaller typologies (although potential cumulative effects with any larger typologies sited in 8a would need to be considered).

Guidance on development

There is no scope to accommodate the larger typologies due to the likely adverse effects on the scale of these often narrow and strongly contained valleys and the presence of an even dispersal of buildings, woodlands and other small features. Larger typologies would also detract from areas with a particularly diverse land cover pattern and would result in cumulative landscape and visual effects with existing wind farm developments sited in the adjacent 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a) character type, which are already visible from some of these valleys.

The small-medium typology would also appear very large in relation to the small scale and often narrow extent of the majority of these valleys. This typology would also be more likely to have significant cumulative effects if closely inter-visible with operational and consented larger typologies within adjacent character types. There may be some **limited** opportunity however for turbines towards the lower height band of this typology to be accommodated within upper slopes and terraces within the broader valleys. The setting and views to the landmark hill of the Bin of Cullen and potential cumulative issues associated with any development within the 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a) will be key constraints however.

There is **some** increased scope to accommodate the small typology (turbines 20-35m) within these valleys.

All turbines should be sited on more gentle, open slopes and terraces, avoiding areas with a more pronounced pattern of trees and policy woodlands. They should avoid being sited close to existing wind farm development (which is already visible in parts of the upper Isla) in the 'Broad Forested Hills within Upland Farmland' (8a) in order to avoid visual clutter associated with different turbine sizes and design. Areas with a more complex rolling landform and the incised and often intimately scaled valley floors should also be avoided as should intrusion on the setting to archaeological features and mansion houses and their designed landscapes.

Detailed guidance on the siting and design of smaller turbines is set out in section 5 of this report.