Landscape Character Area: Cliffs of the North and South East coasts

*Landscape character type: The Coast; the persistent influence of the sea dominates this landscape character type. The landscape fluctuates between sandy beaches and dunes, to rocky headlands and sheer cliffs.*

**Overview**
Along the entirety of the northern shoreline of Banff & Buchan, and on the eastern coast south of Peterhead, the coastal strip is dominated by cliff-edged headlands, frequently fissured and bitten into narrow inlets and, more rarely, hugging sheltered sandy bays. Despite the physical restrictions of this narrow rocky coastline, the overall impression is of an open, large-scale landscape, the wide expanses of sea and sky merging into one at the uninterrupted horizon line.

Cliffs of the North and South East Coasts Location:

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**Key Landscape Features**

**Sensitivity** This character area is of increased landscape sensitivity due to the characteristics described below. This area is coincident with what was historically identified as an Area of Landscape Significance.

**Landform** High headlands give way to sheer cliffs, pitted by waves and shattering into jagged reefs. Cliff edged headlands are frequently fissured and bitten into by narrow inlets and more rarely hugging sheltered sandy bays such as Cruden and Sandend. South of Peterhead the sea has gnawed the pink granite into a ragged coastline of highly sculpted and fractured cliffs, broken reefs and dramatic features such as the Bullers of Buchan blowhole. The cliffs of the northern coastline are relatively cohesive and form a more defined edge to the headlands compared to those on the east shore.

**Vegetation** Short creeping grasses and occasional wind pruned gorse bushes on cliff faces. Trees and woodland are very limited which adds to the windswept nature of the cliffs.

**Settlement** Frequent settlement along the coastline. Settlements vary from large fishing ports of Fraserburgh and Peterhead to small fishing villages of Crovie and Pennan which are crammed at the base of cliffs and are colourful in comparison with planned inland villages. Ruined castles and mansion houses such as those at Slains, Pitsligo and Dundarg, stud the grassy headlands.

**General** Open, large-scale landscape, the wide expanses of sea and sky merging into one at the uninterrupted horizon line Lack of landscape diversity.

**Other** Character area is of high nature conservation and geological interest, in particular the large number of coastal breeding birds.
Specific Guidance

General

- Ruined castles and mansion houses such as those at Slains, Pitsligo and Dundarg, stud the grassy headlands. The setting of these should be maintained.
- Pressure from wind generation, the area has high wind speeds.
- Development in exposed and highly sensitive locations may disturb the perception of a remote landscape, particularly evident in coastal areas.

Dwellings

- New housing should be sensitively located, corresponding to traditional patterns. New housing in prominent locations, such as on exposed sites above small coastal villages that were formerly contained at the base of cliffs, should be avoided.
- Adding to existing groups of houses is a successful way of accommodating new development within the countryside. The established pattern of the group should be adhered to.
- Individual houses occur occasionally but are very dispersed across the character area and are generally located close to the roadside. Individual houses should be within modest garden surrounded by stone dykes and a range of outbuildings may be appropriate to reflect traditional dwellings.
- Within settlements the gable end of almost every dwelling faces onto the sea. This orientation should be reflected in new development where this is the established pattern. Outwith settlements dwellings face onto the roadside or to the sea and the established pattern in an area should be adhered to in new development.
- Large over embellished dwellings with sweeping drives and lawns are disproportionate to the landscape and other development in the character area and looks out of place.
- Stone dykes are successful boundary treatments, and wooden fencing should be avoided.

Trees and Woodland

- Trees and woodland are very limited which adds to the windswept nature of the cliffs. Planting around new development should be restricted to small clumps of broadleaf trees.

Boundaries

- Hedgerows and stone dykes should be maintained and reinstated.

Agricultural Buildings

- New buildings should be grouped with existing building and depending on the back drop grey or greenish corrugated sheeting should be used.
Landscape Character Area: Dunes and Beaches from Fraserburgh to Peterhead

Landscape Character Type: The Coast; the persistent influence of the sea dominates this landscape character type. The landscape fluctuates between sandy beaches and dunes, to rocky headlands and sheer cliffs.

Overview
The area includes the coastal strip from Fraserburgh, one of the longest stretches of beach in Europe, where huge sweeps of deserted sand are backed by rolling dunes. The transition from dunes to landform is much gentler than the cliffs elsewhere along the coast. Views from the adjoining low coastal plains out to sea are almost uninterrupted.

Key Landscape Features

Sensitivity  This character area is of increased landscape sensitivity due to the characteristics described below. This area is coincident with what has historically been identified as an Area of Landscape Significance.

Landform  Huge sweeps of deserted sand backed by rolling dunes. Wind sculpted seaward dunes merge with ever-shifting sands to the east and the comparative solidity of the landward dunes to the west giving a gentler transition between land and sea. A key feature is the Loch of Strathbeg, the main body of standing water in Banff & Buchan, and the largest dune lake in Britain.

Settlement  Almost devoid of settlements with the exception of the two main settlement Fraserburgh and Peterhead. St Fergus is a dramatic feature, although planting and mounding contributes to the integration of the development with the surrounding coastal plain.

Vegetation  Vegetation limited to knitted mats of coastal grassland and marram.

Other  High nature conservation and geological interest as demonstrated by the majority of the area being designated SSSI. Uninterrupted views from character area and neighbouring coastal plain out to sea.
Specific Guidance

**General**
- Uninterrupted views to sea are a feature of this area and development should avoid disrupting these.
- The landscape can be described as unstable, and is almost devoid of settlements. Large scale development should be avoided.
- St Fergus Gas Terminal, Peterhead Power Station, and Ron Lighthouse and are dramatic features whose setting should be retained.

**Dwellings**
- Development in exposed and highly sensitive locations may disturb the perception of a remote landscape.
- The limited access points into the area will intrinsically limit the locations where development can occur.
- Pressure from development is more pressing to the south and east of the area within commuting distance of Aberdeen. Development should in the main be concentrated within existing settlements.
- Constant local demand for rural housing has the potential to impact on the landscape.
- New housing should be sensitively located, corresponding to traditional patterns. In the countryside dwellings are sparsely distributed. In settlements, traditional development has the gable facing the sea.
- New housing in prominent locations, such as on dunes or in the middle of large flat fields, should be avoided.
- There are a number of potential brownfield opportunities.

**Other**
- There are few trees in the area, although there are occasional pockets of scrubby woodland.
- Radio masts are particularly prominent around Blackhills Industrial Estate
- There are few agricultural buildings in the area

**Boundaries**
- Loss of hedgerows/stone dykes is an issue and these should be retained and maintained where possible.
- Post and wire field boundaries predominate.
Landscape Character Area: Formartine Links

Landscape Character Type: The Coast; the persistent influence of the sea dominates this landscape character type. The landscape fluctuates between sandy beaches and dunes, to rocky headlands and sheer cliffs.

Overview
Glaciation has been the principal agent of the landscape formation in this area, creating a flat hinterland with occasional low raised beaches to the north. The most recent marine transgression brought vast quantities of silt and sand to the area which has led to the creation of the vast Forvie Dunes at the mouth of the River Ythan.

This landscape has a windswept open character predominated by rough grazing and scrubby sand flats. Few shelterbelts and woods interrupt the horizon, and the occasional solitary trees or buildings stand isolated within the expanse. There are occasional groups of broadleaf trees, generally around estate houses such as Foveran House and Menie House. To the West, the land rises into the fertile, gently undulating hinterland of the Formartine Lowlands. North of Collieston, the agricultural belt extends to the edge of the rocky coastline, reflecting the coastal character south of Aberdeen. The village of Collieston nestles at the base of a small cove north of the dunes contrasting with the more exposed settlements of Balmedie and Newburgh.

Formartine Links Location:

Key Landscape Features

Sensitivity This character area is of increased landscape sensitivity due to the characteristics described below. This area is coincident with what was historically identified as an Area of Landscape Significance.

Landform Open, exposed landscape. Extensive sands and beaches, including dunes. Contrasting narrow rocky shoreline north of the dunes. Raised beaches in the Ythan Valley.

Vegetation Predominant landcover of scrubby gorse and grasses behind the sands; dunes tufted with marram grass or bare of any vegetation. Scarce woodland and sporadic tree cover.

Field pattern/Land-use Encroachment of farmland into sandy coastal fringe.

Settlement Settlement concentrated in towns such as Newburgh and Balmedie which are expanding with new housing.

Other Experience highly dependant on weather and prevailing character of the sea, whether rough or calm. Exposed to long expansive views along the beach and across the sea.
Specific Guidance

General
- The massive sand dunes at Forvie are especially sensitive to built development and visitor pressure; their physical structure and lack of vegetation cover leaves them open to erosion.
- Open, exposed landscape with long views renders it sensitive to vertical elements which will have a significant visual impact.
- Uncontrolled pressures could result in the erosion of dunes, changes in vegetation structure and new built development which would alter the wild and exposed character of the coastline.
- Vertical elements are particularly intrusive in the open landscape; their impact may be reduced by positioning them against a backdrop of landform or vegetation.

Tourist Facilities
- Screening of car parks will help to restrict visual impact and prevent car access onto vulnerable areas; car parks which are set back from the dunes and roughly surfaced conform with the surrounding character, behind the links and dunes, car parks, roads and services may blend with the landscape by limiting the use of urbanising elements such as metalled surfacing, road lines, kerbs, signage and street lights.
- Designed picnic areas, boardwalks and information boards will help to keep people to paths and restrict access to sensitive areas of the dunes.
- Developing recreational and visitor facilities away from the dunes may concentrate visitors and recreational users in the more structurally and ecologically robust areas such as the rocky shoreline or farmland fringe.

Woodland and Trees
- Woodland is not on the whole a feature, but where it does exist broad leave trees are predominant.
- Where trees are grouped around buildings, this should be continued although this is generally only for larger buildings.

Dwellings
- Built development along the coastline and expansion of settlements which is set back from the coastal edge will help to conserve the dune character.
- Limited use of boundary treatments; the use of landform rather than vegetation to screen new areas of built development is appropriate.
- Built development on the edges of existing settlements such as Newburgh and Balmedie will have a visual impact due to the lack of tree cover.
- Houses are sparsely distributed, groupings are not particularly common.
Landscape Character Area: Kincardine Cliffs

Landscape Character Type: The Coast; the persistent influence of the sea dominates this landscape character type. The landscape fluctuates between sandy beaches and dunes, to rocky headlands and sheer cliffs.

Overview
Kincardine Cliffs cover about 30km of coastline between Aberdeen and Inverbervie. The area lies within the Highland Boundary Fault which can be seen more prominently from the east. The area is characterised by steep rugged slopes and cliffs which merge quickly into farmland around Garvock and Glenbervie and the Kincardine Plateau. Raised beaches are a common feature with villages often sitting along shorelines. Sea cliffs dominate the north, around Crawton, whilst softer rocks covered in grass, present a gentler edge in the south. The area is densely inhabited, particularly north of Stonehaven where the foothills of the Grampians extend out towards the sea, forcing the settlements into a narrow corridor of land. Old fishing villages such as Findon, Muchalls and Catterline appear within sheltered coves or on perched cliff tops with white washed or pebble dashed cottages. Sea views are fundamental to the character of Kincardine Cliffs, providing an immense sense of scale when viewed from the cliff tops.

Key Landscape Features
Sensitivity This character area is of increased landscape sensitivity due to the characteristics described below. This area is coincident with what was historically identified as an Area of Landscape Significance.

Landform Steep, weathered coastal cliffs with stacks and arches especially between Stonehaven and Aberdeen. Cliff erosion is prevalent in some areas, particularly on sandstone cliffs south of Stonehaven. Raised beach platforms can give deep stepped profile to the coastline.

Vegetation Grass and shrub covered slopes on shallower cliffs and bare rock on steep slopes.

Land-use Farmland extends to the edge of the cliffs.

Settlement Settlements cluster on cliff tops whilst older villages and harbours nestle at the cliff base, which are accessed by steep roads down to the sea. Extensive new development at the edge of coastal towns.

Other Major communications corridor behind the cliffs, notably the A90 and the east coast railway line. Expansive views out to the seas provide a vast sense of scale.
Specific Guidance

General
- Exposed cliff tops are sensitive to any changes in land use and development. The exposed area will make developments highly visible. Coastal cliffs, stacks and arches are sensitive to nearby development which may affect their setting.
- Windswept cliff tops are a key characteristic of the area. Windfarms may be highly visible and at variance with the character of small clustered settlements. In more open and undeveloped land they will be a prominent feature but may also enhance the windswept aspect of the landscape.
- Historical features, such as cliff-top castles, churches and archaeological remains benefit from open landscapes that emphasise their exposure and enhance their views. Development near such features will detract from these views.
- The rural character of the cliff tops may be conserved by restricting the use of urbanising elements such as street lighting and signage outside the main settlements.
- New development on the coast which is clustered in form and limited in extent will reflect traditional patterns and is likely to be acceptable. Linear development along communication routes may lead to strip development, lacking a sense of identity.
- Pressures of development within small stone harbours could lead to the loss of their character and the conservation of small fishing villages on and below cliffs is important. The design of new development should aim to preserve their identity and harbour settings.

Dwellings
- In the north of the character area there are few houses that are not associated with farms. This is likely to be a result of the area being within the greenbelt and also due to access restrictions. Where development in this area can be supported by other plan policies this should be screened with clumps of trees and where possible add to an existing group of buildings.
- Single storey cottages situated individually or larger dwellings associated with farms reflect the character in the southern parts of the character area outwith settlements.
- White wash and stone finishes reflect the traditional architectural style.

Agricultural Buildings
- New agricultural buildings should be associated with existing farm buildings which are usually close to cliff edges. With the sea backdrop, grey corrugated sheeting will be preferable rather than stronger contrasting colours.

Boundaries
- The enhancement and maintenance of drystone dykes will reinforce field patterns and landscape structure.

Trees and Woodland
- Extensive use of shelterbelts around development can appear out of place and may emphasise built development; clumped groups of native species is more appropriate.
Landscape Character Area: Kincardine Links

Landscape Character Type: The Coast; the persistent influence of the sea dominates this landscape character type. The landscape fluctuates between sandy beaches and dunes, to rocky headlands and sheer cliffs.

Overview
The land to the south of Inverbervie is flat before it gradually rises from the Kincardine Links to form a gently sloping stretch of land that extends into the more pronounced relief of Garvock and Glenbervie. The distinctive rocky edge of the Aberdeenshire coastline is absent here and the raised beaches widen to create a more gentle unison between land and sea. The wide coastal fringe is the most distinctive element of this landscape character area. South of Inverbervie it merges with farmland directly or across low step that mark the edge of the raised beach. South of St Cyrus the coastal fringe forms an enclosed platform that is backed by a prominent cliff line and encompasses farmland as well as saltmarsh and dunes. The landscape is well settled with villages located behind the coast or, at St Cyrus, set back from the cliff edge on the elevated rolling terrain. As with all coastal landscapes, the space and scale provided by sea views is characteristic. This open character is more pronounced in the Kincardine Links owing to the wide area of farmland and the extensive coastal fringe.

Key Landscape Features

Sensitivity An area of increased landscape sensitivity exists to the south of Johnshaven, as shown by the shaded area, due to the qualities of the raised beaches and extensive sea views. This area is coincident with what was historically identified as an Area of Landscape Significance.

Landform Extensive coastal fringe. Gently sloping agricultural hinterland descends gradually to cliffs or, where cliffs are low, almost to the sea. Raised beaches from 50m to 600m wide, backed by cliffs.

Vegetation Cliff slopes are well vegetated with grasses and scrub. Raised beaches encompass open farmland, marsh and reed bed, with little woodland, as well as a narrow sandy fringe.

Settlement Villages perched on or set back from cliff tops, often including extensive new housing development, such as at Inverbervie, Johnshaven and St Cyrus. Farms and caravan sites are exposed on sloping agricultural hinterland.

Other Telecommunication masts are prominent across the agricultural hinterland. Expansive views across the sea are fundamental to the character together with exposure to elements.
Specific Guidance

**General**
- The flat coastal fringe is vulnerable to development that would alter its open character. Careful siting of development must ensure the open character is not disrupted. The open landscape is also sensitive to changes which may block or restrict views.
- Areas of wetland and marsh add to the visual diversity of the area and should be preserved through specific conservation management.
- Development within the coastal fringe may intrude the views along the beach.

**Dwellings**
- Coastal edge development that reflects traditional styles of small cottages are characteristic.
- The siting of new dwellings outwith settlements should reflect the dispersed settlement pattern with individual dwellings widely spaced out.
- Small terraces of two or three cottages close to cliff edges or on the coastal fringe are also a characteristic. New development of this type should seek to replicate the scale of the traditional terraces. Generally terraces are not grouped with other terraces but may be associated with other buildings.
- Dwellings should generally front onto the sea.
- Whitewash or stone finishes are reflective of the character area.
- Setting new large scale development 1-2km back from the edge will help to preserve the character of the area.
- Planting around new dwellings should be limited and where planting is proposed it should be in small clumps.

**Tourist Facilities**
- Cliff tops are sensitive to the development of tourist accommodation such as caravan sites or new suburban style development. Caravan parks and campsites should be set back from the edge in raised locations in order to preserve the character of the area whilst commanding good sea views.
- Small scale developments, such as picnic sites and individual buildings, should be confined to the base of raised beaches and cliffs in order to preserve the open aspect and the character of the area. Parking and picnic areas would be best integrated by using low lying, naturalistic vegetation such as grasses and gorse.