

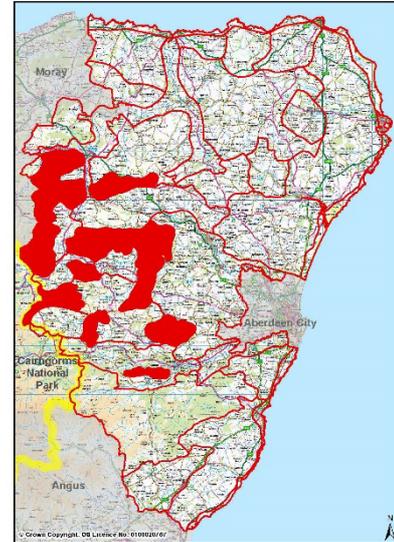
## Landscape Character Type: Outlying Hills and Ridges

### Overview

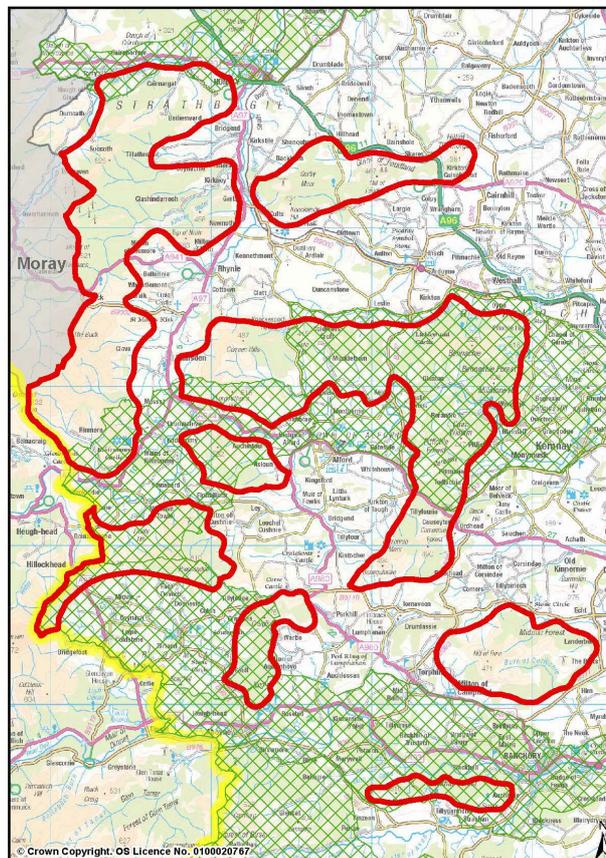
The moorland spurs extending from the high mountains of the Cairngorms to the lower farmed coastal landscapes of the northeast are distinctive. Collectively these provide a large-scale transitional landscape character type.

Whilst each spur has its own character, overall the *Outlying Hills and Ridges* Landscape Character Type exhibits almost uniform landcover of heather and forest. When viewed from the lower lying farmland, they appear to coalesce into an almost continuous dark backdrop.

The interrelated system of highland ridges and peaks are integral to Aberdeenshire's landscape identity e.g. Bennachie and Tap o'Noth.



Map 1 *Outlying Hills and Ridges*



## **Key Landscape Characteristics**

**Sensitivity** – The *Outlying Hills and Ridges* Landscape Character Type is indivisibly linked to surrounding scenic upland areas, including the Cairngorms National Park. There are five Special Landscape Areas (SLA) shown by the hatched areas on Map 1. These comprise Deveron Valley SLA to the north, with Bennachie SLA, Upper Don Valley SLA, Howe of Cromar SLA and Dee Valley SLAs forming a contiguous 'C' shape to the west of Garioch, and through Marr. These designations emphasise landscape qualities that provide high scenic value, strong landscape identity, sense of place, naturalness and remoteness.

**Landform** – Moorland spurs extend into the farmed landscape. Smooth undulating landform forms dark ridges across the skyline when viewed from lowlands. Outcrops stand proud of surrounding low farmland and there are occasional dramatic outcrops such as at Bennachie and Tap o'Noth.

**Vegetation** – Almost uniform landcover of heather and forest. Extensive tracts of conifer plantation covering much of the slopes, with patches of heather moorland. Fields at the base of the moorland spurs form a distinctive edge of pasture on the lower slopes.

**Settlement** – Settlements are limited to the edges of the moorland spurs with steadings at the base of slopes in sheltered locations. Typically, these are occasional isolated houses and derelict buildings. Important archaeological features are located in this landscape.

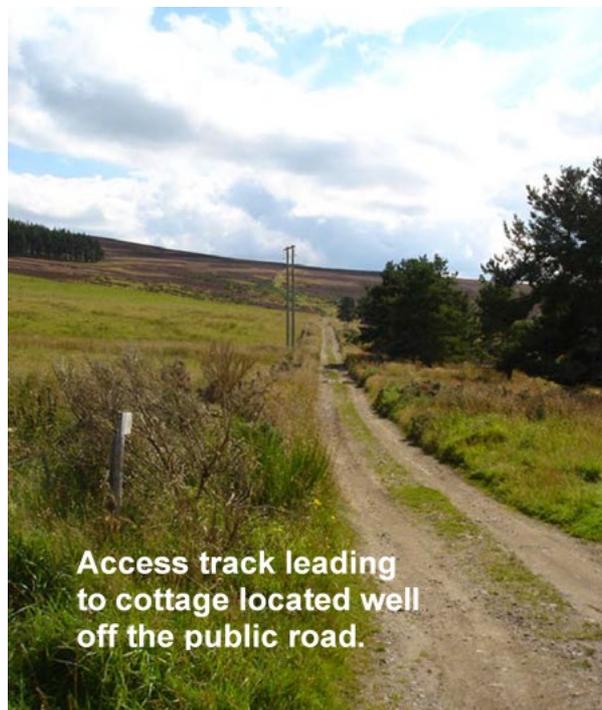
**General** – Colours and tone vary with weather and seasons. Promontories present spectacular views over surrounding lowland.

**Other** – Communication masts can be a dominant feature within skyline views. Wind energy development is largely limited to the edges of the moorland spurs although views of turbines are visible in this landscape.

## Specific Guidance

### General

- The *Outlying Hills and Ridges* Landscape Character Type is sparsely populated with few roads.
- New development should maintain the landscape pattern with its wide expanses and a handful of houses/smallholdings.
- The variety of landcover is a characteristic that could be enhanced for visual diversity and interest. However, the distinct moorland edge should be conserved.
- Maintenance of a continuous tract of moorland with views into lowland areas provides a valuable recreational resource linking distinctive upland features. Development should be limited within these areas, ensuring views to the lowlands are not impacted.



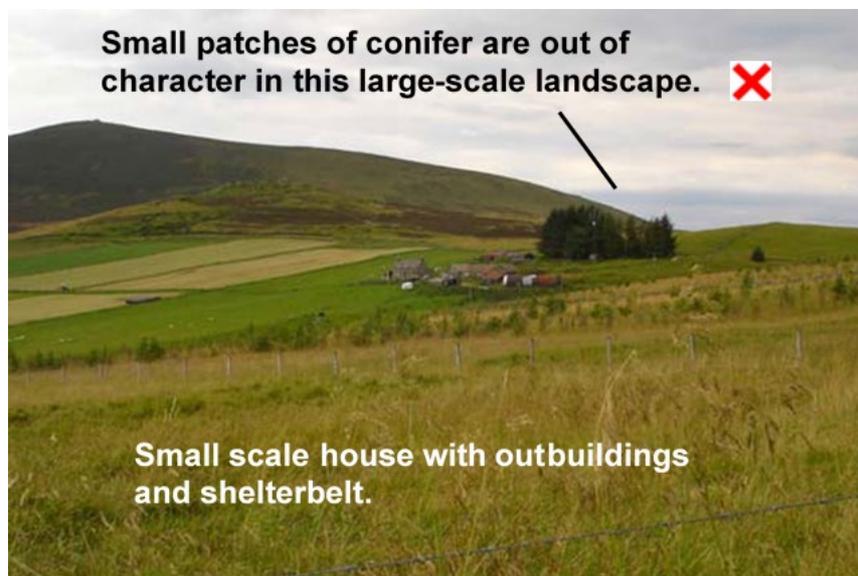
### Land Use - Residential

- Derelict stone cottages highlight a sense of remoteness within the moorland setting.
- Development should reflect the remote and windswept character by generally being of a small scale and no more than 1½ storey.
- Small single storey cottages with a small range of outbuildings are characteristic. Houses/cottages should be low lying and not occupy prominent positions such as on the top of ridges.
- Development should reflect the existing sparsely scattered pattern and be located well off main roads.



### Trees and Woodland

- On higher land, small patches of conifer are generally inappropriate, being out of character with the large scale of the upland forms.
- On lower slopes, loosely scattered stands of conifer and native pines can add a more natural feel to the upland edge.



### Boundaries

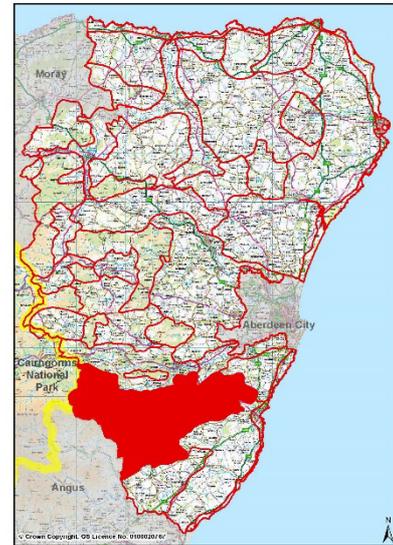
- Post and wire fencing can form an appropriate boundary allowing unchecked views.
- Drystone dykes add structure to the landscape and should be maintained where they occur, particularly around smallholdings.

## Landscape Character Type: Summits and Plateaux - Aberdeenshire

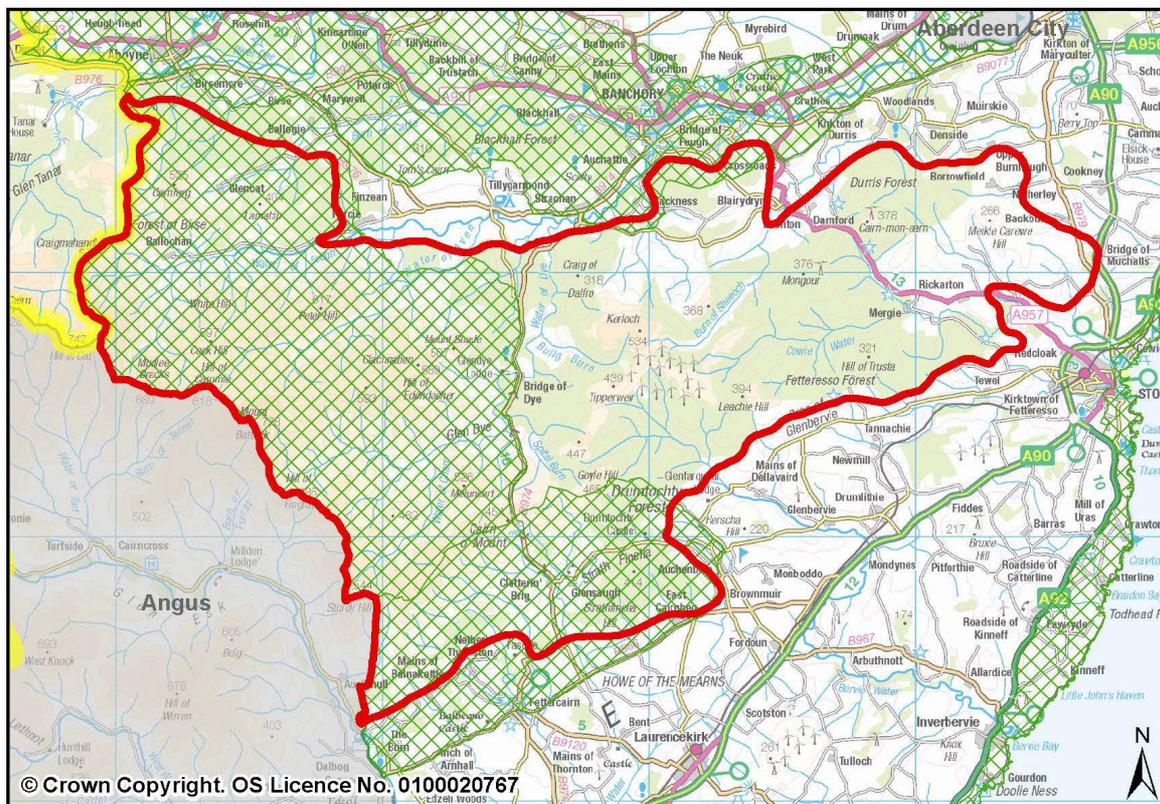
### Overview

The high moorland plateaux encompass a vast landscape expanse, extending from the edge of the high mountains of the Cairngorms National Park almost to the coast at Stonehaven. This Landscape Character Type has a wild and exposed character with commanding views into the tranquil farmed lowland of Howe of the Mearns and the coast, and across to Deeside.

The landscape is characterised by its smooth rolling relief and rounded hill summits, with a distinct southern edge and a change of landform marking the Highland Boundary Fault. This presents a dramatic change from upland to lowland. The lower slopes assume a smaller scale and more intricate character with pastureland and clustered farms.



Map 1 *Summits and Plateaux – Aberdeenshire:*



## **Key Landscape Characteristics**

**Sensitivity** – Large open areas of upland are rare in eastern Aberdeenshire. The moorland swathes the *Summits and Plateaux - Aberdeenshire* Landscape Character Type should be preserved and maintained to protect this valuable landscape asset.

Special Landscape Area designations are shown as the hatched areas in Map 1. Clachnaben and Forest of Birse Special Landscape Area (SLA) to the west recognises the scenic qualities created by the strong rolling relief and distinctive hill profiles, its naturalness and relationship with the Cairngorms National Park. To the south lies the Braes of the Mearns SLA with its contrasting uniformly flat landscape. This designation recognises the highly visible nature of the landscape and its importance in maintaining views to and from the highland backdrop.

**Landform** – Smooth rolling landform and rounded summits with interlocking spurs. Upland ridges extend toward the Cairngorms. The smooth landform is dissected by deep gullies. The southern edge changes to the steeper slopes of the Highland Boundary Fault.

**Vegetation** – The lower slopes are extensively forested but the plateau itself is covered by heather moorland extending westwards into the Cairngorms National Park. This extent reveals the strong and simple rolling relief with successive ridges and deep gullies often linked by mossy clumps of birch and rowan. The plateau foothills have a more diverse mix of farmland and grazed moors. There is a patchwork of heather, bracken, gorse, scrubby birch, pine woodland.

Unenclosed green pasture extends up from the valleys where small-clustered farms are located on lower slopes enclosed by broadleaf shelterbelts.

**Field Pattern / land-use** – Patchwork of green pasture on some fringe slopes associated with isolated villages and hamlets.

**Settlement** – An almost complete absence of habitation on the upland ridges. Occasional derelict grey stone cottages are features. Small-clustered farms shelter on the lower slopes.

**Other** – The area is crossed by only two roads, with the A974 Cairn o' Mount a key feature. Numerous old routeways are now used as footpaths for walkers. Large

scale wind farm development has a significant presence in the central and eastern sections of the upland areas, with medium and small-scale turbines on the lower slopes.

## Specific Guidance

### General

- The moorland swathes the *Summits and Plateaux* Landscape Character Type should be preserved and maintained to protect this valuable landscape asset.



- A key characteristic of this Landscape Character Type is its exposed ridgelines and smooth interlocking spurs. These are sensitive to development of wind turbines and communication masts intruding the skyline and detracting from the remoteness of the upland ridges.



### Land Use - Residential

- Development should generally be single storey cottages situated on their own.
- Individual cottages/homes should generally be situated close to roads with small garden grounds.



- To reflect the character of the settlement pattern, cottages/homes would best fit into the landscape in forested parts and not on the open moorland.

### Trees and Woodland

- Small patches of conifer woodland are generally inappropriate and out of character with the large scale of the upland forms.



- Any new planting should reflect and link to existing plantations.
- On the moorland areas planting should be limited to reflect the windswept character

## Boundaries

- Drystone dykes add local interest and structure to the landscape and should be retained.
- In some parts the stone walls have a more uniform appearance, typically signifying an estate boundary.



## Tourist Facilities

- Visitor pressure in the form of hill walking and car parking contributes human impact and erosion of the landscape.
- Small car parks and visitor facilities built of local stones and timber would fit well in the landscape. These should generally have a 'rough' appearance and retain trees where practical.



## Land Use - Agriculture

- New agricultural buildings should be associated with existing farmsteads.