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Aberdeenshire Local Landscape Designation Review

**Prepared by LUC for Aberdeenshire Council
March 2016**



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1 Introduction

Background

- 1.1 Aberdeenshire Council are in the process of preparing the new Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (LDP) 2016 and associated Supplementary Guidance (SG). Following a review of existing landscape policy in the 2012 LDP and associated SG, Aberdeenshire Council concluded that the policy on 'valued views' was not fit for purpose. The Council therefore determined to undertake a review of landscape designation, to identify landscapes that merit additional protection at a local level.¹
- 1.2 The Local Landscape Designation Review (LLDR) aims to identify local landscape designations, using pre-defined landscape character units as a baseline. The LLDR follows the process recommended by the 2006 *Guidance on Local Landscape Designations*, published by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Historic Scotland (HS). The study aims to provide a better understanding of Aberdeenshire's landscapes and helps to inform Policy E2 Landscape in the proposed LDP 2016.

Requirements of the brief

- 1.3 In April 2015, LUC was appointed to identify landscapes worthy of local landscape designation within the Aberdeenshire Council area. It is intended that the study will inform the preparation of SG on local landscape designations.
- 1.4 The project brief defines the overall purpose of the project as being:
 - *"to identify Aberdeenshire landscapes which have particular value and merit special attention as designated local landscapes in the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan;*
 - *to inform an Aberdeenshire wide 'all-landscapes' approach and future landscape objectives;*
 - *to inform the preparation of the forthcoming Local Development Plan 2016, specifically the development of robust and meaningful landscape policy and associated supplementary guidance."*
- 1.5 The outputs of this report are a series of candidate Special Landscape Areas (SLA) that will be subject to further public consultation prior to adoption. The formulation of detailed policy that will apply within the SLAs will be undertaken by Aberdeenshire Council, and will be presented as SG for public consultation alongside the candidate SLAs.

Study area

- 1.6 The study area is defined as the Aberdeenshire Council area, excluding the area falling within the Cairngorms National Park. The extent of the study area is shown in **Figure 1**.

¹ Aberdeenshire Council (2013) Main Issues Report 2013: Valued Views Position Paper

Planning background

- 1.7 National, regional and local policies and plans provide the context for the provision of local landscape designations, and offer high-level guidance on the approach to identifying and selecting candidate areas.

National Planning Framework

- 1.8 The National Planning Framework for Scotland 3 (NPF3)² recognises the contribution Scotland's landscapes make to our quality of life, our national identity and the visitor economy:

"Landscape quality is found across Scotland and all landscapes support place-making. National Scenic Areas and National Parks attract many visitors and reinforce our international image. We also want to continue our strong protection for our wildest landscapes – wild land is a nationally important asset. Closer to settlements landscapes have an important role to play in sustaining local distinctiveness and cultural identity, and in supporting health and well-being" (para. 4.4).

Scottish Planning Policy

- 1.9 Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) is the Scottish Government's policy on nationally important land use planning matters.³ The policy outlines the need for planning authorities to protect, enhance and promote *"access to natural heritage, including green infrastructure, landscape and the wider environment"* (para. 29).
- 1.10 SPP notes that *"International, national and locally designated areas and sites should be identified and afforded the appropriate level of protection in development plans. Reasons for local designation should be clearly explained and their function and continuing relevance considered when preparing plans"* (paragraph 196). It identifies that non-statutory local designations should be limited to areas designated for their local landscape or nature conservation value.
- 1.11 The document notes that the purpose for designating a local landscape area should be to:
- *"safeguard and enhance the character and quality of a landscape which is important or particularly valued locally or regionally; or*
 - *promote understanding and awareness of the distinctive character and special qualities of local landscapes; or*
 - *safeguard and promote important local settings for outdoor recreation and tourism"* (paragraph 197).

Planning Advice Note 60

- 1.12 PAN 60: Planning for Natural Heritage (2000) provides policy and planning advice regarding Scotland's natural heritage.⁴ Safeguarding and enhancing landscape character is an important planning objective. To achieve this there needs to be clear policy objectives in relation to landscape, promotion of high standards of development siting and use of appropriate materials.
- 1.13 PAN 60 notes that landscape character assessment can provide the means of determining the extent of landscapes to be designated (paragraph 26). Landscape designations are stated to be of more value when forming part of a wider land-use framework and habitat network and contributing to realisation of national natural heritage strategy (paragraph 39).
- 1.14 In relation to landscape designations, PAN 60 advises that these *"should be valued beyond their immediate locale"*. The importance of *"development guidelines designed to safeguard landscape character and quality"* is highlighted (paragraph 40).

² Scottish Government (2014) Scotland's Third National Planning Framework.

³ Scottish Government (2014) Scottish Planning Policy.

⁴ Scottish Executive (2000) Planning Advice Note 60: Planning for Natural Heritage.

Strategic Development Plan

- 1.15 The Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan (2014) sets out the vision for the future of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire.
- 1.16 The Quality of the Environment Objective (page 34) sets targets for protecting “*the region’s important built, natural and cultural assets*” and how to achieve these targets at a Local Development Plan level.

Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2012

- 1.17 Policy 12 of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2012, entitled *Landscape Conservation*, aims to promote protection, management and planning of the landscape. The policy is supported by the following supplementary guidance:
- SG Landscape 1: Landscape character, is designed to support the conservation and managements of landscapes across Aberdeenshire, drawing on the landscape character assessment and reflecting the ‘all landscapes’ emphasis of the European Landscape Convention; and
 - SG Landscape 2: Valued Views, which identifies and aims to protect locally valued views and landscapes from inappropriate development. These valued views have been treated as local landscape designations within the terms of Scottish Planning Policy 2010, though it is acknowledged that they focus on the visual resource rather than the features and qualities that together contribute to the landscape resource.
- 1.18 It is clear that Aberdeenshire’s current approach, based on views rather than areas, does not meet the requirements of SPP 2014. Nor does it reflect the approach set out in the guidance published by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Historic Scotland (HS) in 2005. Aberdeenshire Council have prepared a ‘position paper’ which explains why the valued views policy is no longer considered fit for purpose.⁵
- 1.19 The LDP contains other policies which relate to protection of the natural environment. These include: Policy 4 - Special Types of Rural Land, which aims to protect the special character of the greenbelt and coastal zone; Policy 11 - Natural heritage, which aims to improve and protect designated nature conservation sites and the wider biodiversity and geodiversity of the area; and Policy 13 - Protecting, improving and conserving the historic environment. The LLDR does not make recommendations on these other types of designations and these policies are not reviewed in detail here.

Proposed Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2016

- 1.20 The Proposed Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan was approved as the settled view of the Council in March 2015, following a period of consultation. It is intended that the plan will be adopted in 2016 following examination. Policy E2 *Landscape*, within Section 15 of the Plan, sets out consideration to be given to landscape character, as defined in published character assessments. It also refers to Special Landscape Areas, stating that development in such areas “*will only be permitted if the qualifying interests are not being adversely affected or effects of the development are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of at least local importance.*” Policy E2 refers to Supplementary Guidance on Special Landscape Areas, which will be informed by the present report.

⁵ Aberdeenshire Council (2013) Main Issues Report 2013: Valued Views Position Paper

Structure of this report

- 1.21 This report presents the approach and findings of the LLDR. The methodology which was used is fully described in **Section 2**.
- 1.22 The landscape baseline is described in **Section 3**, including the landscape units which informed the study (see **Appendix 1**) and other designated landscape within and adjacent to Aberdeenshire (see **Appendix 2**).
- 1.23 **Section 4** summarises the findings of a systematic, quantitative evaluation of the landscape of Aberdeenshire. The results of this evaluation are presented in **Appendix 3** and **Appendix 4**.
- 1.24 **Section 5** includes more detailed qualitative analysis to identify the search areas which were considered to potentially merit designation. A series of practical criteria was applied to these search areas, as set out in **Section 6**.
- 1.25 The finalised candidate SLAs are described in **Section 7**, alongside draft lists of qualifying interests.
- 1.26 The stakeholder engagement process is discussed at the appropriate stages in the study, with a more detailed consultation report included as **Appendix 5**. **Appendix 6** discusses consideration of weighting based on the consultation responses.

Abbreviations

1.27 The following abbreviations are used in this report.

| | |
|------|---|
| AGLV | Area of Great Landscape Value |
| ALS | Area of Landscape Significance |
| GDL | Site listed on the Historic Scotland Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes |
| HS | Historic (Environment) Scotland |
| LCA | Landscape character assessment |
| LCT | Landscape character type |
| LDP | Local Development Plan |
| LLDR | Local landscape designation review |
| NCN | National Cycle Network |
| NNR | National Nature Reserve |
| NPF3 | National Planning Framework for Scotland 3 |
| NSA | National Scenic Area |
| SAC | Special Area of Conservation |
| SG | Supplementary Guidance |
| SLA | Special Landscape Area |
| SNH | Scottish Natural Heritage |
| SPA | Special Protection Area |
| SPG | Supplementary planning guidance |
| SPP | Scottish Planning Policy (2014) |
| SSSI | Site of Special Scientific Interest |

2 Methodology

Approach to the study

- 2.1 The methodology for the LLDR was drawn from *Guidance on Local Landscape Designations* (SNH and Historic Scotland, 2006) and was developed based on LUC's past experience in undertaking designation reviews. Further refinement was undertaken based on the specific needs of the present study, and through discussion with the Steering Group at the project outset. The Steering Group included officers of Aberdeenshire Council and a representative from Scottish Natural Heritage.
- 2.2 At the project outset it was also agreed with the steering group that the primary purpose of Special Landscape Areas in Aberdeenshire should be the first of the three purposes outlined in SPP, i.e. to "*safeguard and enhance the character and quality of a landscape which is important or particularly valued locally or regionally*". This was further agreed with stakeholders, as outlined below.
- 2.3 The methodology comprises five principal stages, as follows:
 - establishment of the landscape baseline;
 - quantitative evaluation of the landscape baseline;
 - qualitative analysis of the evaluation results and selection of search areas;
 - refinement of search areas through application of practical criteria; and
 - written statements of importance.

Stakeholder engagement

- 2.4 Three elements of stakeholder engagement were included at different points during the study. These exercises aimed to gain a wider input into the approach that would be taken, the areas likely to be valued locally, and the appropriateness of the candidate Special Landscape Areas being proposed. These three engagement opportunities are described at the appropriate stage within the overall methodology.

Landscape baseline

- 2.5 The landscape baseline was based on previous landscape character assessments which have been undertaken for Aberdeenshire. The baseline is described in greater detail in **Section 3**, but was defined as a series of discrete 'landscape units' (listed in **Appendix 1**), each of which was individually evaluated.
- 2.6 At the same time a brief review was undertaken of the existing landscape designations which lie adjacent to Aberdeenshire (particularly within Moray), and the special qualities of the Cairngorms National Park (refer to **Appendix 2**). The location and nature of the Valued Views were also reviewed briefly since, while there are concerns over this designation, they do represent the results of a consultative exercise. Similarly, cognisance was given to the locations historically identified as Areas of Landscape Significance.
- 2.7 Gathering of other baseline data also took place at this stage, including material relevant to each of the agreed criteria (see below). This included information on habitats, geodiversity, cultural heritage, planning allocations and other relevant designations.

Quantitative evaluation of the landscape

- 2.8 The quantitative evaluation represents a systematic, criteria-based assessment of the relative values of each landscape unit. The criteria represent a range of aspects of landscape which may help identify an area which is considered worthy of designation. They are therefore designed to identify those aspects of Aberdeenshire which the Steering Group felt would merit designation as SLAs.
- 2.9 The process of defining criteria begins with the suggested aspects of landscape set out in the *Guidance on Local Landscape Designations*. These are presented as “aspects of landscape character” and “landscape qualities” (pp.15-16). LUC has expanded and developed these criteria in order to identify high-quality or highly-valued landscapes within Aberdeenshire, in relation to the project brief. The criteria were discussed with the Steering Group at the outset of the project.

Stakeholder engagement I

- 2.10 This first round of engagement sought to consult on the approach to the study and the purpose of designation. Key stakeholders were identified by Aberdeenshire Council for initial targeted engagement and included community councils and local interest groups.
- 2.11 At the project outset these groups were contacted directly by LUC with a short paper seeking agreement on:
- The intended purpose of Special Landscape Area designation; and
 - The list of evaluation criteria that were to be used.
- 2.12 With a very limited number of exceptions, stakeholders who responded agreed that the primary purpose of SLAs in Aberdeenshire should be to “safeguard and enhance the character and quality of a landscape which is important or particularly valued locally or regionally”. However, a number of respondents were keen that the other SPP purposes, relating to understanding of the landscape and recreation, were not dropped but remained as secondary purposes of the SLAs.
- 2.13 There was general agreement with the criteria-based approach and the criteria that were proposed. Based on comments received some changes were made to the way the criteria were defined and applied. More detailed analysis of the consultation responses is set out in **Appendix 5**.

Agreed criteria

- 2.14 The criteria that were used in the study, as revised following consultation, are listed and defined in **Table 2.1**.

Table 2.1 Criteria for the evaluation of landscape

| Criterion | Definition | Assessment |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| Landscape character criteria | | |
| Typicality / Representativeness | The extent to which a landscape is represents the study area as a whole, and contributes to its wider identity and sense of place. | Desk based (key landscape characteristics, tourist literature) In the field |
| Rarity / Uniqueness | Landscapes which are unique to Aberdeenshire, or uncommon elsewhere. | Desk based (key landscape characteristics) In the field |
| Intactness / Condition | Landscapes that are intact and distinctive, having been unaffected by development over a considerable period of time and where these may be threatened by development. | Desk based (key landscape characteristics) In the field |
| Wildness | The relative remoteness of the landscape, including lack of human features, distance | Desk based (SNH Wildness dataset) |

| Criterion | Definition | Assessment |
|---|--|---|
| | from settlement, and ruggedness of terrain. | |
| Landscape quality criteria | | |
| Scenic qualities | The extent to which the landscape contains pleasing combinations of features, or to which it prompts strong sensory appeal. | Desk based (key landscape characteristics, designated landscape datasets) In the field |
| Enjoyment | Landscapes which provide access and recreation opportunities for local people and visitors. | Desk based (recreation datasets, core paths) |
| Built heritage assets | Landscapes which provide key views, in to and away from, important built heritage assets. | Desk based (historic / cultural datasets) In the field |
| Cultural qualities | Landscapes which provide cultural associations such as with literature, music, art or local history or which have spiritual associations. | Desk based (key landscape characteristics, tourist literature) |
| Naturalness and natural heritage assets | The perceived importance to the landscape of features of natural heritage interest, including important habitats, protected sites, and features of geodiversity value. | Desk based (natural heritage datasets) In the field |
| Settlement setting | Landscapes of particular importance to the setting of settlements, as a whole, or particular aspects of the settlement. | Desk based (settlement boundaries, key landscape characteristics) In the field |
| Views | The extent and importance of views in and out of the landscape, including the relative visibility of the landscape from key routes and locations, and key views from outwith Aberdeenshire boundaries. | Desk based (scenic viewpoints, key landscape characteristics, tourist literature) In the field |
| Connectivity | Landscapes which contribute to green networks, such as those which provide green corridors between settlements and the countryside. | Desk based (OS maps, landscape characteristics, local development plan) In the field |
| Non-ranked criteria | | |
| Landscape consistency | The extent to which the landscape is consistent in terms of the above criteria. | In the field |
| Landscape relationships | The extent to which the landscape is associated with adjacent landscapes, potentially combining to form groupings of high value. | In the field |
| Other designations | Identifies existing designations within the landscape. | Desk based (local development plan) |
| Policy context | Landscapes which are the subject of, or support other Aberdeenshire wide strategies, plans and projects. | Desk based (local development plan) |

2.15 Each criterion was developed into an evaluation question, which could be asked in relation to each of the landscape units in **Appendix 1**. Three possible responses were defined, corresponding to 'ranks' of *low*, *medium*, or *high*. The evaluation questions and responses are set out in **Table 2.2**. Three 'ranks' were used to ensure that the evaluation process was both simple to undertake and to present, and would provide enough differentiation between those landscapes that exhibited many of the desired criteria and those that exhibited fewer.

- 2.16 Four of the criteria were non-ranked. These aimed to identify differences in relative value within the landscape unit, and important relationships with other landscape units and designations. They were designed to identify any potential groupings of landscapes, or areas which could be subdivided based on their qualities.
- 2.17 It is important to note that the judgements of *low*, *medium*, or *high* are relative to the landscapes of Aberdeenshire, and do not indicate absolute levels or thresholds. By the same token, the findings cannot be directly correlated to the findings of other similar studies carried out in other localities.

Table 2.2 Evaluation criteria and decision rules

| Criterion | Question | Response | Rank |
|---------------------------------|---|--|--------|
| Typicality / Representativeness | Does the landscape contain features, or combinations of features, that are distinctive of Aberdeenshire, making a positive contribution to its wider identity, image and sense of place? | The landscape contains features which are highly distinctive or iconic of Aberdeenshire, and these features make a strong positive contribution to identity and sense of place. | High |
| | | The landscape contains some features which are distinctive of Aberdeenshire, or which make a strong positive contribution to identity and sense of place. | Medium |
| | | The landscape contains few or no features which are distinctive of Aberdeenshire, and these do not make a strong positive contribution to identity or sense of place. | Low |
| Rarity / Uniqueness | Does the landscape contain features or a combination of features which are rare or unique within Aberdeenshire, or which are known to be uncommon elsewhere? | Large number of landscape features which are unique within Aberdeenshire, and may be rare across Scotland. | High |
| | | Some landscape features which are rare or unique within Aberdeenshire. | Medium |
| | | Few or no landscape features which are rare or unique within Aberdeenshire. | Low |
| Intactness / Condition | <p>a) Is the landscape intact or has it experienced a decline in quality? Are present and future changes likely to lead to such decline, for example as a consequence of changes in landscape management, patterns of development, or the influence of development in adjacent areas?</p> <p>b) Are the landscape features or combinations of features in a good state of repair?</p> | <p>The landscape shows little or no signs of past, present or potential decline in quality; or</p> <p>The landscape is clearly well managed and maintained, and overall is in a good state of repair.</p> | High |
| | | <p>The landscape has experienced some past decline in quality but is not currently or potentially subject to further decline; or</p> <p>The landscape is generally in a good state of repair, although there are some elements which have been less well maintained and managed.</p> | Medium |
| | | <p>The landscape has experienced past decline in quality, and is potentially subject to further decline; or</p> <p>The landscape is not in a good state of repair, with many elements which have been less well maintained.</p> | Low |
| Wildness | Does the landscape display characteristics of wildness, including perceived naturalness, lack of modern artefacts or structures, rugged or physically challenging landform or remoteness / inaccessibility? | The landscape has a high degree of wildness. | High |
| | | The landscape has some degree of wildness. | Medium |
| | | The landscape has no or limited wildness. | Low |
| Scenic qualities | To what extent is the landscape of scenic value in its own right or to what extent does it contribute to the scenic qualities of the wider area? | Pleasant combination of features, visual contrasts and/or dramatic elements. Visual, sensory, perceptual and experiential qualities which contribute to the natural beauty and appreciation of the landscape. | High |
| | | Some pleasing features, visual contrasts and/or dramatic elements, or visual, sensory, perceptual and experiential qualities. A landscape which contributes to the | Medium |

| Criterion | Question | Response | Rank |
|---|--|--|--------|
| | | setting of an adjacent area of high landscape quality. | |
| | | The landscape does not contain particularly pleasing features, visual contrasts and/or dramatic elements, and has more limited visual, sensory, perceptual and experiential qualities. | Low |
| Enjoyment | To what extent is the landscape enjoyed by local people and visitors, for example in the form of walking, cycling or horse riding, or in the form of more formal recreation activities, which are focused on enjoyment of the landscape? | The landscape is well-used, and is important as a greenspace or recreation area, with provision of access routes, key viewpoints and recreational facilities. | High |
| | | The landscape has some importance as a greenspace or recreation area. Some provision of access routes, key viewpoints and facilities, potentially less well-used. | Medium |
| | | The landscape has little or no greenspace or recreational value, and limited provision of access routes, etc. | Low |
| Built heritage assets | a) Do built heritage assets or features of natural heritage interest have a significant influence on the character of the landscape? b) Does the landscape provide key views, in to and away from, important built heritage assets or natural heritage interests? | The landscape is rich in visible features of built heritage, which make an important contribution to landscape character; and/or The landscape has many key views to or from heritage assets. | High |
| | | The landscape has some visible features of built heritage, which make a lesser contribution to landscape character; and/or The landscape has some key views to or from heritage assets. | Medium |
| | | The landscape has few visible features of built heritage; and/or The landscape has few key views to or from heritage assets. | Low |
| | | | |
| Cultural qualities | Does the landscape have specific historic or cultural associations (including literature, music, art, local history or particular spiritual associations) or does it contribute to the wider cultural heritage of the area? | The landscape is rich in well-known literary or artistic associations, or direct associations with major historical events. | High |
| | | The landscape has some literary historical and artistic associations; these may be less well-known or less direct. | Medium |
| | | The landscape has fewer literary, historical or artistic associations; these may be little-known or of principally local interest. | Low |
| Naturalness and natural heritage assets | Does the landscape contain features of natural heritage interest, including important habitats, protected sites, and features of geodiversity value? | The landscape is rich in visible features of natural heritage, which make an important contribution to landscape character; and/or The landscape has many key views to or from natural heritage assets. | High |
| | | The landscape has some visible features of natural heritage, which make a lesser contribution to landscape character; and/or The landscape has some key views to or from natural heritage assets. | Medium |
| | | The landscape has few visible features of natural heritage; and/or The landscape has few key views to or from natural heritage assets. | Low |
| | | | |

| Criterion | Question | Response | Rank |
|--------------------|---|--|--------|
| Settlement setting | How important is the landscape in providing the setting for settlements as a whole, or particular aspects of a settlement? | The landscape performs a key function in providing the setting of settlement(s), or contributes strongly to settlement identity. | High |
| | | The landscape performs some function in providing the setting of settlement(s), and/or makes some contribution to settlement identity. | Medium |
| | | The landscape is isolated from or does not perform a function in relation to the setting of settlement(s), and does not make a strong contribution to settlement identity. | Low |
| Views | Does the landscape provide key views into and out of the landscape? | The landscape is important in views from recognised key viewpoints, settlements or transport routes, and/or includes key landmarks. | High |
| | | The landscape is important in some views from settlements or transport routes, and/or includes landmarks. | Medium |
| | | The landscape does not perform a key function in relation to views from viewpoints, settlements, transport routes or landmarks. | Low |
| Connectivity | Does the landscape contribute to green networks, such as those which provide green corridors between settlements and the countryside? | The landscape performs a key function in providing or contributing to a green network. | High |
| | | The landscape performs some function in providing or contributing to a green network. | Medium |
| | | The landscape does not perform a function in relation to green networks. | Low |

Evaluation Process

- 2.18 The evaluation stage involved the review of each landscape unit against the agreed assessment criteria. The evaluation was based on both desk study and on field surveys of Aberdeenshire. Information on each landscape unit was drawn from available baseline material including the Landscape Character Assessment (see **Section 3**). For each of the landscape units, a standard evaluation sheet was completed in the field, to record information relating to each criterion. Each landscape unit was scored as *high*, *medium* or *low* in relation to each of the agreed criteria and justification for this was provided in a text description. An evaluation sheet, incorporating site-based and desk-based information, for each of the 37 landscape units is included in **Appendix 3** of this report.
- 2.19 The evaluation enabled a series of comparisons between the various landscape units, based on each individual criterion, identifying those which scored higher or lower against each aspect. To simplify this comparison, the ranks assigned under each criterion were converted into numerical values and combined to give an overall 'score' to each landscape unit.
- 2.20 The overall scores were calculated by assigning a value of 1 to a *low* rank, 2 to *medium* and 3 to *high*. This gave a possible range of total 'scores' of between 12 (a landscape unit with 12 *low* ranks) and 36 (a landscape unit with 12 *high* ranks). The use of weighting of important criteria was considered, but was rejected on the grounds that unless a very large weighting was applied there would be limited overall effect on the scores. The approach to weighting is outlined in **Appendix 6**.
- 2.21 The overall scores show which landscapes are ranked highly under the most criteria. They therefore give an indication of those landscapes within Aberdeenshire which exhibit the greatest number of the characteristics and qualities which have been considered worthy of recognition through the LLDR. The scores are relative, and do not represent absolute landscape values which can be applied outside the context of this study. Overall scores are discussed in **Section 4**.

Stakeholder engagement II

- 2.22 To enable stakeholder input to the evaluation and selection process, an online questionnaire was developed, which comprised two parts. The survey was advertised via direct email to all those stakeholders on the original list, as well as any other groups or individuals who responded to the first questionnaire. In addition the survey was advertised by the Council, and appeared in the local press.
- 2.23 The first part asked people to indicate the relative importance of the evaluation criteria, to help inform the methodology. The results of this indicate that of the criteria in **Table 2.1**, the 'scenic quality' and 'wildness' criteria were considered by respondents to be the most important. The addition of weighting for these two criteria was considered, but rejected as noted above. However, in carrying out the analysis the importance attached to these criteria by stakeholders was borne in mind.
- 2.24 The second part of the questionnaire was map-based, and enabled respondents to record the landscapes they consider particularly significant or representative. Respondents were able to select a point on a map of the study area, and provide information as to why this location or landscape was, in their view, worthy of designation. The distribution of points on the map informed the next stage of the process, which defined the 'search areas' for designation.
- 2.25 The results of both parts of this stakeholder engagement, as well as the limits of the consultation tools that were used, are discussed in more detail in **Appendix 5**.

Analysis and selection of search areas

- 2.26 The next stage was to separate those landscapes which were thought to merit designation from those which were unlikely to do so. Those landscape units which were thought to potentially merit designation were taken forward into search areas, to be refined and developed as potential SLAs. This process is one of refinement. The initial evaluation is recognised as a fairly blunt tool

but the analysis is the start of a series of successive refinements aimed at selecting the most appropriate areas for designation.

- 2.27 A simple 'cut-off' can be established to pick out the 'best landscapes', either pegged to a particular minimum score, or based on a proportion of landscape units to be considered. The effect of such an approach is to impose an 'in/out' division, where landscapes below the cut-off are rejected from further consideration. It is recognised that qualities vary across character units, and that there are higher-scoring areas within middle-ranking landscapes. Under a simple in/out division, these areas may be lost to further consideration.
- 2.28 It was therefore decided to create a three-fold division:
- the landscape units with the highest one third of scores were considered for inclusion within search areas;
 - the landscape units with the lowest one third of scores were not considered in further detail, unless they were found to have a strong relationship with other, higher scoring, areas; and
 - the remaining areas were reviewed in more detail, and where appropriate search areas for consideration were identified.
- 2.29 Search areas are discussed in **Section 5**.

Application of practical criteria

- 2.30 Following identification of the candidate SLAs, the practical criteria set out in the SNH/HS guidance were applied to inform choices over inclusion. These practical criteria included:
- identity and coherence;
 - suitable size;
 - other policy/strategy considerations; and
 - boundary features.
- 2.31 The search areas identified in **Section 5** were tested against these practical considerations, in discussion with the Steering Group, and a decision was taken in each case as to whether to pursue the development of a candidate SLA or not.
- 2.32 It is important that SLAs represent recognisable landscape units with a logical theme or focus such as upland hills, a coastal landscape, or a group of river valleys. Boundary definition therefore took account of a number of issues including:
- overlap with other designations, including gardens and designed landscapes, urban open space, and so on;
 - availability of physical boundary features: it is usually preferable to move outward from a search area to the next available boundary, and to include areas of lower merit, than to move inward and omit higher quality areas from the designation; and
 - existing strategies and other commitments, including planning permissions granted.

Stakeholder engagement III

- 2.33 The final stage of stakeholder engagement aimed to seek comment on the boundaries, description and draft qualifying interests of each candidate SLA. This was undertaken through targeted consultation with the relevant community councils or other interest groups active in the area of each candidate SLA, as described in **Appendix 5**. A number of changes to boundaries were made, though this engagement was primarily useful in generating local knowledge that contributed to the list of qualifying interests of the candidate SLA.

Statements of importance

- 2.34 Once the candidate SLAs had been confirmed, a statement of importance was drawn up for each candidate SLA. The statement is designed to highlight the key characteristics and qualities which underpin the candidate SLA. Each statement provides a note of the location and boundaries of the candidate SLA, an outline description of the area included, and a list of the qualifying interests for which it has been identified. The statements of importance are accompanied by a map of each candidate SLA. The boundaries of the finalised candidate areas were mapped at a scale of 1:25,000. Statements of importance are included in **Section 7**.

3 Landscape Baseline

Landscape character

- 3.1 The Council's Supplementary Guidance SG Landscape 1: Landscape Character presents a list of 37 landscape units, drawing together the findings of three volumes of landscape character assessment (LCA) published by SNH as part of a nationwide programme:
- Cairngorms landscape assessment (Turnbull Jeffrey, 1996);
 - Banff and Buchan landscape character assessment (Cobham Resource Consultants, 1998);
 - South and Central Aberdeenshire landscape character assessment (ERM, 1998).
- 3.2 More recent work undertaken for the Cairngorms National Park (Alison Grant, 2009) was also briefly reviewed for its bearing on the adjacent Aberdeenshire landscapes.
- 3.3 SNH commissioned a review of the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire landscape character assessments in preparation for the forthcoming on-line publication of the national LCA programme. This information was made available to LUC in draft format, but has not been adopted for the evaluation process. This was partly because it was not available in digital format suitable for incorporation into the project GIS. This not considered to be a fundamental concern since the evaluation of character areas is only a first stage in the process, and the character areas that are used should not affect the outcome. The updated SNH LCA report may change the way that the landscape is described and classified, but clearly will not alter the landscape itself or the values attached to it.
- 3.4 The landscape units identified in SG Landscape 1: Landscape Character have therefore been carried forward to the evaluation stage. The 37 individual landscape units are grouped into seven landscape character types (LCT). These are listed in **Appendix 1** and illustrated in **Figure 2**.

Designated landscapes

- 3.5 To further inform the LLDR process, additional background material relating to designated landscapes was gathered and reviewed, as described below and shown on **Figure 3**.

National Parks

- 3.6 The Cairngorms National Park extends across parts of Aberdeenshire, Angus, Highland, Moray and Perth and Kinross, and borders the LLDR study area to the west. Landscapes within the National Parks do not form part of the study area for the LLDR, however the special qualities of the National Park⁶ were reviewed to inform the baseline. These special qualities are listed in **Appendix 2**.

National Scenic Areas

- 3.7 The Cairngorm Mountains NSA and the Deeside and Lochnagar NSA lie partly within Aberdeenshire, but are within the National Park and do not therefore fall within the LLDR study area.

Locally Designated Landscapes

- 3.8 There are no local landscape designations within Aberdeenshire. The protection of landscape character outside the Cairngorms National Park is based on local plan policy SG Landscape 1:

⁶ Scottish Natural Heritage and Cairngorms National Park Authority (2010). The special landscape qualities of the Cairngorms National Park. Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report, No.375 (iBids and Project no 648).

Landscape character, which is informed by the three Landscape Character Assessments that cover Aberdeenshire (see **Appendix 1** and **Figure 2**). Regard was had to the 'valued views' identified in SG Landscape 2, though the limitations of this approach, as set out in Position Paper 9, were borne in mind in assigning weight to these views. Cognisance was given to the locations historically identified as Areas of Landscape Significance, though only as an indicator of the general types of landscape that have previously been assigned value, since they no longer have any policy recognition.

- 3.9 Angus also has no local landscape designations. In Moray there is a large AGLV (Speyside) in the south which runs along the border with Aberdeenshire from the A920 at the Haugh of Glass southwards. There is also a small coastal AGLV between Findochty and Cullen (Findochty and Cullen Coast AGLV). The Moray AGLVs are defined in the adopted Moray LDP (2015), though they are older in origin, and no detailed review of their boundaries has been carried out. The Moray LDP does not define the qualities for which they have been designated. These areas are shown in **Figure 3**.
- 3.10 The presence of an adjacent designation may be a consideration in defining the extent of a SLA within Aberdeenshire, although it would not be a reason for designation in itself.

Other baseline information

- 3.11 Natural heritage designations are shown on **Figure 4**. These include Ramsar sites, Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), National Nature Reserves (NNRs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Ancient Woodland. The River Dee and its tributaries are a SAC, extending across central Aberdeenshire. The majority of the north Aberdeenshire coast is designated as a SSSI, and the Troup, Pennan and Lion's Heads are also an SPA. The Loch of Strathbeg is recognised as a SSSI, SPA and Ramsar site. The eastern coast between Buchan Ness and Collieston is an SSSI, SAC and SPA. The Sands of Forvie /Ythan Estuary are a National Nature Reserve, Ramsar site, SSSI, SPA and SAC. Fowlsheugh is an SPA and SSSI. There are SACs at the Hill of Towanreef, and mosses at Netherley, Turclossie and Reidside. St Cyrus is a NNR.
- 3.12 Cultural heritage designations are shown on **Figure 5**. These include Historic Battlefields, Scheduled Monuments and Gardens and Designed Landscapes (GDL). There are Conservation Areas along the coast, including Portsoy, Banff, Pennan and Stonehaven, and inland including Fettercairn, Aboyne, Huntly, Oldmeldrum and Strichen. There are Historic Battlefields at Alford, Harlaw, Barra and Fyvie. Scheduled Monuments include stone circles, cairns, burial mounds, standing stones, castles and forts. GDLs include Fyvie Castle, Haddo House, Leith Hall, Pitmedden, Castle Fraser and Forglen.
- 3.13 Features for access and recreation are shown on **Figure 6**. This includes the National Cycle Network (NCN), Rights of Way, Core Paths and Scotland's Great Trails (the Formartine and Buchan Way within Aberdeenshire). NCN Route 1 runs east along the north Aberdeenshire coast between Cullen and Banff, then crosses inland via Turriff, Maud and Tarves, before passing through Aberdeen and along the south east Aberdeenshire coast via Stonehaven. The Formartine-Buchan Way runs between Fraserburgh / Peterhead (merging at Maud) and Aberdeen, via Ellon. The Deeside Way runs along the River Dee corridor between Muir of Dinnet / Aboyne and Drumoak before running into Aberdeen City Centre.
- 3.14 Wildness and wild land are illustrated on **Figure 7**. This depicts the mapping of relative wildness undertaken by SNH, which is derived from the combination of four physical attributes: the perceived naturalness of the land cover; the ruggedness of the terrain; remoteness from public roads; and the visible lack of modern artefacts. **Figure 7** shows that the wildest parts of the study area are: the Forest of Birse and the Mounth bordering the Cairngorms National Park; the Grampian Outliers; the Tore of Troup; and the Aberdeenshire coast, including the Loch of Strathbeg and Forvie. Further analysis of wildness by SNH led to the identification of Wild Land Areas in 2014. There are no Wild Land Areas in the study area; however the Lochnagar-Mount Keen Wild Land Area in the Cairngorms National Park borders the study area at Glen Tanar / Forest of Birse.

4 Evaluation Results

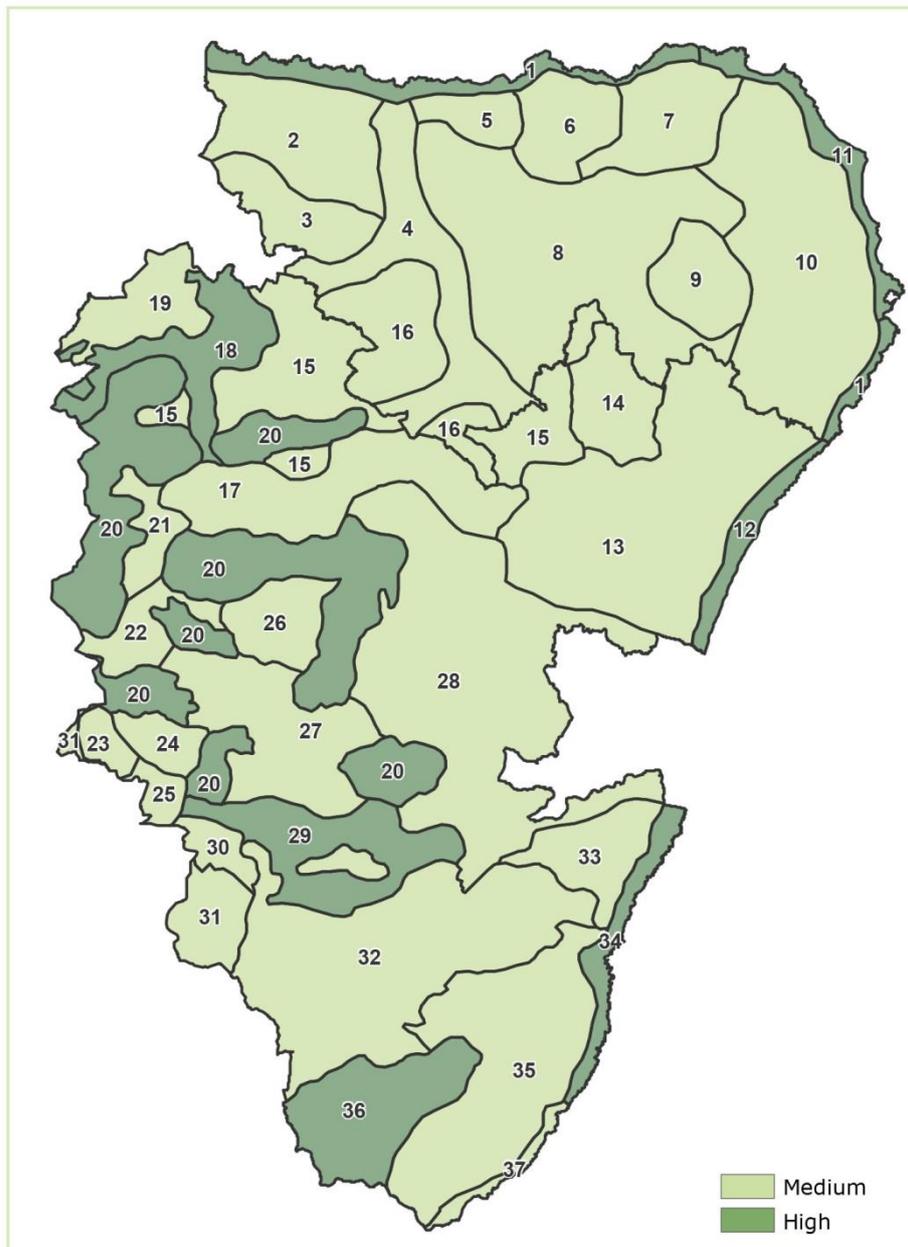
Introduction

- 4.1 This section presents the results of the landscape evaluation, which examined each of the 37 landscape units in terms of the character and quality criteria defined in **Table 2.1** and **Table 2.2**. The detailed evaluation sheets are presented in **Appendix 3** of this report.
- 4.2 The findings in relation to each of the twelve criteria have been extracted and mapped separately, resulting in the series of maps presented in **Figures 4.1 to 4.12**. The following sections discuss the patterns of results relating to each of the landscape characteristics and qualities which were evaluated.

Typicality / Representativeness

- 4.3 Eight areas were ranked high under this criterion, and the remaining 29 were ranked medium.
- 4.4 The areas which were found to best represent the Aberdeenshire landscape included much of the coast (1, 11, 12, 34), which has a strong identity related to its diverse coastal landforms and relationship with the sea and sky. The *Grampian Outliers* (20) were also found to have a strong identity formed by their uniform land cover and role as a backdrop to neighbouring straths. The *Dee Valley* (29) scored highly, for its intact but varied landscape character. The *Howe of the Mearns* (36) and the *Deveron and Bogie Straths* (18) around Huntly scored highly for their strong sense of place.
- 4.5 The remaining areas were all found to be medium, as they tended to be relatively indistinct areas of rolling farmland or moorland with some wooded estates and forestry. None of the areas were ranked low, as all had some features of interest or pockets of local distinctiveness despite being relatively uniform overall.

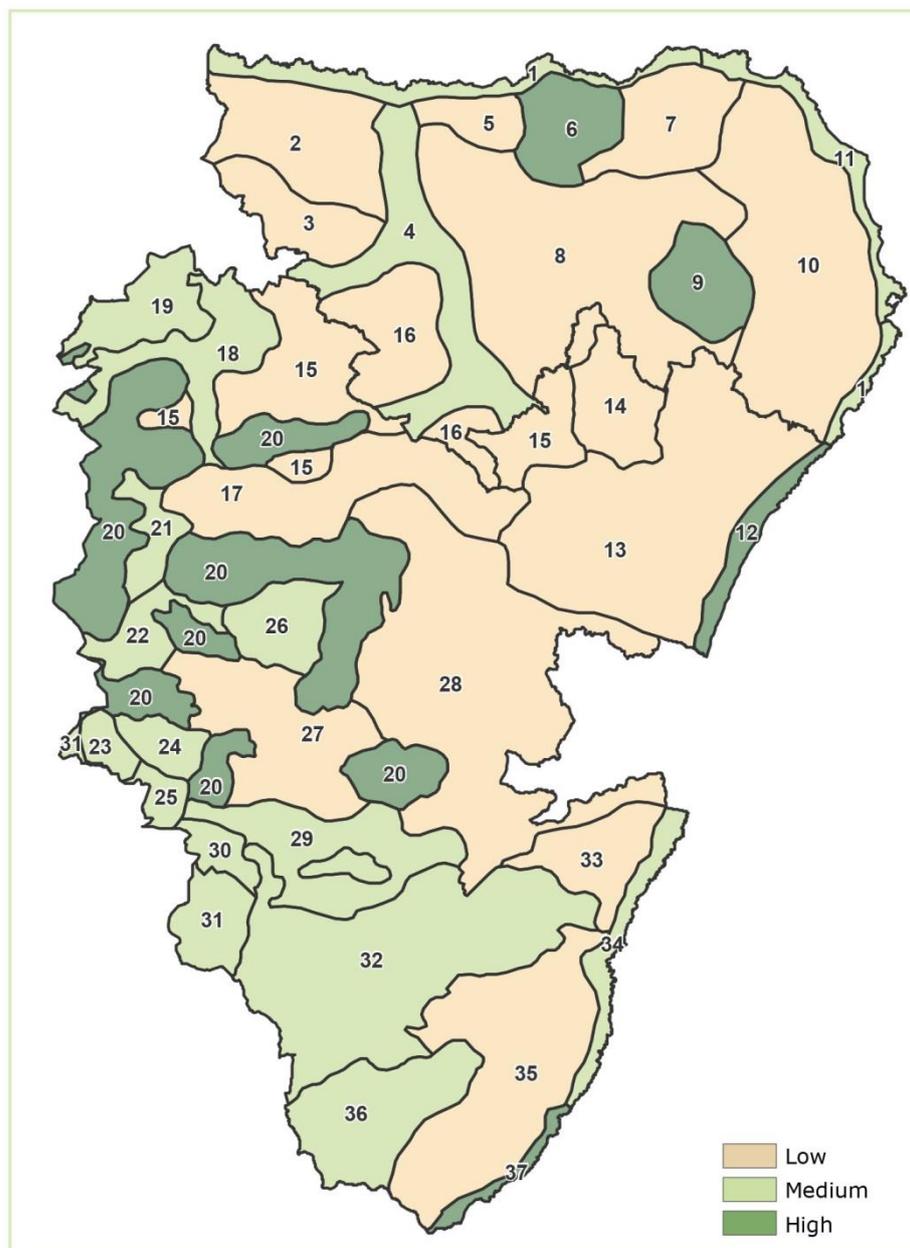
Figure 4.1: Typicality / Representativeness



Rarity / Uniqueness

- 4.6 Five areas were ranked high under this criterion, and 15 were ranked low. The remaining 17 were ranked medium.
- 4.7 The landscapes which were found to be most unique to Aberdeenshire were: the *Grampian Outliers* (20), including the prominent landmarks of Bennachie and Tap o' Noth; the *Kincardine Links* (37), with a wide coastal fringe atypical of the Aberdeenshire coast; the *Formartine Links and Dunes* (12), a distinctive landscape type, rare within Scotland; the *Sandstone Ridges and Valleys south of Troup* (6), an unusual combination of landcover including raised bog and the distinctive Tore of Troup; and an unusually wooded area of former estates around Old Deer (9).
- 4.8 The areas ranked low represented the extensive rolling agricultural hills which are common across the interior of Aberdeenshire. These included the inland coastal farmland areas around Aberchirder (2, 3) and Ellon (13), farmland to the west of Aberdeen (28), the *Insch Basin* (17) and *Garvock and Glenbervie* (35).

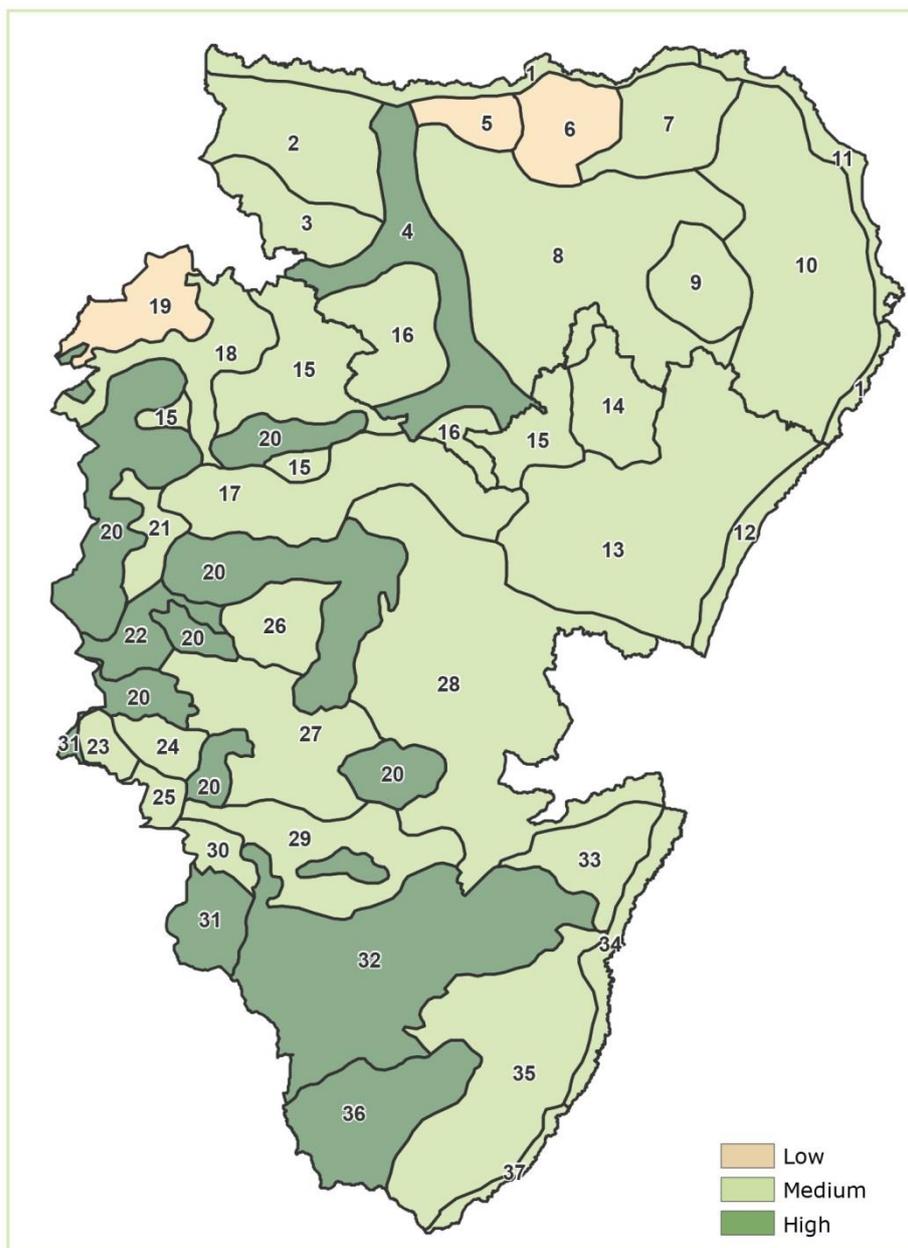
Figure 4.2: Rarity / Uniqueness



Intactness and condition

- 4.9 Six areas were ranked high under this criterion, and three were ranked low. The remaining 28 were ranked medium.
- 4.10 Most areas were found to be relatively intact and in a good state of repair, with occasional signs of neglect e.g. field boundaries in decline, or development pressures such as large scale commercial forestry.
- 4.11 The most intact landscapes were found to be: the farmed and wooded *Deveron and Upper Ythan valleys* (4); the upland moorland and forested slopes of the *Grampian Outliers* (20) and *The Mounth* (32); farmland along *Donside* (22), on the fringes of the Cairngorms National Park; and the well maintained farmland in the *Howe of the Mearns* (36).
- 4.12 The least intact landscapes were a small area of upland fringe farming on the Moray boundary around Cairnie (19), and a mixed landscape of farmland, forestry and bog south of Troup Head (5,6).

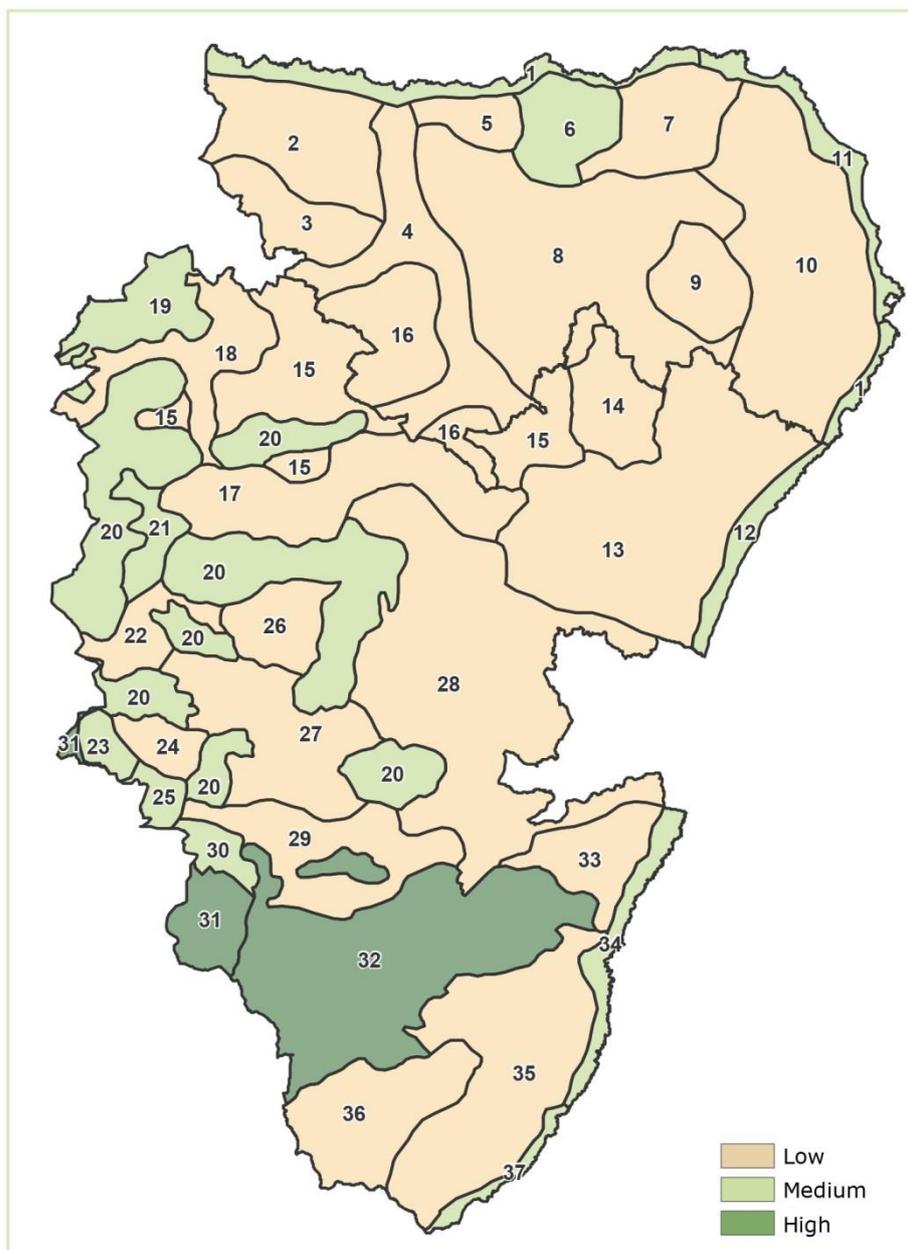
Figure 4.3: Intactness and condition



Wildness

- 4.13 23 areas were ranked low under this criterion, and two were ranked high. The remaining 12 were ranked medium.
- 4.14 The area scoring most highly in terms of perceived wildness was *The Mounth* (32) along with the adjacent *North-eastern Hill Ranges* (31), an expansive moorland plateau extending west into the Cairngorms National Park, and bordering the Lochnagar-Mount Keen Wild Land Area.
- 4.15 Whilst being relatively undeveloped the *Grampian Outliers* (20) scored medium due to the extensive commercial plantations on them which detracted from the sense of wildness. Coastal areas (1, 11, 12, 34, 37) were found to have characteristics of wildness, such as rugged terrain and elemental qualities, but proximity to roads and settlement prevented them from achieving a high scoring.
- 4.16 The number of units scoring low in terms of wildness reflects the farmed and settled nature of the Aberdeenshire landscape.

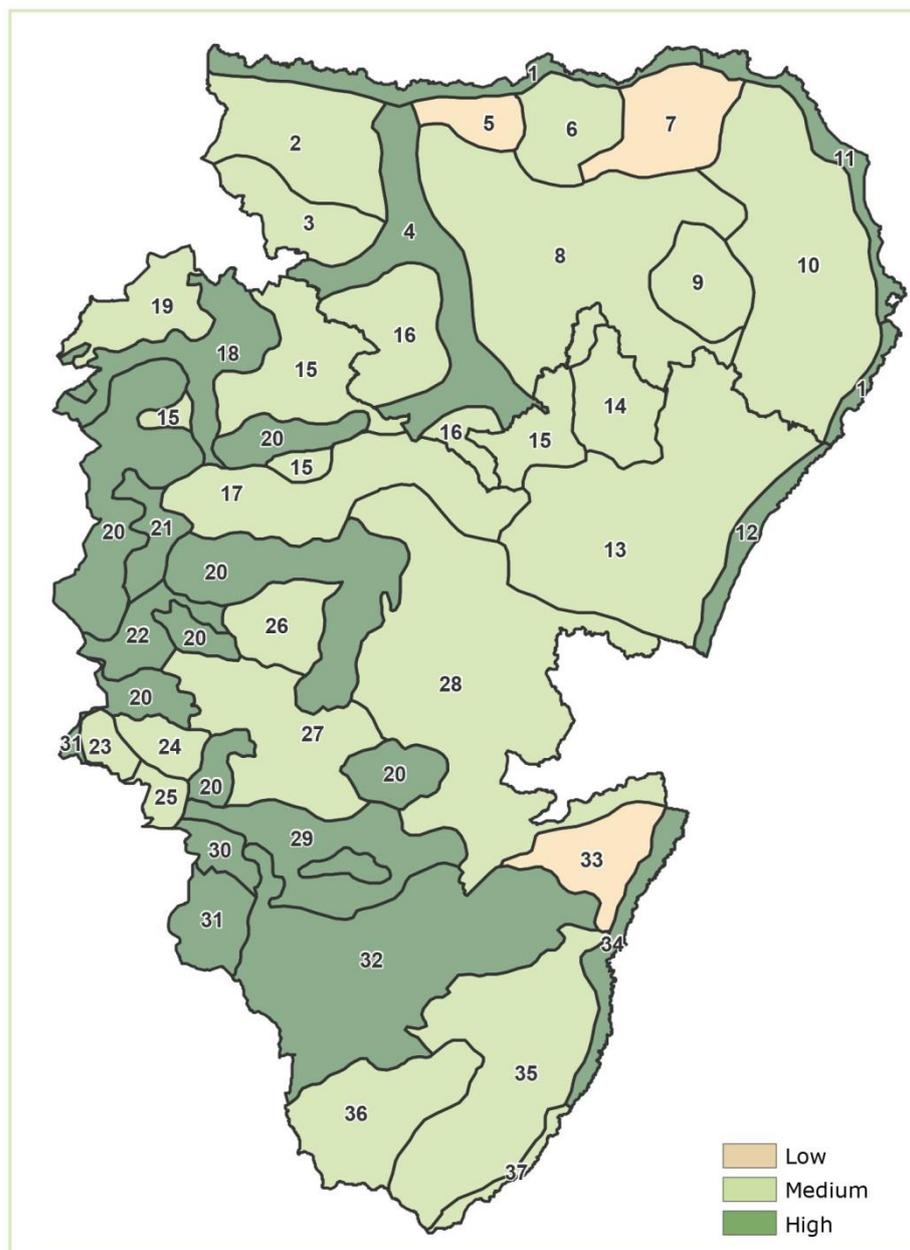
Figure 4.4: Wildness



Scenic qualities

- 4.17 13 areas were ranked high, and three areas were ranked low under this criterion. The remaining 21 were ranked medium.
- 4.18 Coastal areas (1, 11, 12, 34) were found to be of high scenic value for their sandy beaches and dunes, rocky headlands and cliffs, attractive coastal villages and expansive open views to sea. The Deveron Valley around Huntly and Turriff (4, 18) also scored highly for its meandering river and rolling, wooded hills. The *Grampian Outliers* (20) scored highly for their moorland cover forming dark ridges across the skyline, and dramatic outcrops e.g. at Bennachie and Tap o' Noth. *Deeside* (29), *Donside* (22) and the *Lumsden Valley* (21) were found to be of high scenic value for their combinations of rolling hills and valleys, and woodland providing seasonal colour. *The Mounth* (32) and areas on the fringes of the Cairngorms National Park (30, 31) scored highly for their elevated terrain and moorland extending into the dramatic hills in the National Park.
- 4.19 The areas which scored low tended to be uniform areas of coastal farmland, lacking visual diversity or features of interest.

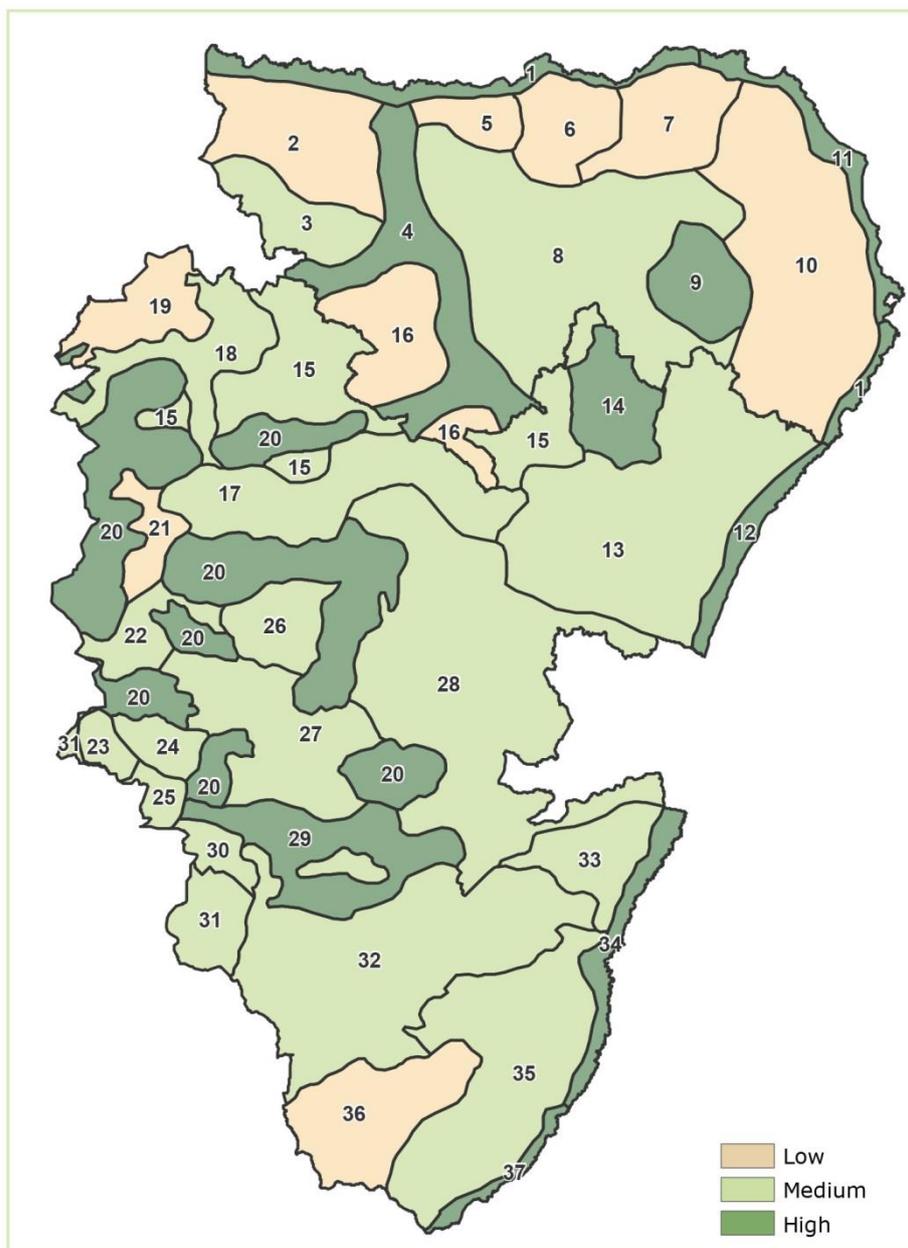
Figure 4.5: Scenic qualities



Enjoyment

- 4.20 Ten areas were ranked high under this criterion, and 9 were ranked low. The remaining 18 were ranked medium.
- 4.21 The highest ranking areas tended to be the coastal fringes (1, 11, 12, 34, 37), with their concentration of beaches, coastal walks, golf courses, scenic viewpoints and tourist facilities and accommodation. The *Grampian Outliers* (20) also scored highly, for their walking opportunities. The Deveron Valley (4) scored highly for its campsites, picnic spots and visitor attractions. There are also visitor attractions in the landscape around Old Deer (9), and the area is crossed by long distance paths / routes. Haddo House contributed to the high score for the area around Methlick and Ythanbank (14). The Dee Valley (29) scored highly for its numerous visitor facilities, and the Deeside Way.
- 4.22 The areas scoring low tended to lack visitor attractions or recreation opportunities of more than local interest, or be transitional areas to more popular tourist destinations e.g. coastal areas.

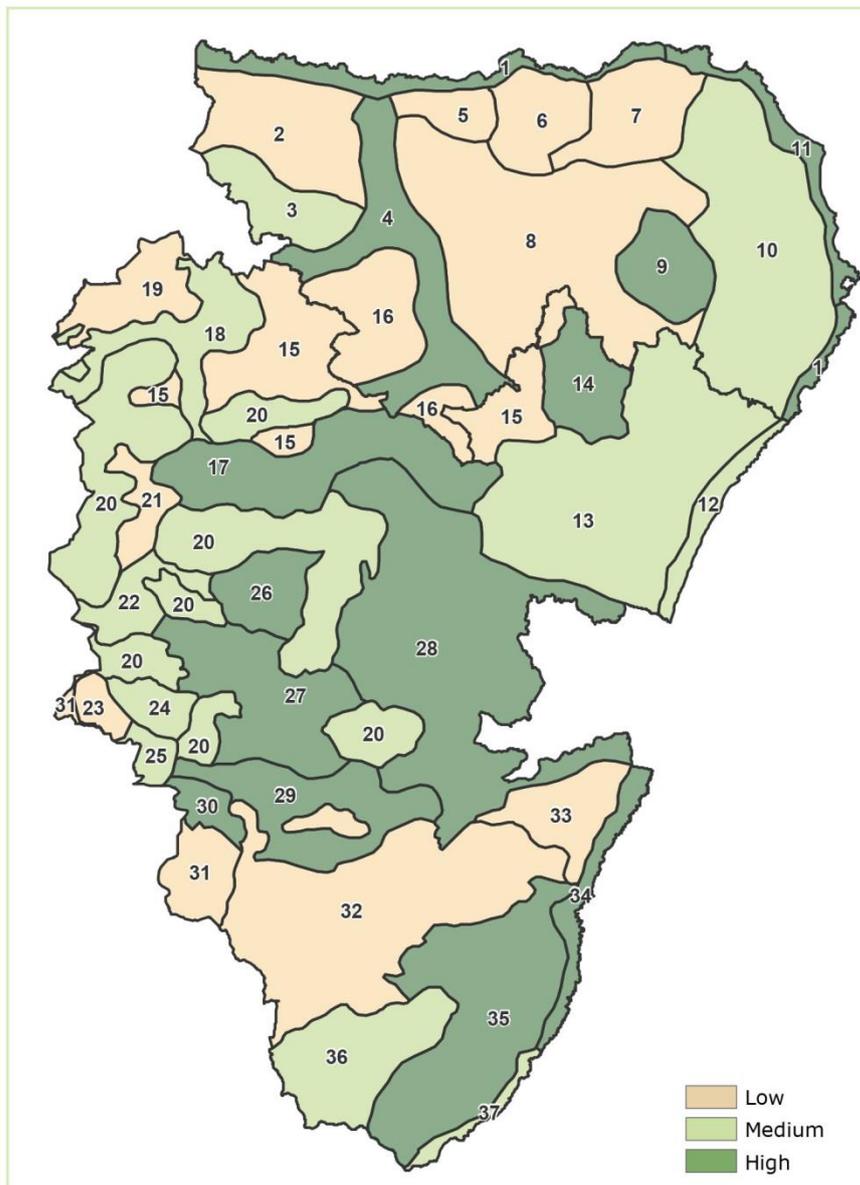
Figure 4.6: Enjoyment



Built heritage assets

- 4.23 13 areas were ranked high under this criterion, and 13 were ranked low. The remaining 11 were ranked medium.
- 4.24 The areas scoring most highly were typically the most settled areas, where built heritage features were more numerous, visible and contributed to landscape character. This included coastal areas (1, 11, 34), with a high concentration of traditional fishing villages, forts and castles. River valleys including the Deveron and Ythan (4), Dee (29) and Don (22), also scored highly, for their visible remnants of estate landscapes, castles and sites of historic battles e.g. Fyvie Castle and Haddo House on the Ythan, Alford Historic Battlefield on the Don. The *Wooded Estates around Old Deer* (9) and *Central Wooded Estates* (28) also scored highly for their estate landscape features such as walls, lodges and gates. The *Cromar Uplands* (27) scored highly for Craigievar Castle, the Peel Ring of Lumphanan and traditional granite villages.
- 4.25 The areas scoring low included *The Mounth* (32) a relatively remote landscape with occasional hill forts but otherwise few built heritage assets. Some areas of coastal and inland farmland and upland fringe farmland on the boundary with Moray were also found to be lacking in visible assets, with the exception of the occasional planned village or traditional farm building.

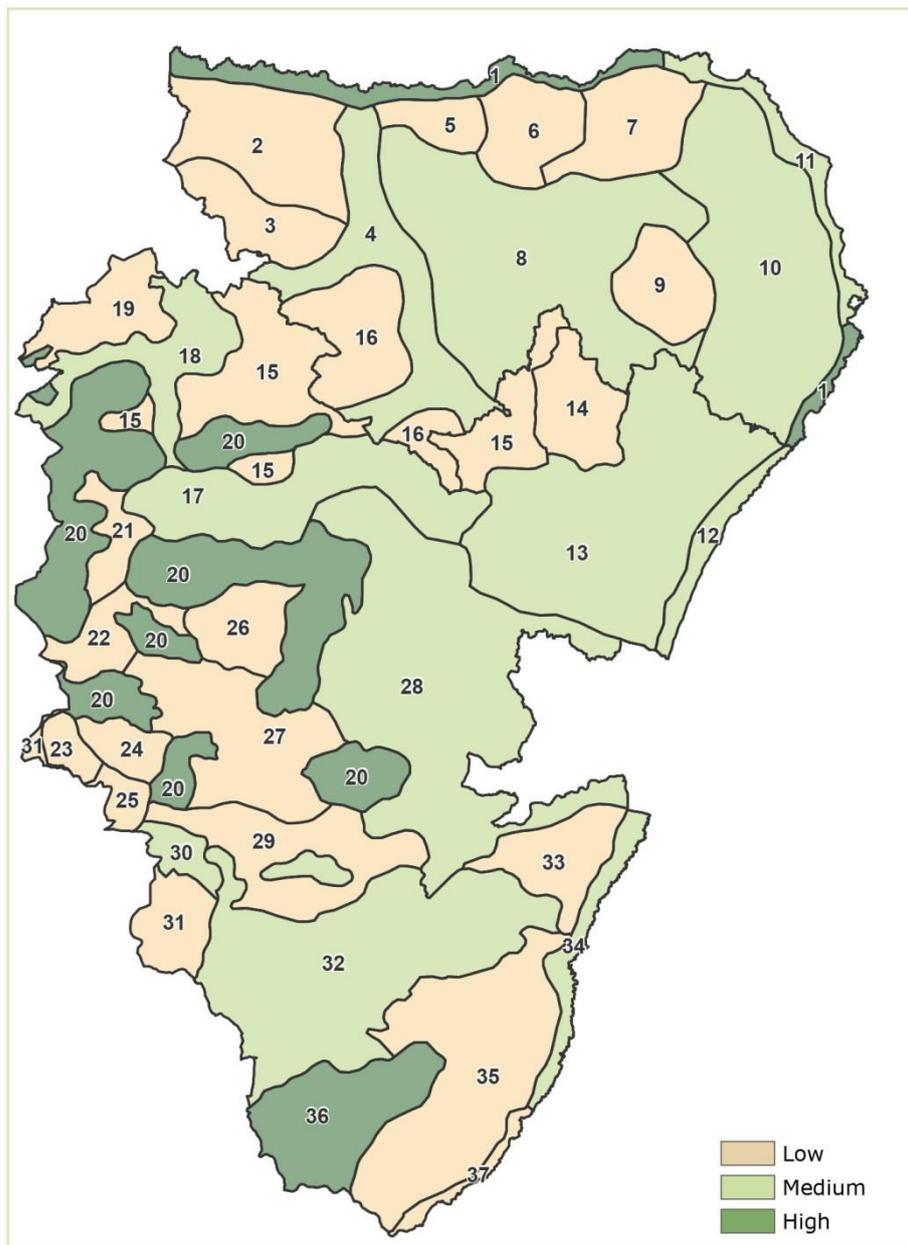
Figure 4.7: Built heritage assets



Cultural qualities

- 4.26 Three areas were ranked high under this criterion, and 22 were ranked low. The remaining 12 were ranked medium.
- 4.27 The areas scoring highly were: the *Cliffs of the North and South East coasts* (1) for its historic associations with literature and film, and continuing associations with fishing and ship building; the *Howe of the Mearns* (36), which provided the setting to the novels of Lewis Grassie Gibbon; and Bennachie (20), for its iron-age hill forts. Areas with a score of medium were found to have an association with literature, music, art or local history, or with spiritual associations. These included the *Agricultural Heartland* (8), which contains features such as the White Horse on Mormond Hill and place names referenced in various folk songs.

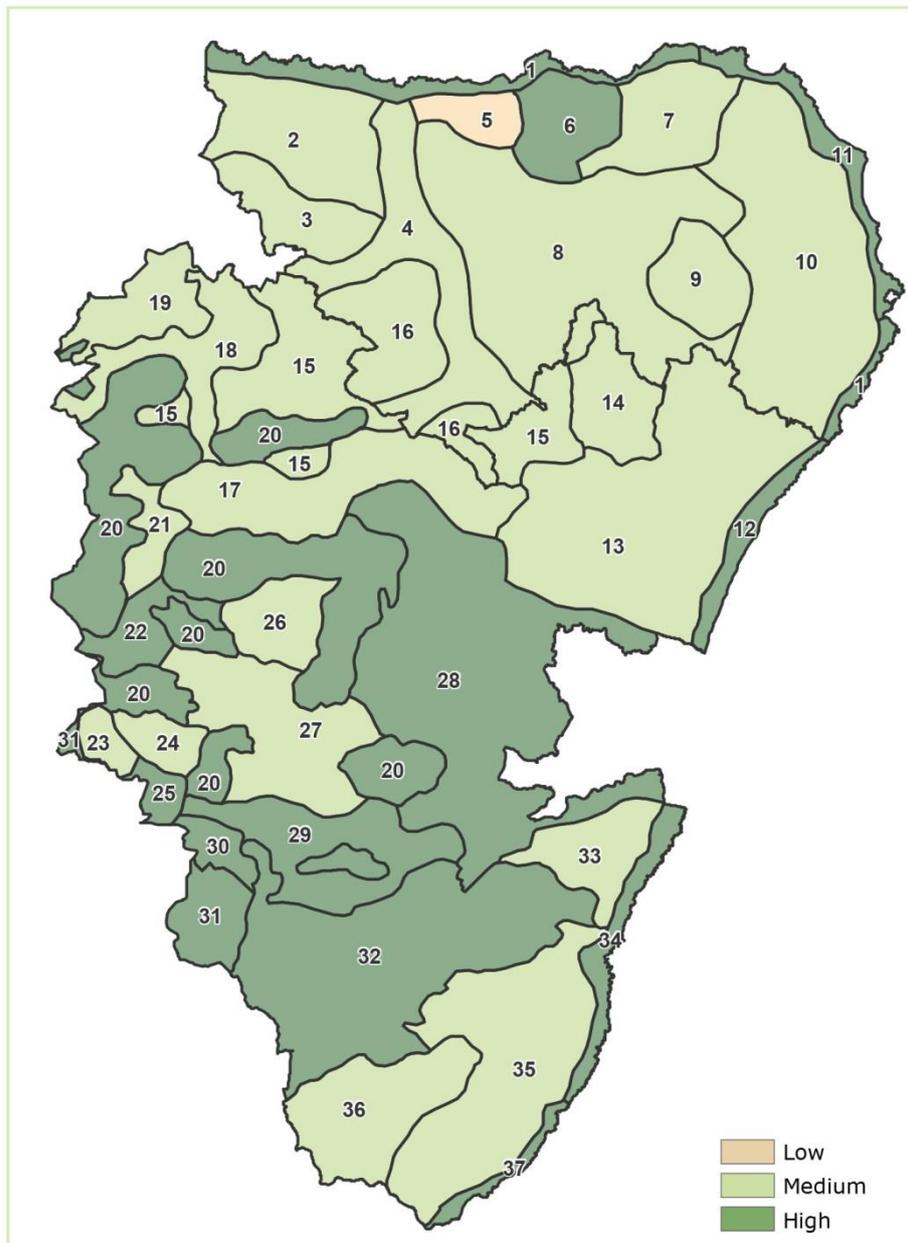
Figure 4.8: Cultural qualities



Naturalness and natural heritage assets

- 4.28 14 areas were ranked high under this criterion, and one area was ranked low. The remaining 22 were ranked medium.
- 4.29 The areas scoring highly in terms of perceived importance of natural heritage assets included coastal areas, river corridors and upland habitats. The coastal cliffs and dunes of the north and east Aberdeenshire coastlines (1, 11, 12, 34, 37) are recognised for their importance to wildlife, including breeding birds, through designation as an SSSI, SAC or NNR. Areas of note include the Loch of Strathbeg in unit 11 and Forvie Dunes in unit 12. River corridors such as the Dee (29) and Don (22) scored highly for their broadleaved woodland and meandering rivers. The importance of the Dee and its tributaries is reflected in its designation as an SAC. Upland areas scoring highly included *The Mounth* (32) and the *Grampian Outliers* (20) for their extensive heather moorland and grassland, with varying degrees of forestry.
- 4.30 The area scoring low (5) is a farmed landscape with little woodland cover. Areas scoring medium tended to be typical rolling farmland and strath landscapes with occasional features of natural heritage interest.

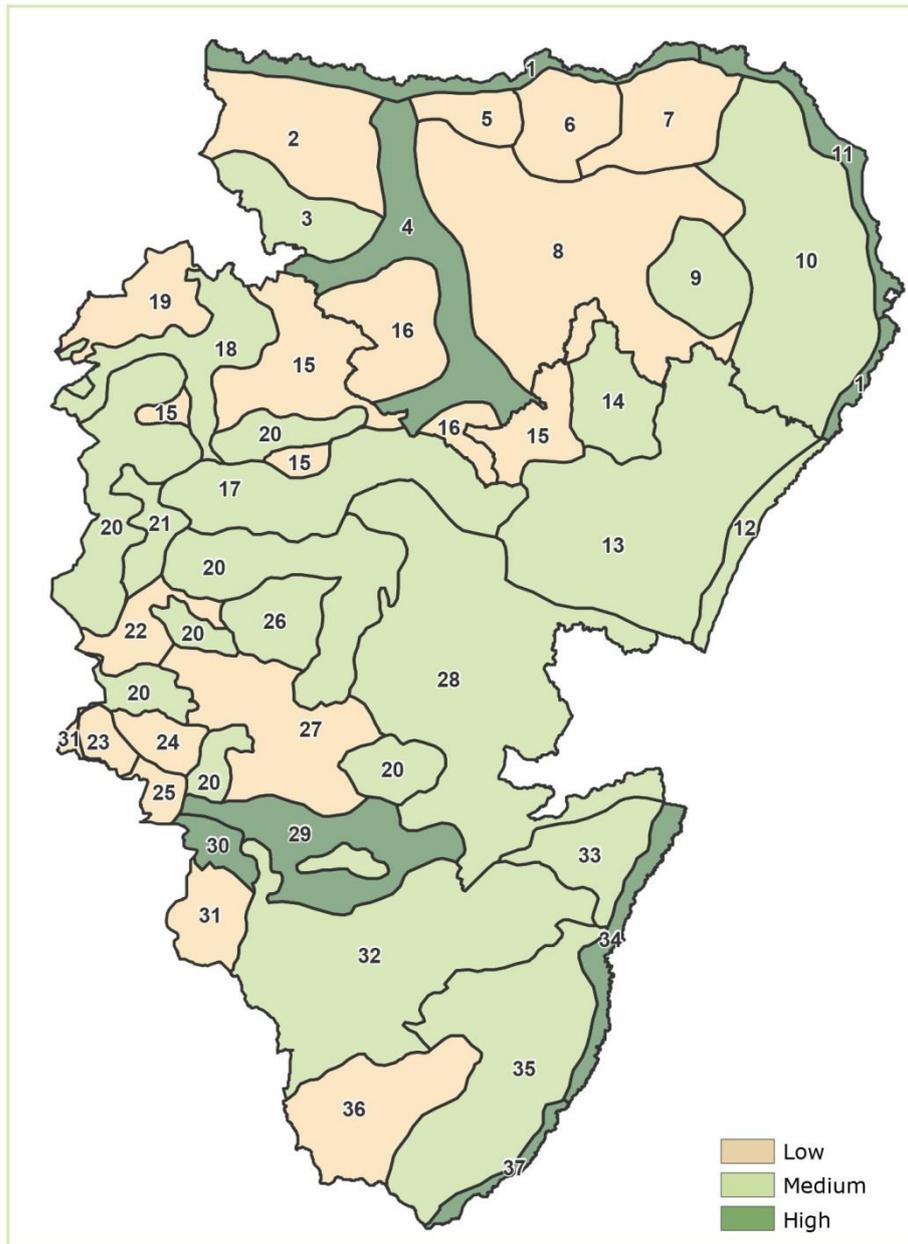
Figure 4.9: Naturalness and natural heritage assets



Settlement setting

- 4.31 Seven areas were ranked high under this criterion, and 15 were ranked low. The remaining 15 were ranked medium.
- 4.32 The majority of coastal areas scored highly (1, 11, 34, 37), as there are numerous towns and villages along the coastal strip, backed by coastal cliffs or sandy bays. The valleys of the Deveron and Upper Ythan (4) and Dee (29) also scored highly, with the self-contained valleys providing a backdrop to several small towns and villages including Banchory and Aboyne on the Dee, and Turriff on the Deveron. The areas scoring low tended to be indistinct rolling farmland or landscapes where adjacent units provided a setting or backdrop, rather than the unit itself.

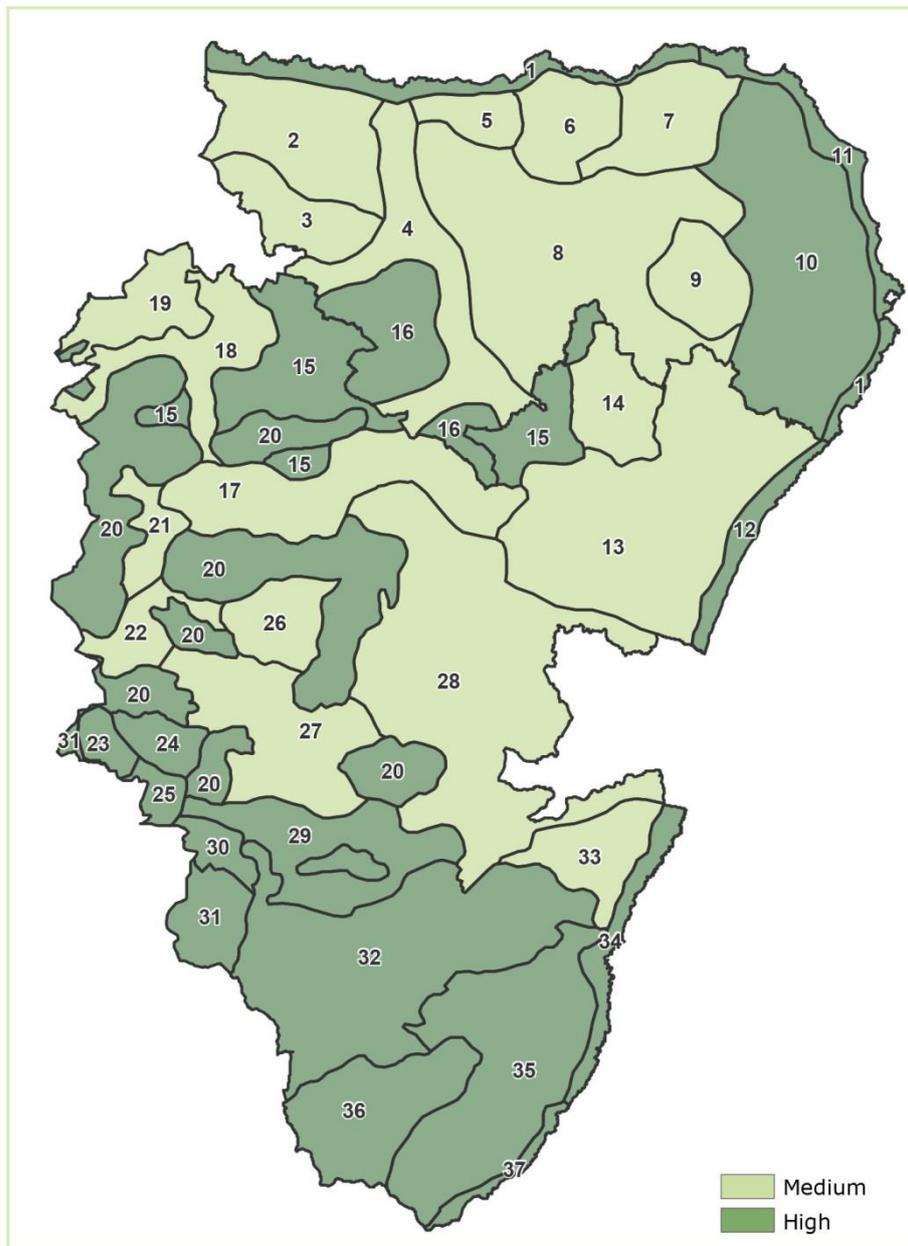
Figure 4.10: Settlement setting



Views

- 4.33 18 areas were ranked high under this criterion, and the remaining 19 were ranked medium.
- 4.34 The areas scoring high are the most visible landscapes, rather than those with the 'best' views, which are recorded under scenic quality. They included: coastal landscapes (1, 11, 12, 34, 37), where expansive open views were available along the coast and out to sea; the *Grampian Outliers* (20), for their intervisibility with the neighbouring straths; *Deeside* (29), which has long views and is visible from the A93; *The Mounth* (32), which provides a backdrop to neighbouring areas and has long views e.g. from Cairn o' Mount; and the *Howe of the Mearns* (36), which is highly visible from neighbouring upland areas and the A90.
- 4.35 The landscapes scoring medium were generally self-contained straths, e.g. the Deveron Valley (4), or areas of farmland not visible to large numbers of receptors, though due to the nature of the Aberdeenshire landscape long views are often a feature.

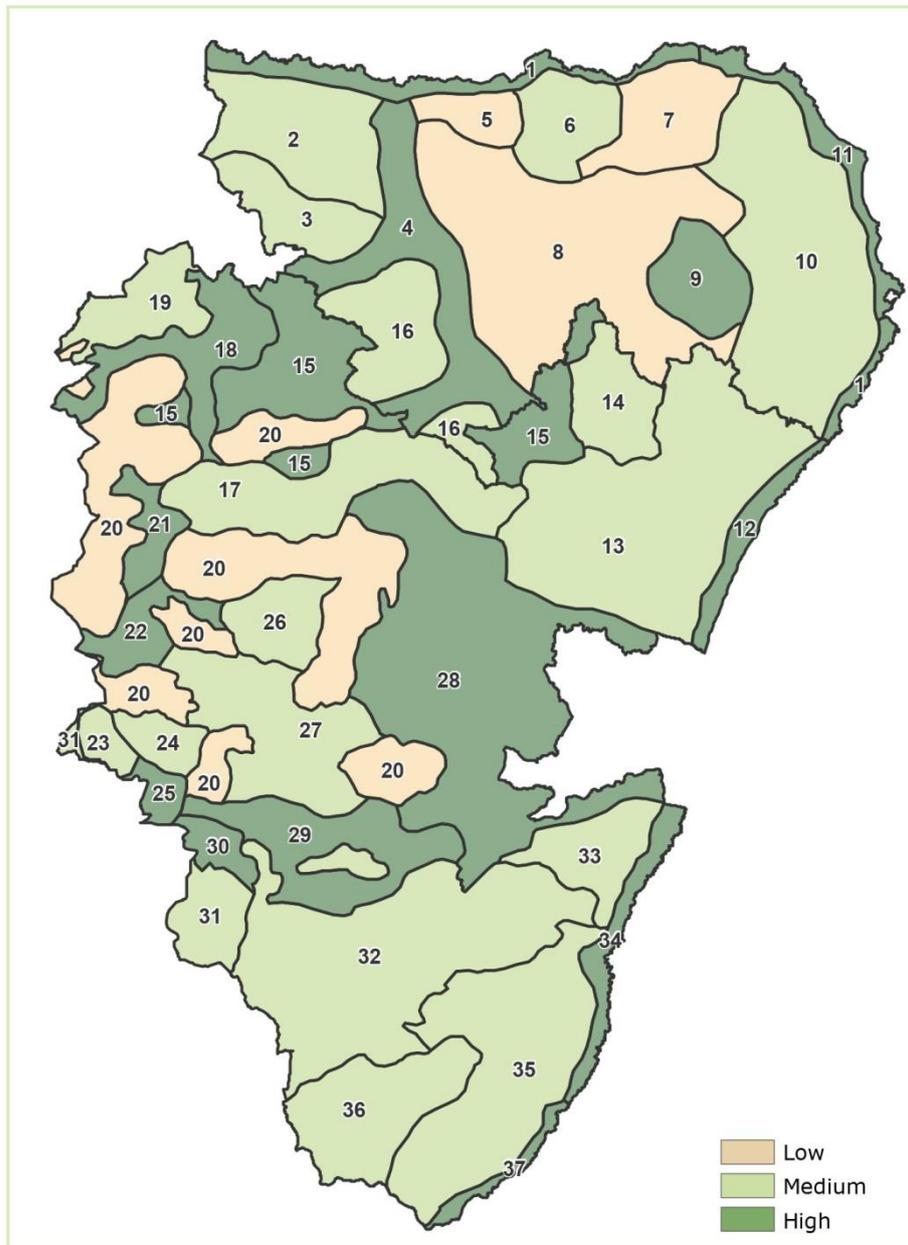
Figure 4.11: Views



Connectivity

- 4.36 15 areas were ranked high under this criterion, and four were ranked low. The remaining 18 were ranked medium.
- 4.37 Coastal areas (1, 11, 12, 34, 37) were scored high for the interface between land and sea, and for walking and cycling routes such as NCN Route 1. River valleys and watersheds also scored highly. These included the Deveron and Ythan (4), Dee (29) and Don (22). The Dee also scored highly for the Deeside Way, part of the NCN. The *Wooded Estates around Old Deer* (9) achieved a high score for its woodland network and the Formartine and Buchan Way which passes through.
- 4.38 Areas which scored low included the *Grampian Outliers* (20), which are discrete units, not directly connected to each other. Also receiving a low score was farmland in north Aberdeenshire (5, 7, 8) which did not contain any habitat networks or corridors of movement of note.

Figure 4.12: Connectivity



Combined results

- 4.39 Total scores were calculated by assigning a value of 1 to a low evaluation, 2 to medium and 3 to high, and adding these together. This gave a possible range of total scores of between 12 and 36, though the actual totals range from 14 to 33. A combined results map was prepared using the total 'score' for each unit. The scores are detailed in **Appendix 4** and are presented on **Figure 9**. It should be noted that these 'scores' are to enable comparison only, and do not represent absolute landscape values that can be applied outside the context of this study.
- 4.40 While it is possible to add a weighting to emphasise the importance of certain criteria, following discussion with the Steering Group it was decided not to introduce a weighting, as there would be a limited overall effect on the scores if weighting was applied (see **Appendix 6**). This suggests that the evaluation process is robust, since it accurately identifies landscapes which meet most of the criteria, and these do not change greatly when different weightings are applied.
- 4.41 The top four scoring units were all coastal landscapes; the highest scoring unit was the *Cliffs of the North and South East Coasts* (1) which scored 33. The *Dunes and Beaches from Fraserburgh to Peterhead* (11) and *Kincardine Cliffs* (34) also scored highly, with 32. *Formartine Links and Dunes* (12) scored 31. Also scoring highly were the *Grampian Outliers* (20), *Deeside* (29) and the *Upper Deeside Estates* (30), which all scored 30.
- 4.42 The lowest scoring areas were coastal farmland inland of the north Aberdeenshire coast, including *Western Coastal Farmland* (2) which scored 18, *North East Coastal Farmland* (7) which scored 16 and *Coastal Farmland East of Macduff* (5) which scored 14.

5 Selection of Search Areas

Introduction

- 5.1 This section sets out the process of analysing the evaluation results and identifying 'search areas'. This was undertaken by firstly filtering the results of the evaluation to focus on the areas which performed best against the criteria. These areas were then analysed to identify search areas, which are landscapes or groups of landscapes that exhibit many of the desired characteristics and qualities. These search areas represent landscapes which may have the potential to form the focus of candidate SLAs, subject to consideration of practical criteria, discussed in **Section 6**.
- 5.2 The map-based element of the stakeholder engagement process informed this stage of the analysis (see **Appendix 5**). The distribution of locations identified on the map has been drawn on in drafting the search areas, making sure that locations which were selected by numerous respondents were included for further consideration. Concentrations of selected places were brought into search areas where they were not already covered, to ensure that the landscapes identified as valued were given due consideration. The locations selected by respondents to the map-based consultation are shown in **Appendix 5**.

Filtering the evaluation results

- 5.3 As set out in the methodology (**Section 2**), the evaluation results were divided into three groups as follows:
- the landscape units with the highest one third of scores were considered for inclusion within search areas;
 - the landscape units with the lowest one third of scores were not considered in further detail, unless they were found to have a strong relationship with other higher scoring areas; and
 - the remaining areas were reviewed in more detail, and where appropriate search areas for consideration were identified.
- 5.4 Applying this three-fold division to the total evaluation scores resulted in the three groups shown in **Table 5.1** and illustrated in **Figure 9**. The following groups were identified:
- 10 areas scoring 27 or more were considered for inclusion as search areas;
 - 20 areas scoring between 21 and 26 were reviewed in more detail; and
 - Seven areas scoring 20 or less were not considered in further detail, unless they were found to have a strong relationship with other higher scoring areas.

Analysis of landscape units

- 5.5 The highest-scoring areas were, in general, considered appropriate to define within search areas. However, some analysis was required to identify significant variations in quality, and interrelationships with other areas (see **Table 5.2**). Search areas are generally groups of two or more landscape units.
- 5.6 The middle-ranking areas were examined in the same way, but without the presumption that they would necessarily form search areas (see **Table 5.3**). Within these areas, the aim was to establish whether all of the landscape unit could be a search area, or whether parts could be considered as a group with other landscape units. Consideration of these areas has particularly focused on those criteria which were evaluated as high.

- 5.7 This analysis was informed by the non-ranked criteria at the end of the evaluation sheets (see **Appendix 3**), which recorded the variations within and interrelationships between landscape units.
- 5.8 The lower-ranking areas were not considered in detail within this analysis, as they do not exhibit enough of the characteristics and qualities which may merit designation. However, any important relationships between the potential search areas and lower-scoring landscapes are considered in the analysis. In this way, important parts of low-scoring landscape units can be recognised where they contribute to group value, and if appropriate these parts can be brought in to the search area.
- 5.9 The analysis was iterative in nature, with the detailed consideration of variations in quality and interrelationships prompting the evaluations to be revisited in some instances.

Table 5.1 Ranking of landscape units by total score

| Landscape unit | | Total score | Group |
|----------------|---|-------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | Cliffs of the North and South East Coasts | 33 | Consider as search area |
| 11 | Dunes and Beaches from Fraserburgh to Peterhead | 32 | Consider as search area |
| 34 | Kincardine Cliffs | 32 | Consider as search area |
| 12 | Formartine Links and Dunes | 31 | Consider as search area |
| 20 | Grampian Outliers | 30 | Consider as search area |
| 29 | Deeside | 30 | Consider as search area |
| 30 | Upper Deeside Estates | 30 | Consider as search area |
| 4 | Deveron and Upper Ythan Valleys | 29 | Consider as search area |
| 37 | Kincardine Links | 29 | Consider as search area |
| 32 | The Mounth | 28 | Consider as search area |
| 9 | Wooded Estates Around Old Deer | 26 | Review in more detail |
| 18 | Deveron and Bogie Straths | 26 | Review in more detail |
| 31 | The North-eastern Hill Ranges | 26 | Review in more detail |
| 22 | Donside | 25 | Review in more detail |
| 25 | Muir of Dinnet | 25 | Review in more detail |
| 28 | Central Wooded Estates | 25 | Review in more detail |
| 36 | Howe of the Mearns | 24 | Review in more detail |
| 14 | Ythan Strath Farmland | 23 | Review in more detail |
| 17 | Insch Basin | 23 | Review in more detail |
| 21 | Lumsden Valley | 23 | Review in more detail |
| 26 | Howe of Alford | 23 | Review in more detail |
| 35 | Garvock and Glenbervie | 23 | Review in more detail |
| 10 | Eastern Coastal Agricultural Plain | 22 | Review in more detail |
| 13 | Formartine Lowlands | 22 | Review in more detail |
| 23 | Cromar Farmlands | 22 | Review in more detail |
| 24 | Howe of Cromar | 22 | Review in more detail |
| 3 | Knockhill and Aberchirder | 21 | Review in more detail |
| 6 | Sandstone Ridges and Valleys South of Troup | 21 | Review in more detail |
| 15 | Northern Rolling Lowlands | 21 | Review in more detail |
| 27 | The Cromar Uplands | 21 | Review in more detail |
| 8 | Agricultural Heartland | 19 | Not considered in detail |
| 16 | Upland Ridges South of the Deveron | 19 | Not considered in detail |
| 19 | Daugh of Cairnborrow | 19 | Not considered in detail |
| 33 | Kincardine Plateau | 19 | Not considered in detail |
| 2 | Western Coastal Farmland | 18 | Not considered in detail |
| 7 | North East Coastal Farmland | 16 | Not considered in detail |
| 5 | Coastal Farmland East of Macduff | 14 | Not considered in detail |

Table 5.2 Analysis of higher-scoring landscape units

| Landscape unit | Consistency | Relationships | Search areas identified |
|--|--|--|--|
| 1 Cliffs of the North and South East Coasts | A narrow and diverse coastal strip, with some variety in landform but otherwise consistent. Scenic headlands and cliffs, expansive views and traditional fishing villages contributed to high scores. | A self-contained coastal strip with a strong relationship with the sea and sky. Borders the narrow Findochty Cullen Coast AGLV in Moray. | Included in a search area which captures the north and north east Aberdeenshire coasts, extending inland to include farmland which forms a backdrop to the coast. |
| 11 Dunes and Beaches from Fraserburgh to Peterhead | A distinctive coastal strip of sandy dunes and beaches with occasional rocky sections, contrasting with developed areas e.g. Fraserburgh and Peterhead. The Loch of Strathbeg contributed to high scores for enjoyment and natural heritage. | Grades into coastal farmland to the west and continuous with unit 1 to the west of Fraserburgh and south of Peterhead. | Included in a search area which captures the north and north east Aberdeenshire coasts, extending inland to include farmland which forms a backdrop to the coast as well as features of interest such as the Loch of Strathbeg. |
| 34 Kincardine Cliffs | A distinctive stretch of coastline with a strong sense of place, centred on Stonehaven. | Has a relationship with the sea and sky, but is otherwise self-contained. | Included in a search area which captures the south east Aberdeenshire coast, and extends inland south of Stonehaven where adjacent farmland forms a backdrop to the coast. |
| 12 Formartine Links and Dunes | A distinctive landscape of coastal farmland including the vast Forvie Dunes at the mouth of the River Ythan at Newburgh. | Has a relationship with the sea to the east, grades into farmland to the west. | Included in a search area which captures the north and north east Aberdeenshire coasts, extending inland to include farmland which forms a backdrop to the coast. |
| 20 Grampian Outliers | Series of fragmented moorland spurs which extend east into Aberdeenshire from the Cairngorms National Park. Some areas are more dramatic than others e.g. Bennachie, Tap o' Noth. | Form a visually continuous dark backdrop of heather and forest to farmed lowland straths. | Included within a search area centred on the Grampian Outliers and Cairngorm fringes, including Bennachie and Tap o' Noth, and the lower lying valleys in between. At Haugh of Glass where the Deveron flows from Moray into Aberdeenshire small parts of the unit form the backdrop to the valley, and are therefore included within a search area focused on the Deveron Valley. Parts of the unit also form the backdrop to the Dee Valley, e.g. at Mortlich and Hill of Fare, and these areas have therefore been included within a search area focused on the Dee Valley. |

| Landscape unit | Consistency | Relationships | Search areas identified |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| 29 Deeside | A strath landscape with a strong sense of place. Mainly pasture and woodland in Lower Deeside, grading into moorland with steep wooded valley sides in Mid Deeside. | The strath has a relationship with the Mounth hills to the south, and Grampian Outliers to the north e.g. Mortlich, Hill of Fare. The Dee Valley flows into Aberdeenshire from the Cairngorms National Park to the west at Muir of Dinnet. | Included in a search area which focuses on the Dee Valley. |
| 30 Upper Deeside Estates | A small area which is continuous with Deeside to the east and Muir of Dinnet extending into the Cairngorms National Park to the west. More wooded in the south. Includes parts of the River Dee and Aboyne. | Continuous with the Dee Valley to the east and west. | Includes part of the River Dee itself and the wooded hills which contain the Dee valley to the south. Therefore included in a search area which focuses on the Dee Valley. |
| 4 Deveron and Upper Ythan Valleys | The Deveron valley runs south from Banff to Turriff, then west to the boundary with Moray. It is steeper and more intact than the Ythan Valley. | The Deveron Valley is relatively self-contained. Parts of the Ythan Valley have a strong sense of place, e.g. Braes of Gight; others merge into adjacent low lying farmland. | The Deveron between Banff and Haugh of Glass is included within a search area which focuses on the Deveron Valley. The Ythan Valley between Turriff and Haddo is included within a separate search area which focuses on the Ythan Valley and also extends north east to include wooded estate landscapes around Old Deer. |
| 37 Kincardine Links | Flat to gently sloping farmed landscape with a raised beach, contrasting with settlement along the coast. | Grades into the coastal farmland to the west. | Included in a search area which captures the south east Aberdeenshire coast, and extends inland south of Stonehaven where adjacent farmland forms a backdrop to the coast. |
| 32 The Mounth | An expansive moorland plateau which extends with smaller scale and more diverse foothills. More forested in the centre and east, with stronger wild land qualities in the west. | Backdrop to the Dee Valley, Howe of the Mearns and Garvock and Glenbervie. Extends west into the higher hills of the Cairngorms National Park. | Considered as part of a search area which focuses on the Mounth itself. A small extension of the unit north of the Water of Feugh, a tributary of the Dee, is also included within a search area focused on the Dee Valley. |

Table 5.3 Analysis of middle-scoring landscape units

| Landscape unit | Consistency | Relationships | Search areas identified |
|----------------------------------|--|---|---|
| 9 Wooded Estates Around Old Deer | A farmed landscape, with a distinctive character created through the high proportion of woodland related to former estate landscapes. Less wooded in the south and west. | The South Ugie Valley is relatively self-contained, with the outer edges of the unit blending into neighbouring farmland. | Considered as part of a search area which includes part of the Ythan Valley between Turriff and Haddo, and also extends north east to include wooded estate landscapes around Old Deer. |
| 18 Deveron and Bogie Straths | The Deveron has more thickly coniferous wooded slopes north and west of Huntly. The landscape is of a more intimate scale around Glass in the west. North east of Huntly the landscape has a more upland fringe feel. Strath Bogie and Huntly have a strong sense of place. | Continuous with the Deveron Valley to the north east. Relationship with the adjacent hills e.g. the Bin to the north of Huntly, the Grampians to the south west. | The unit includes part of the River Deveron between Milltown of Rothiemay and Haugh of Glass, and is therefore considered as part of a search area focused on the Deveron Valley. |
| 31 The North-eastern Hill Ranges | A small part of a much wider area of rolling moorland hills and valleys which extends south west into the Cairngorms National Park and south east into the Mounth. | Continues into the Cairngorms to the west (although separated by a watershed) and the Mounth to the east. | Continuous with the Mounth and Cairngorms, and therefore considered as part of a search area focused on the Mounth. |
| 22 Donside | Extends from the Cairngorms National Park boundary east of Strathdon to the edge of Howe of Alford. The north eastern spur is a narrower, more enclosed valley. Broader in the south. | Contained by the Grampian Outliers to the north west, east and south. | Considered as part of a search area which focuses on the Grampian Outliers and Cairngorm fringes. |
| 25 Muir of Dinnet | Moorland and forestry, including part of the River Dee, on the fringes of the Cairngorms National Park. Varies between the Muir of Dinnet / Dee corridor in the south and more upland hill slopes in the north. | The Muir of Dinnet extends into the Cairngorms to the west. Continuous with the Dee Valley to the east and west. | Includes part of the Dee Valley, and therefore considered as part of a search area which focuses on the Dee Valley. |
| 28 Central Wooded Estates | Substantial farmed and well wooded area to the east of Bennachie between the Dee and Don Valleys, extending to the western edge of Aberdeen. More settled towards the north. A varied landscape, with estates having a local influence. The majority of the area, while typical of Aberdeenshire wooded farmland, does not exhibit a range of other special qualities. | Backed by the Grampian Outliers to the west and south west. The Dee Valley extends east and west. | Forms the foreground to some of the Grampian Outliers e.g. Kemnay south east of Bennachie, and the western section is therefore considered as part of a search area which focuses on the Grampian Outliers and Cairngorm fringes. In the south the area includes part of the Dee Valley between Crathes and Peterculter, and is therefore included within the Dee Valley search area. |
| 36 Howe of the Mearns | A uniformly flat, farmed landscape. Less wooded in the north east. | Contained by the Mounth to the north. Strong relationship with the Highland Boundary Fault, encircling wooded foothills. Hill of Garvock to the south also contains the Howe. | Has a strong relationship with the Mounth to the north, and is therefore included within a search area which focuses on the Mounth and the Howe. |

| Landscape unit | Consistency | Relationships | Search areas identified |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| 14 Ythan Strath Farmland | Agricultural landscape with a strong wooded structure, bisected by the River Ythan. More wooded around Haddo Estate. More upland characteristics in the north of the area. | Merges into adjacent farmland. | Considered as part of a search area which includes parts of the Ythan Valley between Turriff and Haddo, and extends north east to include estate landscapes around Old Deer. |
| 17 Inch Basin | Rolling farmland which is flatter in the east and more hilly in the west (with local variations). | Backed by the Grampian Outliers, including Bennachie to the south. | The area between Rhynie and the A96, considered as part of a search area which focuses on the Grampian Outliers and Cairngorm fringes and the low lying valleys in between. |
| 21 Lumsden Valley | Division between the watersheds of the River Bogie to the north and River Don to the south. Self-contained, with a strong sense of place. | The Grampian Outliers form a backdrop on both sides of the valley. | Considered as part of a search area which focuses on the Grampian Outliers and Cairngorm fringes, and the low lying valleys in between. |
| 26 Howe of Alford | Consistent, farmed landscape bisected by the River Don, with a strong sense of place. | Framed by dark moorland ridges of the Grampian Outliers to the north, east and west. | Considered as part of a search area which focuses on the Grampian Outliers and Cairngorm fringes, and the low lying valleys in between. |
| 35 Garvock and Glenbervie | Open rolling farmland with more intimate wooded valleys. | Contained by the Mounth to the north west, and merges with coastal farmland to the south east. | Included within a search area which focuses on the Mounth and the lowlands which form its setting. The south eastern fringes of this unit are also included within a search area which is focused on the south east Aberdeenshire coast, and extends inland to include farmland which forms a backdrop to the coast. |
| 10 Eastern Coastal Agricultural Plain | A large rolling coastal plain, unified by its land use / landcover. Flatter in the north and hillier in the west. | Merges into the coastal landscape to the east. | Included within a search area which focuses on the north and north east Aberdeenshire coast, and extends inland to include some farmland which forms the backdrop to the coast. |
| 13 Formartine Lowlands | An open, expansive farmed landscape with more strongly undulating hills in the west. | Forms a backdrop to coastal farmland. | Included within a search area which focuses on the north and north east Aberdeenshire coast, and extends inland to include some farmland which forms the backdrop to the coast. |
| 23 Cromar Farmlands | A small area of low open hills contrasting with farmed and forested lowland areas, at the foot of Morven. Similar to, and continuous with the Howe of Cromar. | The character area continues into the Cairngorms National Park. | Located on the north side of the Dee Valley, and included within a search area which is focused on the Dee Valley. |

| Landscape unit | Consistency | Relationships | Search areas identified |
|---|---|--|---|
| 24 Howe of Cromar | A small, consistent landscape centred on Tarland. Continuous with the Cromar Farmlands to the west. | Strongly influenced by the encircling skyline of dark moorland ridges which frame views within it and form an imposing backdrop. | Located on the north side of the Dee Valley, and included within a search area which is focused on the Dee Valley. |
| 3 Knockhill and Aberchirder | Mixed agriculture and scattered woodland, with a rougher, more moorland character on the boundary with Moray. | Relationship with the Deveron Valley to the south and the foothills of Moray to the west. | The fringes of the unit are included within a search area which focuses on the Deveron Valley. |
| 6 Sandstone Ridges and Valleys South of Troup | Predominantly a farmed landscape, but with some areas of moorland, bog and wooded valleys including the distinctive Tore of Troup. | Being of higher elevation, the landscape provides a distant backdrop to neighbouring landscape units. The edges of the landscape fade into surrounding farmland. | Included within a search area which focuses on the north and north east Aberdeenshire coast, and extends inland to include features of interest such as the Tore of Troup within this landscape unit. |
| 15 Northern Rolling Lowlands | Four separate areas of farmland which extend into the Deveron Valley to the north and Glens of Foudland to the south. More elevated around the A96 / Glens of Foudland. | The Grampian Outliers provide a backdrop to parts of the area. | The southern side of the Deveron valley at Tower Hill lies within this unit, and part of it is therefore included within a search area which focuses on the Deveron Valley. The River Ythan flows through another part of the unit at Braes of Gight, and this is included within a search area which focuses on the Ythan Valley and extends north east to include wooded estates around Old Deer. |
| 27 The Cromar Uplands | Farmed moorland edge, amongst Grampian Outliers. Highly variable in character and overall quality. | Grampian Outliers surround and have a strong influence by forming an imposing backdrop. | Forms the backdrop to the Dee Valley, e.g. at Kincardine O' Neil, and is therefore included within a search area which focuses on the Dee Valley. |

Search areas for development of candidate SLAs

- 5.10 Based on the analysis presented in **Table 5.2** and **Table 5.3**, the following seven search areas have been identified, within which candidate SLAs could be developed, subject to consideration against practical criteria:
- **Search Area A** – the north and north east Aberdeenshire coast between the boundaries with Moray and Aberdeen, extending inland to include the edges of coastal farmland and the Tore of Troup (south of Troup Head). Comprising the whole of unit 1, 11 and 12, and parts of units 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10 and 13;
 - **Search Area B** – the south east Aberdeenshire coast, between Aberdeen and Angus, comprising the whole of units 34 and 37, and part of unit 35;
 - **Search Area C** – the Deveron Valley, between Banff and Haugh of Glass on the boundary with Moray, comprising parts of units 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 15, 16, 18, 19 and 20;
 - **Search Area D** – the Ythan valley between Turriff and Ellon, extending north east to include the estate landscapes around Old Deer, comprising the whole of unit 9, and parts of units 4, 8, 13, 14, 15 and 16;
 - **Search Area E** – the Grampian Outliers and Cairngorm fringes, comprising parts of units 15, 17, 20, 21, 22, 26, 27 and 28;
 - **Search Area F** – the Dee Valley, between the Cairngorms National Park and Aberdeen, comprising the whole of units 29 and 30, and parts of units 20, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 31 and 32; and
 - **Search Area G** – the Mounth, including Howe of the Mearns, comprising parts of units 31, 32, 35 and 36.
- 5.11 The search areas are illustrated in **Figure 11**. These areas are considered to represent the characteristics and qualities which have been identified as desirable for locally designated landscapes in Aberdeenshire. They are derived from the evaluations and scores assigned to the individual landscape units, but have been defined based on variations in quality across those units. For this reason the remaining sections of the report are structured around these search areas, rather than the landscape units.
- 5.12 The areas shown in **Figure 11** are for illustrative purposes only and do not reflect the potential boundaries which any candidate designation would have. The search areas were evaluated against practical criteria, as set out in **Section 6**, and the refined candidate SLAs are presented in **Section 7**.

6 Refinement of Search Areas against Practical Criteria

Introduction

- 6.1 The search areas were considered against a range of 'practical criteria', as advised by the SNH/HS *Guidance on Local Landscape Designations*. This included detailed discussion with the Steering Group on each of the search areas, to review their extent and identify the likely qualifying interests and potential boundaries of candidate SLAs.
- 6.2 Practical considerations which were examined included:
- the identity, size and coherence of each area as a recognisable landscape;
 - the reasons for selecting each area, and compatibility with the purposes of designation;
 - potential overlaps and correspondence with other designations, including relationship with the Cairngorms National Park and Moray AGLVs;
 - potential overlaps with other planning policy/strategy considerations; and
 - availability of suitable boundary features.
- 6.3 The following sections summarise the consideration of practical criteria in relation to each of the search areas, and the decisions which were taken as to whether or not to take each all or parts of each search area forward as a candidate SLA. The refinement was an iterative process, with ongoing Steering Group discussions informing reconsideration of some areas in order to ensure the most robust result.
- 6.4 In defining boundaries for the candidate SLAs, the overlap with settlements was considered. As agreed with the Steering Group, the inclusion of a settlement within a candidate SLA was examined on a case-by-case basis. A settlement (as defined in the LDP) was included where the purpose and qualifying interests of the designation related clearly to the settlement itself. Settlement size and setting were also considered. In the final analysis, most settlements have been included in the candidate SLAs.

Search Area A

- 6.5 This search area encompasses the entire north and north east Aberdeenshire coastal strip, between the boundary with Moray and the north side of Aberdeen. It comprises varied coastal landscapes which are unified by the influence of the sea. These landscapes include sandy beaches, vast dunes, prominent headlands and rocky cliffs. The search area extends inland to include coastal farmland and features such as the Tore of Troup (a deep wooded ravine south of Pennan) and the Loch of Strathbeg (a large inland loch south of St. Combs). Search Area A includes several large settlements including Banff, Fraserburgh and Peterhead, and transport corridors including the A90, A98 and A975. The search area is continuous with the narrow coastal Findochty Cullen Coast AGLV in Moray.
- 6.6 The north facing Aberdeenshire coast, between the Moray boundary and Fraserburgh, mainly comprises the Coast LCT (unit 1), extending inland to include the Coastal Farmland LCT (units 2, 5, 6 and 7) and River Valley LCT (unit 4) where these landscapes form a backdrop to the coast. This coastal strip forms a cohesive and self-contained landscape, which has limited intervisibility with inland landscapes, but a strong relationship with the sea and sky.
- 6.7 Designation of this area would recognise the high scenic value created by the juxtaposition of rugged coastal cliffs and headlands with traditional fishing villages nestling at the base of the cliffs. It would also recognise the strong elemental qualities of this coast and the importance of

expansive views across the North Sea from higher headlands and coastal roads. The many features of natural heritage present along this coastline, such as Troup Head and the Tore of Troup, would also be recognised by its designation. Designation would also protect the recreational value of the area and its function as a corridor for the movement of people, as highlighted in the evaluation.

- 6.8 It was therefore decided to take this area forward as a candidate SLA, under the name **North Aberdeenshire Coast**. The various roads which run parallel to the coast (including the A98, B9139 and B9031) form a natural boundary to this self-contained landscape. The candidate SLA includes Banff and Macduff, situated on a prominent headland either side of the mouth of the River Deveron and with numerous examples of built heritage. The candidate SLA does not include the fishing port of Fraserburgh.
- 6.9 The north eastern Aberdeenshire coast, between Fraserburgh and Aberdeen, has some rugged cliffs, but is more typically characterised by expansive sweeps of sand backed by rolling dunes. This coastal strip mainly comprises the Coast LCT (units 1, 11 and 12), and extends inland to include the Coastal Farmland LCT (units 7 and 10) and Agricultural Heartland LCT (unit 13).
- 6.10 Designation of this area would recognise its strong sense of place, scenic qualities and uninterrupted views out to the North Sea. Designation would also recognise the ecological importance of the area's dune systems and protect features such as the Loch of Strathbeg, the largest dune lake in Britain, and the connectivity these assets provide. The coast is well settled, and includes the large fishing ports of Fraserburgh and Peterhead, smaller coastal villages and the landmark St Fergus Gas Terminal buildings. Designation would recognise the importance of the coast to the setting of settlements and numerous built heritage assets such as castles, towers and churches. The opportunities for recreation, such as long distance walking routes, coastal paths and nature reserve at the Loch of Strathbeg would also be recognised.
- 6.11 It was therefore decided to take this area forward as a candidate SLA, under the name **North East Aberdeenshire Coast**. The edge of the coastal strip varies depending on topography, merging into adjacent farmland in lower lying areas. The boundary therefore follows the closest road, which is frequently the A90, to include coastal features such as the Loch of Strathbeg and the dunes at Forvie. The candidate SLA forms two separate areas either side of Peterhead, which has been excluded from the boundary.

Search Area B

- 6.12 This search area encompasses the entire south east Aberdeenshire coast, between the administrative boundaries of Aberdeen and Angus. It comprises rugged coastal cliffs merging into flat and gently sloping farmland, and includes an atypical raised beach landscape. The search area includes several large settlements (Portlethen, Newtonhill, Stonehaven and Inverbervie) and major transport routes including the A90, A92 and East Coast railway.
- 6.13 The search area mainly comprises the Coastal Strip LCT (units 34 and 37), and extends inland to include part of the Agricultural Heartland LCT (unit 35). The landscape has a strong sense of place and recognisable features.
- 6.14 Designation of this area would recognise the importance of its rugged scenery of weathered coastal cliffs and atypical raised beach features, which form an important setting to the numerous coastal villages and towns as well as an important natural habitat. Designation would also recognise the importance of the area for enjoyment, with its numerous coastal paths, beaches and long distance touring routes, providing connectivity for people as well as opportunities for expansive views out to sea. Built heritage assets are numerous, and include the iconic Dunnottar Castle, on rocky headland to south of Stonehaven. Designation would recognise the importance of built heritage, and also cultural qualities such as the Stonehaven Fireball Festival, as set out in the evaluation.
- 6.15 It was therefore decided to take this area forward as a candidate SLA, under the name **South East Aberdeenshire Coast**. The A90 and the Aberdeen to Dundee railway line both run parallel to the coast, and separate the area of coastal influence from the farmed hinterland to the east.

The boundary therefore follows one of these features for most of its length, between the administrative boundaries of Aberdeen and Angus.

Search Area C

- 6.16 This search area comprises the Deveron Valley within the Aberdeenshire administrative boundary, between the boundary with Moray at Haugh of Glass and Banff. The character of the landscape varies along the course of the valley but is unified by the presence of the River Deveron: in the south west the valley is narrower with a more upland character, and is backed by attractive wooded slopes and landmark hills; north east of Huntly the valley widens as the river meanders through coastal farmland, before discharging into Banff Bay. The River Deveron crosses briefly into Moray at Milltown of Rothiemay, before re-entering Aberdeenshire.
- 6.17 The search area mainly comprises the River Valley LCT (unit 4) and Straths and Valleys LCT (unit 18), with parts of the Coastal Farmland LCT (units 2 and 5), Agricultural Heartland LCT (units 3, 8, 15 and 16), Farmed Moorland Edge LCT (unit 19) and Moorland Plateaux LCT (unit 20). The lower Deveron and Huntly were identified in the evaluation as having a strong sense of place.
- 6.18 Designation of the Deveron Valley would recognise the high scenic quality resulting from its meandering river bounded by rolling wooded hills, which forms an important setting to settlement along the valley floor and sides, and backdrop to castles and estates. Designation would also recognise the importance of the area for connectivity, in terms of transport corridors, water catchments and woodland networks, as noted in the evaluation. Designation would also achieve continuity with the neighbouring Speyside AGLV in Moray.
- 6.19 It was therefore decided to take this area forward as a candidate SLA, under the name **Deveron Valley**. The natural boundary is formed by the topography which encloses the valley landform, and where possible the boundaries were drawn along physical features that marked the enclosing ridge lines.
- 6.20 The Deveron Valley candidate SLA is contiguous with the North Aberdeenshire Coast candidate SLA at Banff and Macduff.

Search Area D

- 6.21 This search area encompasses the valley landscape between Turriff and Ythanbank, the wooded estate landscapes around Old Deer, Haddo Country Park, and the farmland in between. The landscape is varied and includes farmed and wooded river valleys contained by broad ridges and gently rolling hills.
- 6.22 The search area mainly comprises the River Valley LCT (the lower end of unit 4) and the Agricultural Heartland LCT (units 8, 9, 14, 15 and 16). The search area focuses on unit 4 (Upper Ythan Valley) and unit 9 (Wooded Estates around Old Deer), but also explores the potential to link these higher scoring areas through intervening rolling farmland. Beyond the search area, the River Ythan continues on through Ellon, before discharging into the sea in a wide estuary between Newburgh and the Forvie Dunes (Search Area A).
- 6.23 The evaluation identified that within unit 4, the Upper Ythan Valley contributed to the high scores for connectivity (due to the river valley and watershed with the Deveron catchment) and built heritage (for features such as Fyvie Castle). However, the Upper Ythan Valley was noted to be less intact than the Deveron, with a less distinctive valley profile and with fewer opportunities for enjoyment. Despite valued landscape features, such as the Braes of Gight, it was decided not to take the area forward as a candidate SLA.
- 6.24 The evaluation identified unit 9 as a relatively rare landscape due to its high woodland cover, a relic of the former estate landscapes of Aden and Pitfour. The area also scored highly for enjoyment, due to visitor attractions and long distance walking and cycling routes, and connectivity, for its woodland, waterways and paths. However, the unit was not found to have a strong enough identity to merit being a candidate SLA on its own, and no relationships with adjacent landscapes were identified.

- 6.25 Overall, while this search area contains a number of important and valued landscape features, these are not connected or related in a way that could be captured in a coherent candidate SLA.

Search Area E

- 6.26 This search area encompasses a variety of upland landscape types in the west of Aberdeenshire. These include farmed valleys, upland fringe farmland and a series of forested moorland spurs referred to as the Grampian Outliers.
- 6.27 The search area is focused on the Moorland Plateaux LCT (unit 20) and the lower lying Agricultural Heartland LCT (units 15, 17, 26 and 28), Farmed Moorland Edge LCT (units 21 and 27) and Straths and Valleys LCT (unit 22).
- 6.28 During the evaluation and public consultation stages, the Bennachie hill range was identified as being iconic of Aberdeenshire, highly visible from the wider landscape and popular with walkers who enjoyed the spectacular views from the summits over the surrounding lowland.
- 6.29 Designation of Bennachie and its setting would recognise its importance to Aberdeenshire's landscape identity, its popularity with visitors and its intervisibility with the surrounding landscape. Designation would also recognise the contribution of the moorland spurs to scenic qualities of the area, by forming dark ridges across the skyline which contrasts with the green lowlands. The intact landcover of heather moorland and associated habitats would also be recognised.
- 6.30 It was therefore decided to take this area forward as a candidate SLA, under the name **Bennachie**. The candidate SLA includes the ridge that extends to the west of Bennachie, as far as Suie Hill, which is followed by the Gordon Way footpath. Also included are lowland areas which form the immediate setting of the hill, as far as Kemnay to the south-east. The Don Valley to the south of Bennachie and the Pitfichie Forest beyond were also included, to form an area which encompasses recreational, aesthetic, cultural and natural values. Clear physical boundaries in the form of minor and major roads encircle this area.
- 6.31 The Don Valley between Glenkindie and Alford, and the Grampian Outliers enclosing the valley, were identified during the evaluation stage as being an intact farmed landscape with attractive broadleaved woodland and traditional farmsteads, forming a gateway to the Cairngorms National Park.
- 6.32 Designation of the upper Don Valley and enclosing ridges would recognise the high scenic qualities of its rolling wooded hills enclosing steep sided gorges and wider straths. Designation would also recognise the naturalness and connectivity created by the river corridor, woodland network and relationship with the adjacent Cairngorms National Park.
- 6.33 It was therefore decided to take this area forward as a candidate SLA, under the name **Upper Don Valley**. The natural boundary of the valley is formed by the enclosing ridgelines, and physical boundary features have been selected, where possible, to follow these ridge lines. At its southern boundary this area is contiguous with the Howe of Cromar candidate SLA, and to the north-east with the Bennachie candidate SLA
- 6.34 The remaining parts of the search area include the less distinctive areas of rolling farmland within the Howe of Alford and Inch Basin, and the less dramatic Grampian Outliers. The exception to this is Tap o' Noth, which was identified during the evaluation and consultation as a recognisable and iconic hill. However, while Tap o' Noth has a very strong identity, the context of this landmark hill does not offer a particularly distinctive landscape which would merit designation, and the hill itself is of insufficient geographical extent to form a candidate SLA in its own right. Similarly The Buck, while locally a significant feature, does not have a context that would merit designation.

Search Area F

- 6.35 The search area encompasses the Dee Valley and its surrounding hills, between Muir of Dinnet / Aboyne on the fringes of the Cairngorms National Park in the west, and Aberdeen in the east.

- 6.36 The search area is focused on the River Valley LCT (units 25, 29 and 30), the Agricultural Heartland LCT (unit 28) and the enclosing Farmed Moorland Edge LCT (unit 27) and Moorland Plateaux LCT (unit 20).
- 6.37 The Dee Valley was identified during the public consultation as having a strong sense of place, particularly in proximity to Banchory. The valley is backclothed by the Mounth to the south, and Grampian Outliers to the north.
- 6.38 Designation would recognise the strong identity of the Dee Valley, and its scenic qualities which are a combination of the river, with wooded valley sides rising to moorland hills, and occasional limestone outcrops. Designation would also recognise the importance of the Dee Valley for tourism, with its numerous visitor attractions and facilities including castles and estates that contribute to built heritage. Designation would also recognise the naturalness of the Dee Valley, with its river and broadleaf woodland.
- 6.39 It was therefore decided to take this area forward as a candidate SLA, under the name **Dee Valley**. The natural boundary is formed by the ridges which contain the Dee valley and enclose its visual envelope. Where possible, boundary features have been selected that follow these ridge lines, or otherwise contain the valley landscape, centred on the river. This area is contiguous with the Howe of Cromar candidate SLA to the north, and the Clachnaben and Forest of Birse candidate SLA to the south.
- 6.40 The candidate SLA extends from the Cairngorms National Park to the Aberdeen boundary near Peterculter. Beyond this point only the south side of the Dee valley is within Aberdeenshire, with the north boundary in Aberdeen City. An increasing urban influence is apparent in this area, with the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route having a local impact. Because of this change in character and quality, it was decided not to include this area within the Dee Valley candidate SLA.
- 6.41 The Howe of Cromar was identified during the evaluation stage as a wide, sweeping basin contained by low lying hills on the fringes of the Cairngorms National Park. The Howe is backclothed by the dark moorland ridges which contrast with the settled farmland in the basin.
- 6.42 Designation would recognise the intact nature of the Howe, and its strong relationship with the Grampian Outliers and Cairngorm fringes. Designation would also recognise the inter-visibility of the area with the Cairngorms National Park, including views to and from Morven and other peaks. Designation would also recognise the visibility of the area from the A97 and panoramic view from Queen's View. Other features such as archaeological remains, the woodland network and River Dee catchment would also be recognised.
- 6.43 It was therefore decided to take this area forward as a candidate SLA, under the name **Howe of Cromar**. The boundary is formed primarily by the ridge lines which enclose the Howe, and by the administrative boundary with the Cairngorms National Park to the west. Where possible, physical features were selected that mark out the ridge line boundaries. This area is contiguous with the Upper Don Valley candidate SLA to the north, and with the Dee Valley candidate SLA to the south.

Search Area G

- 6.44 This search area encompasses the Mounth, and the Howe of the Mearns to the south. It also includes some lower scoring farmland areas around Glenbervie to the east of the Mounth.
- 6.45 The search area mainly comprises the Moorland Plateaux LCT (units 31 and 32) which forms the Mounth and the Agricultural Heartland LCT (units 35 and 36) which forms the setting to the Mounth.
- 6.46 The western parts of the Mounth were recognised during the evaluation stage as having strong wildness qualities and recognisable features such as Clachnaben. Designation of the western part of the Mounth would recognise the scenic qualities created by the strong rolling relief and distinctive hill profiles. Designation would also recognise the relative lack of habitation and high wildness qualities, as well as the naturalness resulting from extensive areas of heather moorland. Designation would also recognise the relationship with the adjacent Cairngorms National Park, which borders the Mounth between Aboyne in the north and Gannoch (731 m AOD) in the south.

- 6.47 It was therefore decided to take this area forward as a candidate SLA, under the name **Clachnaben and Forest of Birse**. The boundary was drawn to include the most rugged and least human-influenced parts of the Mounth. Boundary features were selected to follow the ridge line above the Dee Valley to the north, the B974 to the east, the Cairn o' Mount ridgeline to the south and the administrative boundary with Angus and the Cairngorms National Park to the west.
- 6.48 This area is contiguous with the Dee Valley candidate SLA to the north, and with the Braes of the Mearns candidate SLA to the south. East of the B974 the Mounth was noted to be lower in elevation and with extensive commercial forestry. This area does not therefore form part of the candidate SLA.
- 6.49 The Howe of the Mearns is a uniformly flat landscape, which slopes steeply up into the Mounth, marking the line of the Highland Boundary Fault. Designation of part of the Howe of the Mearns and the enclosing ridge of the Mounth would recognise the contrast between the distinctive flat farmed valley of the Howe, with its beech woodland and avenues, and the rugged upland ridge which forms its backdrop. Designation would also recognise the highly visible nature of the landscape, and commanding views from its summits including the Cairn o' Mount Scenic Viewpoint, a popular resting place for passers-by.
- 6.50 It was therefore decided to take this area forward as a candidate SLA, under the name **Braes of the Mearns**. The boundary is formed by the administrative boundary with Angus to the west, the ridge line to the north and minor roads crossing Strathfinella to the east and the B966 across the Howe of the Mearns to the south. These boundaries were selected to enclose the steep braes and wooded farmland that combine to make this area unique within Aberdeenshire. This area is contiguous with the Clachnaben and Forest of Birse candidate SLA to the north.
- 6.51 Garvock and Glenbervie scored highly for built heritage, notably archaeological remains including recumbent stone circles and carved stone walls. This area also scored highly for its scenic qualities, and intervisibility with the Howe of the Mearns and Mounth was noted. However these landscapes were not found to have a strong identity in their own right, and did not play a role in forming the setting to other landscapes taken forward as candidate SLAs.

7 Candidate Special Landscape Areas

Introduction

- 7.1 Following the application of practical considerations and discussion with the Steering Group, ten areas were taken forward as candidate SLAs. These are set out in **Table 7.1** below.

Table 7.1 Candidate Special Landscape Areas

| Candidate SLA | Area (km ²) |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| North Aberdeenshire Coast | 88.36 |
| North East Aberdeenshire Coast | 105.12 |
| South East Aberdeenshire Coast | 45.53 |
| Deveron Valley | 229.09 |
| Bennachie | 194.85 |
| Upper Don Valley | 109.94 |
| Howe of Cromar | 89.10 |
| Dee Valley | 172.03 |
| Clachnaben and Forest of Birse | 185.65 |
| Braes of the Mearns | 85.90 |

- 7.2 The ten candidate SLAs cover a total area of 1,305.57 km², representing around 26.7% of the study area, or 20.7% of Aberdeenshire as a whole.⁷ **Figure 12** shows an overview of the ten candidate SLAs within the study area, which are illustrated individually on **Figures 13a** to **13j**. The statements of importance for each area are set out on the following pages.

⁷ The total area of Aberdeenshire is 6,313 km². Excluding the area within the Cairngorm National Park, the study area is 4,889.78km².

North Aberdeenshire Coast candidate SLA

Location, extent and boundaries

- 7.3 This candidate SLA extends along the north coast of Aberdeenshire, from Logie Head in the west to Fraserburgh in the east, as illustrated on **Figure 13a**.
- 7.4 The northern edge is defined by the coast; the western edge by the boundary with Moray. The southern edge of the candidate SLA is defined by roads which run parallel to the coast and include (from west to east) the A98, B9139, A97, A947, B9031 and various minor roads.
- 7.5 These boundaries contain the areas with a strong coastal influence. Although varying in distance from the coast, the road boundaries reflect the most suitable available boundary features. The candidate SLA includes parts of the settlements of Banff and Macduff, being located on prominent headlands either side of the mouth of the River Deveron, but does not include the much larger fishing port of Fraserburgh.

Overview

- 7.6 The North Aberdeenshire Coast is a narrow, self-contained strip of coastal farmland which is unified by its exposed, north facing orientation onto the North Sea and its rugged coastline of high cliffs, headlands and sandy bays.
- 7.7 The coast is windswept, with few trees, although the Tore of Troup is a distinctive wooded glen which extends inland from the coast to the south of Pennan. The rich ecological value of the coast is recognised by much of it being designated as an SSSI. Troup Head is an RSPB reserve and is the only mainland gannet colony in Scotland.
- 7.8 There are frequent settlements along the coast, including traditional fishing villages nestled at the base of cliffs, many of which are Conservation Areas. There are numerous features of built heritage interest, including castle ruins situated on prominent headlands, such as Findlater Castle, Dundarg Castle and Pitsligo Castle at Rosehearty, the ancestral home of Forbes which dates back to the 15th Century. The film 'Local Hero' was filmed in Pennan.
- 7.9 Uninterrupted sea views can be enjoyed from coastal paths and roads (e.g. A98, B9031). Sandy beaches at Sandend and Banff Links are popular for recreation and tourism, including surfing, and boat tours are available at Troup Head.
- 7.10 Despite being accessible and well settled, the influence of the sea and exposure to the elements means that qualities of wildness can be experienced, particularly 'off the beaten track'.



Crovie, from the Braes

Qualifying interests

- 7.11 The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:
- Rugged coastal cliffs and headlands, forming an intricate coast of inlets and rocky bays with important outcrops of rocks and fossils, e.g. the sandstone caves at New Aberdour beach.
 - Settlement is defined by its relationship to the sea, with buildings sited and oriented accordingly.
 - Traditional fishing villages are nestled at the base of cliffs, including Pennan and Crovie, distinguished by diminutive form and difficulty of access.
 - Larger settlements such as Banff and Macduff retain characteristic links to maritime industry.
 - The Tore of Troup is the largest example of the many coastal dens, a deep wooded ravine with its own distinct, tranquil character, linked to the north coast.
 - Panoramic views from higher headlands, some of which can be appreciated from the A98 and B9031 coastal roads.
 - Nature conservation interest contributes to appreciation of this coastal landscape, with a focus for bird life around Troup Head, and extensive undeveloped coastlines.
 - Historic monuments provide landmarks and incidents along the coast, including castles such as Pitsligo, ancient churches as at Inverboyndie, and other landmarks including the Macduff war memorial.
 - A recreational coast, with beaches coastal paths enabling good access to the outdoors, as well as more formal recreation such as the historic Tarlair swimming pool.
 - Elemental qualities of the rugged north coast: a strong relationship with the sea and sky, offering an accessible experience of wildness.

North East Aberdeenshire Coast candidate SLA

Location, extent and boundaries

- 7.12 This candidate SLA extends across two sections of the Aberdeenshire Coast: from Fraserburgh to Peterhead; and from Buchan Ness to Blackdog, as illustrated on **Figure 13b**.
- 7.13 Between Fraserburgh and Peterhead the boundary runs inland along the B9033 and A90. South of Buchan Ness at Boddam the boundary follows the A90, and then cuts in towards Cruden Bay along the A975. It crosses the River Ythan at Newburgh, and then re-joins the A90 at Rashiereive, following this road until the boundary with Aberdeenshire at Blackdog.
- 7.14 These long narrow areas cover a variety of coastal landscapes, and the boundary has been drawn to reflect the approximate extent of maritime influence, largely following roads which parallel the coast. The variation in breadth reflects topography, since in lower lying areas the influence of the sea is felt further inland, while high cliffs tend to screen the hinterland from the coastal edge. The large industrial town of Peterhead, and the developed coast immediately south, are excluded from the candidate SLA.

Overview

- 7.15 The North East Aberdeenshire Coast is a strip of coastal farmland with a strong sense of place. The candidate SLA is unified by the east-facing orientation of the landscape towards the open North Sea. It comprises wide sandy beaches backed by rolling dunes, with outcrops of rugged cliffs from Boddam to Port Erroll. A collapsed sea cave, the Bullers of Buchan, is a notable geomorphological feature.
- 7.16 There are occasional pockets of scrubby woodland, but otherwise trees are limited in this windswept landscape. The Loch of Strathbeg, north east of Crimond, is a large inland loch and is an RSPB reserve with hides for observing the abundant bird life including gulls, terns and waders, and geese which arrive from Iceland in autumn and winter. Forvie National Nature Reserve east of Newburgh is a landscape of shifting sand dunes with patches of dune heath and marram grass. The Ythan Estuary runs along the edge of the NNR and is home to the largest colony of breeding eider ducks in the UK. The mouth of the Ythan Estuary is also a seal haul out site.
- 7.17 Settlement and industry have had a major impact on this landscape, most notably the St Fergus Gas Terminal. Elsewhere, traditional fishing villages have a strong relationship with the coast e.g. Collieston and Cruden Bay are nestled into the sheltered landform. There are numerous features of built heritage interest along the coast, including the lighthouse at Rattray head, the ruins of a 12th Century church partially buried in the sand dunes at Forvie, and the prominent ruin of Slains Castle, which is said to have given Bram Stoker the inspiration for Count Dracula's castle.
- 7.18 The area is visible from the A90 and uninterrupted views out to sea are available from coastal paths including the clifftop walk at the Bullers of Buchan and the long distance Formartine and Buchan Way. Notable beaches include the expansive sands at Balmedie Country Park, and Cruden Bay, a wide arc of pink sands popular for swimming and fishing. There are also numerous golf courses along the coast.
- 7.19 There are some areas of greater wildness, such as at Forvie, but the influence of large scale settlement and industry, as well as proximity to trunk roads, decreases wildness elsewhere.



The Bullers of Buchan

Qualifying interests

7.20 The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:

- Expansive beaches backed by rolling dunes, with long views out to sea.
- Rugged and dramatic cliffs to the south of Boddam, with intricate landforms such as the Bullers of Buchan.
- Important nature conservation sites contribute to appreciation of and access to this landscape, including Forvie National Nature Reserve, an extensive area around the mouth of the Ythan, and the Loch of Strathbeg, the largest dune lake in Britain.
- Lighthouses form landmark features, spaced along the coast.
- A popular coast for visitors, with coastal paths, accessible dunes, golf courses and popular beaches.
- Ancient coastal forts occupy headlands, with later castles and houses like Slains also prominently sited.
- Coastal settlement generally associated with small harbours, such as at Collieston and Cruden Bay. The siting and orientation of buildings can be highly distinctive, as seen at Inverallochy.
- Panoramic views out to sea from cliff tops and open beaches.

South East Aberdeenshire Coast candidate SLA

Location, extent and boundaries

- 7.21 This candidate SLA covers the coast from the council boundary north of Portlethen, to the mouth of the North Esk in the south, as illustrated on **Figure 13c**.
- 7.22 Between Aberdeen and Newtonhill the boundary follows the railway line (except between Portlethen and Newtonhill where it cuts inland up to the A90), before joining the A90 south of Newtonhill until Stonehaven. It includes the eastern edge of the settlement before joining the A92 near Dunnottar Mains. It then follows the A92 until the boundary with Angus.
- 7.23 The narrow but continuous strip has been defined to include areas with strong coastal influence, which is generally restricted due to the high cliffs that separate the hinterland from the sea.

Overview

- 7.24 The South East Aberdeenshire Coast is a narrow strip of coastal farmland between the A90 / A92 and the coast, and is unified by its south east facing orientation onto the North Sea. North of Bervie Bay the coast is more rugged, with interesting features such as stacks and arches. South of Bervie Bay is a raised beach landscape between 50 m and 600 m wide and backed by cliffs.
- 7.25 The windswept nature of this coastal landscape means that there are few trees. There is a broad sandy beach at St Cyrus, backed by cliffs and dunes which form part of a National Nature Reserve. There is a clifftop seabird colony at Fowlsheugh which is an RSPB reserve and home to thousands of breeding birds including guillemots, razorbills, kittiwakes and puffins.
- 7.26 The candidate SLA contains many settlements, the largest of which is Stonehaven, framed by cliffs and featuring a working harbour, Art Deco swimming pool and annual Fireball Festival. Settlement also includes intact fishing villages located in sheltered coves or nestled on cliff tops, and larger coastal towns with extensive new development e.g. Inverbervie. Built heritage interests include the striking Dunnottar Castle, approached via the coastal path from Stonehaven.
- 7.27 This area is visible from the A90 and A92 coastal routes, NCN Route 1, east coast railway and coastal footpaths, and sea views are fundamental to its character. Coastal landmarks include lighthouses e.g. at Todhead. Opportunities for recreation include beaches, sea kayaking and boat trips from Stonehaven harbour.
- 7.28 This landscape is farmed up to the coastal edge, and settlement and major transport corridors are ever present in views, however the open seas and exposure to the elements provide a sense of wildness.



Newtonhill Bay

Qualifying interests

- 7.29 The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:
- Rugged and intricate scenery of weathered coastal cliffs and raised beach landforms, including sites of geological interest.
 - The broad sweep of sand at St Cyrus, backed by dunes that form a National Nature Reserve.
 - Iconic Dunnottar Castle, on a rocky headland south of Stonehaven, is the most striking of many coastal archaeological sites.
 - The coast provides the immediate and wider setting for a number of larger settlements, including Portlethen, Newtonhill, and Stonehaven, framed by rising cliffs on either side.
 - Traditional fishing villages such as Gourdon and Catterline remain intact, with cottages perched above diminutive harbours, and limited modern development.
 - Coastal routes include the A92, A90, east coast railway, footpaths and NCN Route 1, all offering expansive views out to sea.
 - Panoramic views out to sea from headlands and beaches and important views along the coast, including the view over the sands at St Cyrus, and views from Dunnottar.

Deveron Valley candidate SLA

Location, extent and boundaries

- 7.30 This candidate SLA covers the valley of the River Deveron as it flows through Aberdeenshire, from Haugh of Glass in the west to the north coast at Banff and Macduff, as illustrated on **Figure 13d**.
- 7.31 From west to east the northern boundary of the candidate SLA follows the ridge of high ground to the north of the River Deveron, crossing the Daugh of Cairnborrow and The Bin. North east of Ruthven the boundary follows the Moray council boundary until the Moss of Crombie. Here it travels east along minor roads (and briefly the A97 south of Aberchirder) before heading north at South Briggs. From here it continues to follow minor roads before following the A97 from the Mill of Brydock to Banff, where it shares a boundary with the North Aberdeenshire Coast candidate SLA.
- 7.32 From west to east the southern boundary of the candidate SLA follows minor roads from Haugh of Glass, then crosses Clashmach Hill to Huntly. The A96 and A97 then form the boundary until Cobairdy. It then follows watercourses and minor roads east past Glen Dronach Distillery south of Forgue, and on to Milnbank and Turriff. The boundary passes through Turriff on the A947, then heads north along a minor road returning to the A947 as far as Macduff.
- 7.33 The boundaries of the candidate SLA follow, as far as possible, the ridge lines that define the valley. Roads and other physical boundaries have been selected as close as possible to these ridge lines, though in places the boundary follows topography where no alternative was located.

Overview

- 7.34 The Deveron Valley is a farmed landscape, framed by wooded hills and ridges. The valley is unified by the meandering River Deveron, which flows from the hills of Moray into the Moray Firth at Banff Bay. The scale of the valley changes several times, from broader open strath to narrower sections. The landscape is a pleasing composition of river, farmland, wooded estates and heather-clad / forested hills, forming the setting to numerous villages and historic buildings.
- 7.35 The Deveron Valley has a strong woodland structure comprising deciduous woodland associated with estates such as Duff House and Forglen, as well as forested hills, riverside trees and beech hedging.
- 7.36 There are numerous small settlements and estates with distinctive local architecture. These include Duff House, designed by William Adam and now a museum and part of the National Gallery of Scotland. The focal point of the Duff estate is the 17th century Bridge of Alvah which towers high over the River Deveron gorge. Smaller scale examples include the Bridge of Marnoch.
- 7.37 The River Deveron is popular for fishing of salmon, sea trout and brown trout. Other opportunities for recreation include canoeing, walking, cycling and golf. Some of the hills enclosing the valley provide opportunities for panoramic views across the Deveron and beyond, including Fourman Hill, a Marilyn on the boundary with Moray, south east of Milltown of Rothiemay. Views across the valley from the A97 are also available, e.g. south of Aberchirder.
- 7.38 The Deveron Valley is a farmed and settled landscape, with few characteristics of wildness, although the landscape context becomes less developed and human influence generally decreases in the west, towards the uplands.



The Deveron Valley north of Turriff.

Qualifying interests

- 7.39 The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:
- Meandering river generally visible in the landscape, framed by rolling wooded hills and ridges that enable views into and along the valley.
 - Strong network of woodland throughout the valley provides landscape structure and wildlife habitat. A variety of woodland types include coniferous plantations, deciduous hilltop copses, shelter belts and a wealth of roadside trees including beech and ash.
 - The presence of historic estates has a strong influence along the river, including parkland around Duff House, Forglen and others, but more generally in the wooded landscape.
 - The valley landscape forms an important part of the setting of various settlements, including the planned town of Huntly and the market town of Turriff.
 - Distinctive local granite architecture displayed in villages and towns, farms and most notably in castles such as Huntly.
 - The attractive landscape makes the Deveron a popular setting for a range of outdoor recreation including fishing, canoeing, walking and cycling, with the NCN Route 1 between Banff and Turriff.
 - A continuous valley landscape, from the hills to the sea.

Bennachie candidate SLA

Location, extent and boundaries

- 7.40 This candidate SLA is centred on the landmark hill of Bennachie at the centre of Aberdeenshire, and extends west along the distinctive ridge as far as Suie Hill. It includes Pitfichie to the south and the wooded farmland which forms the foreground to Bennachie to the east.
- 7.41 The western boundary follows minor roads along the Suie Burn between Bridge of Alford in the south and Ford in the north. The northern boundary follows minor roads and the B9002 between Ford and the A96 at Mill of Carden. The eastern boundary heads south east through Garioch, following minor roads, and briefly the route of an overhead line, between Mill of Carden and west of Inverurie. The boundary crosses the River Don west of Port Elphinstone, then joins the B993 south west until Kemnay. The southern boundary skirts the edge of Kemnay before re-joining the B993 until Tillyfourie where it follows the A944 as far as Bridge of Alford.
- 7.42 These boundaries have been chosen as defensible physical features that enclose the key upland areas, and their lowland settings, which have been identified as meriting designation within this candidate SLA.

Overview

- 7.43 The Bennachie ridge is part of the Grampian Outliers, and comprises a series of rounded hills of between approximately 300 m and 530 m AOD, between Suie Hill in the west and Mither Tap in the east. At 528 m AOD, Oxen Craig is the highest point on the ridge, although Mither Tap (518 m AOD) has the most distinctive profile. Bennachie is an iconic landform, visible from much of the wider Aberdeenshire area.
- 7.44 The hills are blanketed with moorland and forestry, with rocky outcrops at the higher summits. This moorland and forestry forms a dark ridge seen across the skyline from the farmed and wooded lowlands.
- 7.45 Bennachie has numerous historic features, including an Iron Age hill fort at the summit of Mither Tap, and cairns on other summits. The Maiden Stone is a Pictish symbol-bearing slab of pink granite, located near Garioch. The Place of Origin is a modern sculpture, located overlooking the quarry at Kemnay.
- 7.46 Bennachie is popular with walkers, being readily accessible and providing opportunities for forest and hill top walks, and Pitfichie is a hub for mountain biking. The Gordon Way is a waymarked trail that crosses the southern flank of Bennachie between Suie car park in the west and the Bennachie visitor centre in the east. There are spectacular views over the surrounding lowlands from the hill summits, and conversely the series of hills is visible is widely visible from the surrounding lowlands, forming a distinctive focal point in views. Bennachie is visible from the A944 to the south and A96 to the north and east.
- 7.47 The upland areas have an intact landcover of heather moorland and forestry, supporting wildlife such as cuckoos, red squirrels and roe deer. The hills provide opportunities to experience tranquillity and solitude, whilst being in proximity to farmed and settled lowland areas.



Bennachie from the north-east

Qualifying interests

- 7.48 The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:
- Bennachie is the iconic hill of central Aberdeenshire, instantly recognisable from across the wider landscape, in both long and short range views.
 - Intact landcover of heather moorland on the main Bennachie ridge.
 - Extensive woodland across both lowland and upland, forming a network of woodland types including native woods, estate policies and forestry plantations. A substantial amount is recognised as ancient woodland.
 - Important historic landscape, featuring a network of interrelated sites including hill forts cairns and other features, emphasising the long history of settlement.
 - The River Don is a key feature of Aberdeenshire, meandering through the upland glen south of Bennachie, and across the farmland around Kemnay.
 - The farmland to the east provides the setting to Bennachie, but also typifies lowland Aberdeenshire with its pattern of wooded estates and open farmland.
 - A hugely popular area offering a range of outdoor recreation options, with numerous walking routes such as the Gordon Way, and a centre for mountain biking at Pitfichie.
 - Panoramic views from the upland areas, particularly from the Bennachie summits, over the Don Valley and beyond to the patchwork of Aberdeenshire farmland. .

Upper Don Valley candidate SLA

Location, extent and boundaries

- 7.49 This candidate SLA lies in the west of Aberdeenshire, and covers the upper part of the River Don valley from Glenkindie in the west to the Howe of Alford in the east.
- 7.50 The western boundary is contiguous with the Cairngorms National Park. To the north the boundary follows ridgelines, minor roads and tracks across to the A97. It continues east along minor roads and paths to cross the ridge of Lord Arthur's Hill. The boundary follows the Blacklatch Burn down to the Old Military Road at Tullynessle. From here the boundary marches with that of Bennachie candidate SLA as far as Alford, where it turns westward to follow the A980. From Muir of Alford it returns to forest tracks and field boundaries up to The Socach, from where it follows the ridgeline westward across Broom Hill and Balderonoch Hill to the National Park boundary.
- 7.51 Boundaries have been drawn as closely as possible along the ridge lines that frame the upper Don valley, with the intention of including the immediate visual envelope of the river itself, and of the experience of the valley from the A97 and A944 roads that pass through.

Overview

- 7.52 The Upper Don Valley comprises rolling arable and pastoral farmland, bisected by the meandering River Don and contained by hills blanketed in open moorland and woodland. The A97 (Highland Tourist Route) passes through this area and is seen as a gateway into the Cairngorms National Park to the west. The A944 runs along the valley floor parallel to the River Don, and passes through an attractive wooded gorge west of Alford.
- 7.53 The Don is one of Aberdeenshire's major rivers, with a strong identity. The Upper Don Valley is well wooded, with both broadleaved woodland and coniferous forestry. There are numerous features of built heritage interest, including a cairn on Lord Arthur's Hill and the medieval Kildrummy Castle. There are small settlements and scattered farmsteads along roads, built with traditional materials.
- 7.54 The Don Valley is a gateway into the National Park, and attractive drives are available along both the A944 and A97. Higher hills within the Cairngorms National Park are visible beyond those enclosing the valley.
- 7.55 The Upper Don valley is farmed and settled, with accessible hills, and does not display true wildness characteristics although the network of meandering rivers, burns and woodland contributes to naturalness within the landscape.



Heather-clad moors contrast with farmland in Strathdon.

Qualifying interests

- 7.56 The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:
- Distinctive valley landforms, including the steep sided gorge west of Alford and the wider strath around Kildrummy.
 - The Don is contained by rolling wooded hills with attractive broadleaved woodland and a patchwork of arable farmland and pasture.
 - Broad open moorland forms the backdrop to views along and across the strath, including views to the higher hills within the Cairngorms National Park.
 - Moorland ridges extend almost to the river in places, creating an interlocking visual pattern of upland and lowland.
 - Substantial and well visited built heritage features include the medieval Kildrummy Castle and its more recent namesake and associated gardens. The designed landscape of Glenkindie House has an influence on the approach to the National Park.
 - An agricultural but sparsely settled landscape, the settlement pattern is one of dispersed farms, often featuring traditional granite buildings set in small woodlands, rather than nucleated villages.
 - The meandering, occasionally braided River Don is a key river that contributes to the identity of Aberdeenshire, forming a link between the mountains and the sea.
 - The Don valley is the route of the A97 Highland Tourist Route, a major gateway into the National Park, with glimpses into the higher hills west of Glenkindie.
 - The southern ridge of Balderonoch Hill, Broom Hill and The Socach offers panoramic views for walkers over Strathdon and south into the Howe of Cromar.

Howe of Cromar candidate SLA

Location, extent and boundaries

- 7.57 This candidate SLA is centred on Tarland in the west of Aberdeenshire. The candidate area includes the Howe of Cromar and the surrounding hills that define it on all sides.
- 7.58 To the west this area is bounded by the Cairngorms National Park, which wraps around to Balderonoch Hill in the north and Black Moss in the south. From Balderonoch Hill the northern boundary of the candidate SLA continues east across the ridge of Broom Hill and Pressendye, then follows the Corse Burn south-east to the B9119. From this road the boundary runs south largely following the eastern edge of forest plantations that cap the Craiglich-Mortlich ridge. At Mortlich it joins the boundary of the Dee Valley candidate SLA, and turn west to follow the higher ground that separates the Howe of Cromar from the river valley. This boundary mainly follows minor roads, paths and field boundaries as far as the National Park boundary at Black Moss.
- 7.59 The boundaries have been established along the ridge lines that enclose the Howe. The most appropriate boundary feature has been chosen along each ridge, which in some cases is a track or path following the high ground. In other cases, as at Craiglich, the boundary is on the hillside beyond the ridge, rather than in front of it, in order to ensure that the visual envelope of the Howe is included .

Overview

- 7.60 The Howe of Cromar is a wide, sweeping basin of farmland, contained by low lying hills blanketed by moorland and forestry, and also by the more distant summits within the Cairngorms National Park, including Morven.
- 7.61 Numerous burns cross the Howe, and are tributaries of the River Dee and therefore part of the River Dee SAC. The Howe is well wooded, much of it ancient woodland, and both the woodland and waterways contribute to the ecological connectivity of the area.
- 7.62 The area has numerous features of built heritage interest including stone circles, Pictish stones and hill forts. The small granite village of Tarland is at the centre of the Howe, and there are scattered traditional farmsteads throughout. There is a Garden and Designed Landscape at Tillypronie.
- 7.63 There are many opportunities for recreation in the Howe including walking, mountain biking and hang-gliding. Queen's View offers panoramic views across the Howe towards the Cairngorms National Park. The area is also visible from the A97, e.g. at Tillypronie where views south open across the Howe.



The Howe of Cromar from Queen's View

Qualifying interests

- 7.64 The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:
- Wide, sweeping basin of farmland, framed by ridges of dark moorland and forestry.
 - Dramatic mountain peaks rising from the farmland in the west of the Howe to the summit of Morven within the National Park.
 - Panoramic vistas from Queen's View in the east, overlooking the Howe and beyond, to the cliffs of Lochnagar.
 - A patchwork of arable farmland and woodland across the Howe, with an intact network of coniferous and deciduous plantations, policy woodlands and shelterbelts.
 - A long heritage of settlement, with stone circles, Pictish stones and hill forts forming a well-known network of historic landscape, including many accessible sites.
 - More recent built heritage includes castles and laird's houses, and distinctive granite village architecture as seen in Tarland.
 - The area is overlooked from walking routes in the National Park, and also from the adjacent hills including the open ridge of Pressendye and the more intricate, wooded Scar Hill.

Dee Valley candidate SLA

Location, extent and boundaries

- 7.65 This candidate SLA includes the valley of the River Dee from Dinnet in the west to Peterculter in the east. It includes the river and associated landscapes, taking in the adjoining hills, and covers the settings of riverside towns such as Aboyne and Banchory. The boundary has been drawn to include landscapes which help to frame the setting of the river.

Overview

- 7.66 The Dee is one of Aberdeenshire's major rivers, and the Dee Valley has a strong sense of place. It comprises an intact farmed valley, with wooded sides rising to moorland hills. The Mounth rises to the south and the Grampian Outliers to the north.
- 7.67 The valley has a strong sense of naturalness, created by the combination of river and broadleaf woodland. The River Dee with its tributaries is an SAC.
- 7.68 There are numerous features of built heritage interest reflecting the Dee's settled past. There are Conservation Areas at Aboyne and Kincardine O'Neil. Gardens and Designed Landscapes include Inchmarlo and Crathes Castle.
- 7.69 There are many opportunities for recreation in the Dee Valley, including canoeing, walking and cycling. The area is a hub for tourists, with visitor attractions and tourist facilities, particularly in Banchory. These attractions include the Falls of Feugh near Banchory, comprising waterfalls with a stone footbridge and opportunities to view leaping salmon. Scolty Hill near Banchory is a popular location for its woodland walks and has panoramic views from the summit.
- 7.70 Despite being farmed and settled the Dee provides opportunities to experience tranquillity and enjoy the area's wildlife.



The River Dee from the B974 at Banchory

Qualifying interests

- 7.71 The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:
- Broad, meandering river, with wooded banks rising to moorland hills and occasional limestone outcrops.
 - Broadleaf woodland contributes to visual diversity and habitat value all along the valley, and reflects a long history of estate development.
 - The woodland along the Dee forms part of an intact habitat network, including policy woodland, plantations and riparian woodland, providing connectivity between the lowlands and uplands of Aberdeenshire.
 - Key routes through the valley include the Royal Deeside Railway, the Deeside Tourist Route and long distance walking, cycling and horse riding trails. The valley is seen by large numbers of people using these routes.
 - A wealth of distinctive built heritage, including the well-known Crathes Castle, and the Victorian vernacular of farms, cottages and estate buildings along the valley.
 - The granite architecture of Deeside settlements is an essential part of the character of Aboyne and Banchory, as well as smaller villages.
 - Deeside is representative of Aberdeenshire's identity, and is a popular tourist destination, both in itself and as a link between Aberdeen and the National Park.
 - At its western end, increasing glimpses to the higher hills mark the approach to the National Park.

Clachnaben and Forest of Birse candidate SLA

Location, extent and boundaries

- 7.72 This candidate SLA is in the south west of Aberdeenshire, taking in part of the Mounth uplands. The Forest of Birse is one of the wildest parts of Aberdeenshire outside the National Park, while Clachnaben is a prominent landmark for miles around.
- 7.73 The northern boundary follows the edge of the Dee Valley candidate SLA to the north, then follows minor roads tracks that separate the uplands from the more populated Water of Feugh valley to the north east. It follows the B974 from south of Greendams, through Bridge of Dye to Cairn o' Mount. The southern boundary marches with the boundary of the Braes of the Mearns candidate SLA, running south-west along the ridge line from Cairn o' Mount over Hound Hillock to Sturdy Hill. From here the western boundary follows the administrative boundary with Angus and the Cairngorms National Park.
- 7.74 These boundaries have been selected to enclose the most undeveloped parts of The Mounth, which are among the least accessible and wildest parts of Aberdeenshire. The boundaries have been drawn to exclude all but minor roads, as well as the larger forest plantations east of the B974.

Overview

- 7.75 The Forest of Birse is an open expanse of rolling upland hills which extends west into the Cairngorms National Park. The hills are between approximately 300 m to 730 m in height, with the highest peak being Garnoch (731 m AOD) on the National Park boundary. Clachnaben (579 m AOD) is a distinctive craggy peak on the north side of Glen Dye, a valley running east-west through the candidate SLA.
- 7.76 The land cover is predominantly heather moorland, with some extensive areas of forestry on the fringes, particularly in the north above the Dee Valley. The Forest of Birse is important for bird life. Burns running along the sheltered glens are tributaries of the River Dee and form part of the River Dee SAC.
- 7.77 The Mounth provides opportunities for hill walking, and Clachnaben is a popular summit, with panoramic views including towards Bennachie to the north. The area is visible from the elevated B974 which runs along the eastern boundary. The area forms the backdrop to the Dee Valley to the north.
- 7.78 There is little habitation in the candidate SLA, and many areas are inaccessible except on foot. The area has a strong sense of wildness, and tranquillity can be experienced in both the upland moorland hills and sheltered glens.



The distinctive profile of Clachnaben from the B974

Qualifying interests

- 7.79 The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:
- Strong, rolling relief of the upland landscape, including highly distinctive hill profiles the most recognisable of which is the crag of Clachnaben.
 - High wildness qualities including a virtual absence of habitation, limited access, extensive open moorland and rugged terrain.
 - Uninterrupted natural landcover of heather moorland across most of the area, with forestry on fringes.
 - Forest of Birse includes a range of habitat types, including the community-owned Community Pinewoods, which are being positively managed. is an important habitat for bird life.
 - A widely visible landscape, forming the backdrop to Deeside to the north, and with the landmark of Clachnaben seen from miles around.
 - The long minor road into Ballochlan ends at the remote Forest of Birse Kirk, with historic links over The Fungle, an ancient way linking Deeside with Glen Tarf.
 - Expansive area which continues seamlessly westwards into the Glen Tanar Forest area in the Cairngorms National Park.
 - Clachnaben is a popular hill summit, with views across the whole of this landscape and beyond. Remote Mount Battock is the most easterly of the Corbetts (hills over 2500 feet), and there are several hill ascents accessible from Ballochlan.

Braes of the Mearns candidate SLA

Location, extent and boundaries

- 7.80 This candidate SLA includes the south-facing slopes of the Mounth and the northern part of the Howe of the Mearns, where these two distinct landscapes come together.
- 7.81 The northern boundary marches with that of the Clachnaben and Forest of Birse candidate SLA, and follows the ridgeline from Sturdy Hill (544 m) in the south west, across Cairn o' Mount, the summit above the scenic viewpoint on the B974, to Coyle Hill (464 m) in the north east. The eastern boundary crosses the Drumtochty Forest via a forest track, and then follows tracks and minor roads through Glenfarquhar and Auchenblae. The southern boundary follows the B966 along the Howe of the Mearns from Auchenblae, through Fettercairn, to the boundary with Angus at Gannochy. The western boundary follows the Aberdeenshire - Angus border back up to Sturdy Hill.
- 7.82 These boundaries include the wooded farmlands at the foot of the Highland Boundary Fault, and the steep hills which form the backdrop of the Howe of the Mearns. The boundary therefore contains this important combination of landscapes, but does not cover the broader and less visually diverse farmland of the Howe of the Mearns.

Overview

- 7.83 The Braes of the Mearns comprises a pleasing juxtaposition of uniformly flat farmland and woodland, with a dramatic and rugged ridge to the north marking the line of the Highland Boundary Fault.
- 7.84 The northern part of the Howe of the Mearns is well wooded, with notable beech hedges and woodland associated with estates such as Fasque, Fettercairn and Drumtochty, some of which is ancient woodland.
- 7.85 Notable built heritage features include Fasque House, a mansion house near Fettercairn, set in a wooded estate. The village of Fettercairn is a Conservation Area with some notable buildings such as the Royal Arch. There are historic deer dykes around Garrow and Arnbarrow Hills.
- 7.86 There are opportunities for walking and cycling in this candidate SLA, including forest trails in Drumtochty Forest and Strathfinella. The Sturdy Hill to Coyle Hill ridge is widely visible from the Howe of the Mearns including the A90, as well as the Hill of Garvock on the opposing side of the Howe. The Cairn o' Mount viewpoint is an easily accessible location for panoramic views south across the Howe.
- 7.87 The Howe is farmed and settled, and accessible via a network of roads. The rugged moorland and forested hills rising to the north display some qualities of wildness, such as natural landcover and pockets where remoteness from human influence can be experienced.



View south from Cairn o' Mount, looking towards Strathfinella Hill and the Howe of the Mearns

Qualifying interests

- 7.88 The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:
- Strong contrast between the distinctive flat Howe and the dramatic ridge of the Mounth to the north.
 - Clear expression of the Highland Boundary Fault, where Highland and Lowland Scotland meet.
 - Intact farmed landscape of the Howe of the Mearns, with a strong structure of beech woodland and avenues along the foot of the slopes.
 - Highly visible ridge viewed from across the landscape to the south east, including from the A90, which defines the Howe of the Mearns.
 - Cairn o' Mount scenic viewpoint, a popular stopping place on the hill road with views across the Howe, and providing access to the .
 - The intimate wooded glen of Strathfinella provides access into the hills for walkers and mountain bikers.
 - Wooded estate landscapes distinguish this part of the Howe of the Mearns from the more open farmland to the south, and include The Burn, Fasque, and Drumtochty Castle.
 - Well known literary associations of the Howe of the Mearns including the work of Lewis Grassic Gibbon, with scenes from the recent film version shot in Fettercairn.

Appendix 1

Landscape Units

The following table presents the landscape units within Aberdeenshire, as illustrated in **Figure 2**.

A1 1 Landscape units

| Ref No | Landscape unit name | Landscape Character Type |
|--------|---|--------------------------|
| 1 | Cliffs of the North and South East Coasts | The Coast |
| 2 | Western Coastal Farmland | Coastal Farmland |
| 3 | Knockhill and Aberchirder | Agricultural Heartland |
| 4 | Deveron and Upper Ythan Valleys | River Valleys |
| 5 | Coastal Farmland East of Macduff | Coastal Farmland |
| 6 | Sandstone Ridges and Valleys South of Troup | Coastal Farmland |
| 7 | North East Coastal Farmland | Coastal Farmland |
| 8 | Agricultural Heartland | Agricultural Heartland |
| 9 | Wooded Estates Around Old Deer | Agricultural Heartland |
| 10 | Eastern Coastal Agricultural Plain | Coastal Farmland |
| 11 | Dunes and Beaches from Fraserburgh to Peterhead | The Coast |
| 12 | Formartine Links and Dunes | Coastal Strip |
| 13 | Formartine Lowlands | Agricultural Heartland |
| 14 | Ythan Strath Farmland | Agricultural Heartland |
| 15 | Northern Rolling Lowlands | Agricultural Heartland |
| 16 | Upland Ridges South of the Deveron | Agricultural Heartland |
| 17 | Insch Basin | Agricultural Heartland |
| 18 | Deveron and Bogie Straths | Straths and Valleys |
| 19 | Daugh of Cairnborrow | Farmed Moorland Edge |
| 20 | Grampian Outliers | Moorland Plateaux |
| 21 | Lumsden Valley | Farmed Moorland Edge |
| 22 | Donside | Straths and Valleys |
| 23 | Cromar Farmlands | Cairngorm Straths |
| 24 | Howe of Cromar | Agricultural Heartland |
| 25 | Muir of Dinnet | Straths and Valleys |
| 26 | Howe of Alford | Agricultural Heartland |
| 27 | The Cromar Uplands | Farmed Moorland Edge |
| 28 | Central Wooded Estates | Agricultural Heartland |
| 29 | Deeside | Straths and Valleys |
| 30 | Upper Deeside Estates | Cairngorm Straths |
| 31 | The North-eastern Hill Ranges | Moorland Plateaux |
| 32 | The Mounth | Moorland Plateaux |
| 33 | Kincardine Plateau | Agricultural Heartland |
| 34 | Kincardine Cliffs | Coastal Strip |
| 35 | Garvock and Glenbervie | Agricultural Heartland |
| 36 | Howe of the Mearns | Agricultural Heartland |
| 37 | Kincardine Links | Coastal Strip |

Appendix 2

Special Qualities of the Cairngorms National Park

The special qualities of the Cairngorms National Park are summarised below:⁸

- General Qualities
 - Magnificent mountains towering over moorland, forest and strath;
 - Vastness of space, scale and height;
 - Strong juxtaposition of contrasting landscapes;
 - A landscape of layers, from inhabited strath to remote, uninhabited upland;
 - 'The harmony of complicated curves';
 - Landscapes both cultural and natural;
- The Mountains and Plateaux
 - The unifying presence of the central mountains
 - An imposing massif of strong dramatic character
 - The unique plateaux of vast scale, distinctive landforms and exposed, boulder strewn high ground
 - The surrounding hills
 - The drama of deep corries
 - Exceptional glacial landforms
 - Snowscapes
- Moorlands
 - Extensive moorland, linking the farmland, woodland and the high tops
 - A patchwork of muirburn
- Glens and Straths
 - Steep glens and high passes
 - Broad, farmed straths
 - Renowned rivers
 - Beautiful lochs
- Trees, Woods and Forests
 - Dark and venerable pine forest
 - Light and airy birch woods
 - Parkland and policy woodlands
 - Long association with forestry
- Wildlife and Nature
 - Dominance of natural landforms
 - Extensive tracts of natural vegetation
 - Association with iconic animals
 - Wild land
 - Wildness
- Visual and Sensory Qualities
 - Layers of receding ridge lines
 - Grand panoramas and framed views
 - A landscape of many colours
 - Dark skies

⁸ Scottish Natural Heritage and Cairngorms National Park Authority (2010) *The Special Landscape Qualities of the Cairngorms National Park*. Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No.375.

- Attractive and contrasting textures
- The dominance of natural sounds
- Culture and History
 - Distinctive planned towns
 - Vernacular stone buildings
 - Dramatic, historical routes
 - The wistfulness of abandoned settlements
 - Focal cultural landmarks of castles, distilleries and bridges
 - The Royal connection
- Recreation
 - A landscape of opportunities
 - Spirituality

Appendix 3

Results of the evaluation of the Aberdeenshire landscape

The following pages present the evaluation sheets which were completed for each of the 37 landscape units as part of a comprehensive quantitative evaluation of the Aberdeenshire landscape. The evaluation methodology is described in **Section 2** of the report, and the findings are summarised in **Section 4**.

Appendix 4

Summary of rankings and total scores

The following pages present the rankings and total scores for each of the 37 landscape units. The evaluation process is described in **Section 4** of this report, and the combined results are shown on **Figure 8**.

A1 2 Summary of rankings and total scores

| Ref No. | Landscape unit name | Typicality / Representativeness | Rarity / Uniqueness | Intactness and condition | Wildness | Scenic qualities | Enjoyment | Built heritage assets | Cultural qualities | Naturalness and natural heritage assets | Settlement setting | Views | Connectivity | Total score |
|---------|---|---------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|----------|------------------|-----------|-----------------------|--------------------|---|--------------------|--------|--------------|-------------|
| 1 | Cliffs of the North and South East Coasts | High | Medium | Medium | Medium | High | High | High | High | High | High | High | High | 33 |
| 2 | Western Coastal Farmland | Medium | Low | Medium | Low | Medium | Low | Low | Low | Medium | Low | Medium | Medium | 18 |
| 3 | Knockhill and Aberchirder | Medium | Low | Medium | Low | Medium | Medium | Medium | Low | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | 21 |
| 4 | Deveron and Upper Ythan Valleys | Medium | Medium | High | Low | High | High | High | Medium | Medium | High | Medium | High | 29 |
| 5 | Coastal Farmland East of Macduff | Medium | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Medium | Low | 14 |
| 6 | Sandstone Ridges and Valleys South of Troup | Medium | High | Low | Medium | Medium | Low | Low | Low | High | Low | Medium | Medium | 21 |
| 7 | North East Coastal Farmland | Medium | Low | Medium | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Medium | Low | Medium | Low | 16 |
| 8 | Agricultural Heartland | Medium | Low | Medium | Low | Medium | Medium | Low | Medium | Medium | Low | Medium | Low | 19 |
| 9 | Wooded Estates Around Old Deer | Medium | High | Medium | Low | Medium | High | High | Low | Medium | Medium | Medium | High | 26 |
| 10 | Eastern Coastal Agricultural Plain | Medium | Low | Medium | Low | Medium | Low | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | High | Medium | 22 |
| 11 | Dunes and Beaches from Fraserburgh to Peterhead | High | Medium | Medium | Medium | High | High | High | Medium | High | High | High | High | 32 |
| 12 | Formartine Links and Dunes | High | High | Medium | Medium | High | High | Medium | Medium | High | Medium | High | High | 31 |

| Ref No. | Landscape unit name | Typicality / Representativeness | Rarity / Uniqueness | Intactness and condition | Wildness | Scenic qualities | Enjoyment | Built heritage assets | Cultural qualities | Naturalness and natural heritage assets | Settlement setting | Views | Connectivity | Total score |
|---------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|----------|------------------|-----------|-----------------------|--------------------|---|--------------------|--------|--------------|-------------|
| 13 | Formartine Lowlands | Medium | Low | Medium | Low | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | 22 |
| 14 | Ythan Strath Farmland | Medium | Low | Medium | Low | Medium | High | High | Low | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | 23 |
| 15 | Northern Rolling Lowlands | Medium | Low | Medium | Low | Medium | Medium | Low | Low | Medium | Low | High | High | 21 |
| 16 | Upland Ridges South of the Deveron | Medium | Low | Medium | Low | Medium | Low | Low | Low | Medium | Low | High | Medium | 19 |
| 17 | Insch Basin | Medium | Low | Medium | Low | Medium | Medium | High | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | 23 |
| 18 | Deveron and Bogie Straths | High | Medium | Medium | Low | High | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | High | 26 |
| 19 | Daugh of Cairnborrow | Medium | Medium | Low | Medium | Medium | Low | Low | Low | Medium | Low | Medium | Medium | 19 |
| 20 | Grampian Outliers | High | High | High | Medium | High | High | Medium | High | High | Medium | High | Low | 31 |
| 21 | Lumsden Valley | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | High | Low | Low | Low | Medium | Medium | Medium | High | 23 |
| 22 | Donside | Medium | Medium | High | Low | High | Medium | Medium | Low | High | Low | Medium | High | 25 |
| 23 | Cromar Farmlands | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | Low | Low | Medium | Low | High | Medium | 22 |
| 24 | Howe of Cromar | Medium | Medium | Medium | Low | Medium | Medium | Medium | Low | Medium | Low | High | Medium | 22 |
| 25 | Muir of Dinnet | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | Low | High | Low | High | High | 25 |
| 26 | Howe of Alford | Medium | Medium | Medium | Low | Medium | Medium | High | Low | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | 23 |
| 27 | The Cromar Uplands | Medium | Low | Medium | Low | Medium | Medium | High | Low | Medium | Low | Medium | Medium | 21 |
| 28 | Central Wooded Estates | Medium | Low | Medium | Low | Medium | Medium | High | Medium | High | Medium | Medium | High | 25 |
| 29 | Deeside | High | Medium | Medium | Low | High | High | High | Low | High | High | High | High | 30 |
| 30 | Upper Deeside | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | High | Medium | High | Medium | High | High | High | High | 30 |

| Ref No. | Landscape unit name | Typicality / Representativeness | Rarity / Uniqueness | Intactness and condition | Wildness | Scenic qualities | Enjoyment | Built heritage assets | Cultural qualities | Naturalness and natural heritage assets | Settlement setting | Views | Connectivity | Total score |
|---------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|----------|------------------|-----------|-----------------------|--------------------|---|--------------------|--------|--------------|-------------|
| | Estates | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 31 | The North-eastern Hill Ranges | Medium | Medium | High | High | High | Medium | Low | Low | High | Low | High | Medium | 26 |
| 32 | The Mounth | Medium | Medium | High | High | High | Medium | Low | Medium | High | Medium | High | Medium | 28 |
| 33 | Kincardine Plateau | Medium | Low | Medium | Low | Low | Medium | Low | Low | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | 19 |
| 34 | Kincardine Cliffs | High | Medium | Medium | Medium | High | High | High | Medium | High | High | High | High | 32 |
| 35 | Garvock and Glenbervie | Medium | Low | Medium | Low | Medium | Medium | High | Low | Medium | Medium | High | Medium | 23 |
| 36 | Howe of the Mearns | High | Medium | High | Low | Medium | Low | Medium | High | Medium | Low | High | Medium | 25 |
| 37 | Kincardine Links | Medium | High | Medium | Medium | Medium | High | Medium | Low | High | High | High | High | 29 |

Appendix 5

Stakeholder Engagement

This appendix describes the three stages of stakeholder engagement that were undertaken, and how they informed the LLDR process.

Introduction

The views of stakeholders were sought at three stages of the LLDR process, as set out in Table A1 3 below.

A1 3 Stakeholder engagement stages

| Engagement | Stage of LLDR | Purpose of consultation | Dates |
|------------|--|--|--|
| I | At the project outset | To agree the purpose of SLA designation, and the evaluation criteria that would be used | 11 June 2015 to 10 July 2015 (four weeks) |
| II | Alongside the evaluation process | To understand the relative importance of the criteria, and to identify landscapes that are highly valued by stakeholders | 2 September 2015 to 2 November 2015 (8½ weeks) |
| III | Following the drafting of candidate SLAs | To confirm the boundary and coverage of candidate SLAs, and gather local knowledge of possible qualifying interests | 13 January 2016 to 10 February 2016 (four weeks) |

The findings of each stage have informed the LLDR process, and are summarised at the appropriate points in the report. This appendix presents details of the responses received at each stage.

Stakeholder engagement I

This first round of engagement sought to consult on the approach to the study and the purpose of designation. Key stakeholders were identified by Aberdeenshire Council for initial targeted engagement, and a list of their email addresses was supplied. A complete list of all groups contacted is given in Table A1 4. Each group was contacted by email, and was sent a copy of the consultation paper reproduced in Appendix 5.1.

A total of 44 separate representations were received in response to this consultation paper. Some of the community councils opted to distribute the paper amongst their members to respond on an individual basis, while other groups responded as an organisation. Eleven community councils provide representations, as well as four national bodies, two local interest groups and one Council department. The remaining comments were supplied by private individuals. Table A1 5 provides a summary of all the comments received.

With a very limited number of exceptions, stakeholders who responded agreed that the primary purpose of SLAs in Aberdeenshire should be to *“safeguard and enhance the character and quality of a landscape which is important or particularly valued locally or regionally”*. A number of respondents were keen that the other SPP purposes, relating to understanding of the landscape and recreation, were not dropped but remained as secondary purposes of the SLAs.

There was general agreement with the criteria-based approach and the criteria that were proposed. Criteria were reviewed and amended, and the responses helped frame the development of the decision rules in Table 2.2. Some suggestions, such as use of weighted terms like ‘unspoiled’, were not taken up. Other suggestions were considered to be already covered, such as tourism and recreation which are included under the enjoyment criterion.

A1 4 List of groups contacted at stakeholder engagement I

| | |
|---|---|
| Alvah and Forglan Community Council | Rathen, Memsie and Area Community Council |
| Arbuthnott Community Council | Rosehearty Community Council |
| Auchterless and Inverkeithny Community Council | Royal Burgh of Inverbervie Community Council |
| Ballater and Crathie Community Council | Slains & Collieston Community Council |
| Banchory Community Council | Stonehaven and District Community Council |
| Banff and Macduff Community Council | Strathbogie Community Council |
| Belhelvie Community Council | Strichen and District Community Council |
| Benholm and Johnshaven Community Council | Tap O'Noth Community Council |
| Bennachie Community Council | Tarves Community Council |
| Birse and Ballogie Community Council | Turriff and District Community Council |
| Boddam Community Council | Udny Community Council |
| Braemar Community Council | Westhill & Elrick Community Council |
| Buchan East Community Council | Whitehills and District Community Council |
| Catterline, Kinneff and Dunnottar Community Council | Ythan Community Council |
| Cornhill and Ordiquhill Community Council | Fyvie, Rothie, Monquhitter Community Council |
| Crathes, Drumoak, Durriss Community Council | Cluny, Midmar and Monymusk Community Council |
| Cromar Community Council | Lumphanan Community Council |
| Cruden Community Council | Torphins Community Council |
| Deer Community Council | Scottish Natural Heritage |
| Donside Community Council | Cairngorms National Park Authority |
| Echt and Skene Community Council | Cairngorms National Park Authority |
| Ellon Community Council | Historic Scotland |
| Feughdee West Community Council | Royal Society for the Protection of Birds |
| Fintray and Kinellar Community Council | Scottish Land and Estates |
| Finzean Community Council | John Muir Trust |
| Fordyce and Sandend Community Council | Aberdeenshire Local Outdoor Access Forum |
| Foveran Community Council | Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland |
| Fraserburgh Community Council | Forestry Commission Scotland |
| Gourdon Community Council | The Mountaineering Council of Scotland |
| Huntly Community Council | Concerned About Wind Turbines in Aberdeenshire (CAWT) |
| Invercairn Community Council | Aberdeenshire Youth Council |
| Inverurie Community Council | Community Planning Officer (Banff & Buchan) |
| Kemnay Community Council | Community Planning Officer (Marr) |
| King Edward and Gamrie Community Council | Community Planning Officer (Formartine) |
| Kintore and District Community Council | Community Planning Officer (Kincardine & Mearns) |
| Longside and District Community Council | Community Planning Officer (Marr) |
| Marr Area Partnership | Community Planning Officer (Garioch) |
| Mearns Community Council | Community Planning Officer (Kincardine & Mearns) |
| Meldrum and Bourtie Community Council | Community Planning Officer (Buchan) |
| Methlick Community Council | Community Planning Officer |
| Mid Deeside Community Council | Aberdeen City Council |
| Mintlaw and District Community Council | North East Mountain Trust |
| New Aberdour, Tyrie and Pennan Community Council | National Trust for Scotland |
| New Pitsligo Community Council | Energetica Project |
| Newmachar Community Council | Ramblers Scotland |
| Newtonhill, Muchalls, Cammachmore Community Council | Scottish Wildlife Trust |
| North Kincardine Community Council | Visit Scotland, Perth |
| Peterhead Community Council | Visit Scotland, Aberdeen |
| Portlethen and District Community Council | Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce |
| Portsoy and District Community Council | Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Future (ACSEF) |

A1 5 Summary of responses to stakeholder engagement I

| Name | Q1 | Q1 comments (abridged) | Q2 | Q2 comments (abridged) |
|---------------------------------------|-----|--|-----|--|
| Cruden CC | Yes | | Yes | Is special coastal views covered under the Scenic Qualities? |
| Longside & District CC | Yes | | Yes | Built environment could be included, e.g. conservation areas |
| Mountaineering Council of Scotland | Yes | | Yes | Additional criterion covering outdoor recreation and tourism. |
| Huntly CC | Yes | | Yes | |
| RSPB | Yes | SLAs should safeguard and enhance countryside where people can celebrate nature, and that sustains the supply of food, fuel, fibre and water that people need now and in the future. | Yes | Naturalness criteria should include important species as well as habitats. |
| Historic Scotland | Yes | | Yes | Clarity required as to how designed landscapes are addressed. |
| Braeside CC | Yes | | Yes | |
| Scottish Natural Heritage | Yes | The other purposes are also important, but they can be more effectively achieved through the content of the Council's Plan Policies. | Yes | |
| L. Bain | Yes | | Yes | |
| Newtonhill, Muchalls & Cammachmore CC | Yes | | Yes | Further detail required on condition and views criteria. |
| Parish of New Machar CC | | | No | Safeguarding should focus on settlement setting above other considerations. |
| D. Taylor | Yes | | Yes | |
| P. Quinn | Yes | | Yes | Exclude "scenic drives" from the Enjoyment criterion. |
| A. Poulsen | Yes | | Yes | Archaeological sites should be included in the Built heritage criterion. |
| S. Ward | Yes | Suggested Bennachie area for consideration. | Yes | |
| J. Bayne | Yes | | Yes | |
| J. V. Robinson | Yes | The review should not lose sight of the other purposes. | Yes | |
| J. E. C. Hunt | Yes | | | The evaluation should not consider adverse impacts of temporary features such as wind farms. |
| P. J. Duffield | Yes | The other purposes are also relevant to SLA designation. | Yes | |
| Alvah & Forglen CC | Yes | | Yes | |
| A. and B. Black | | | | Features of architectural excellence could also be considered. |

| Name | Q1 | Q1 comments (abridged) | Q2 | Q2 comments (abridged) |
|---|-----|--|-----|--|
| Cluny, Midmar and Monymusk CC | Yes | The review must be objective, and should involve community views. | Yes | Adverse impacts of development should not prevent areas being considered as SLAs. Importance is attached to spatial placement of historic buildings and monuments in the landscape. The protection of rare flora and fauna should also be incorporated into the criteria. Consultation should be comprehensive and publicised. |
| J. Perry | Yes | | Yes | |
| J. Perry | Yes | | Yes | |
| V. Ross | Yes | | Yes | |
| A. Addy | Yes | | Yes | |
| A. Miller | Yes | Also places importance on recreation and tourism aspect. | Yes | |
| Birse and Ballogie Community Council | Yes | | Yes | 'Unspoiled' might be a better term to use than 'Naturalness'. |
| B. Hill | Yes | | Yes | |
| M. Dewhurst | Yes | | Yes | |
| M. Price-Davies | Yes | | Yes | Clarify importance to be placed on archaeology. |
| S. King | Yes | | | |
| T. King | Yes | | Yes | |
| Cromar Community Council | Yes | The three purposes should be given similar weight. | Yes | Concerned that the definitions of 'Representativeness' and 'Wildness' are too vague to be useful. |
| Banff and Macduff Community Council | Yes | Purpose should cover all three points. Overlapping designations should be avoided. | Yes | How are criteria to be weighted? Could recreation and social benefits be included? |
| Bailies of Bennachie | Yes | | Yes | |
| D. Price-Davies | Yes | | Yes | |
| Aberdeen City Council Local Development Plan Team | Yes | | Yes | |
| G. Middleton | Yes | | Yes | |
| D. Macphee | Yes | | Yes | |
| N. and M. Pye | Yes | | Yes | |
| A. Urquhart | Yes | | Yes | Special notice should be taken of the major river valleys and scenic coastline. |
| Marnoch and Deveron Valley Protection Group | Yes | | Yes | |
| G. Mckilligan | No | Economic sustainability must be the first priority in all considerations | No | Identification of special landscape areas is entirely in the eye of the beholder. |

Stakeholder engagement II

The second engagement aimed to gather a broad view of valued landscapes across Aberdeenshire. An online questionnaire was developed, which comprised two parts. Part one asked about the relative importance of the different evaluation criteria, and also asked for some indicative information about respondents. Part two asked respondents to identify their favourite Aberdeenshire landscapes on a map and to explain why they valued these locations. The two parts of the questionnaire are reproduced in Appendix 5.2.

The survey was advertised via direct email to all those stakeholders identified by the Council for stakeholder engagement I, as well as any other groups or individuals who responded to the first questionnaire. In addition the survey was advertised by the Council, and appeared in the local press.

The survey was accessible for two months, during which 135 people completed the questionnaire (part 1). Respondents selected 149 points on the interactive map (part 2). Since it is possible to enter more than one place on the map, the number of individual respondents to the map cannot be determined. However, the similarity in overall numbers suggests that most people completing part 1 went on to enter at least one place in part 2.

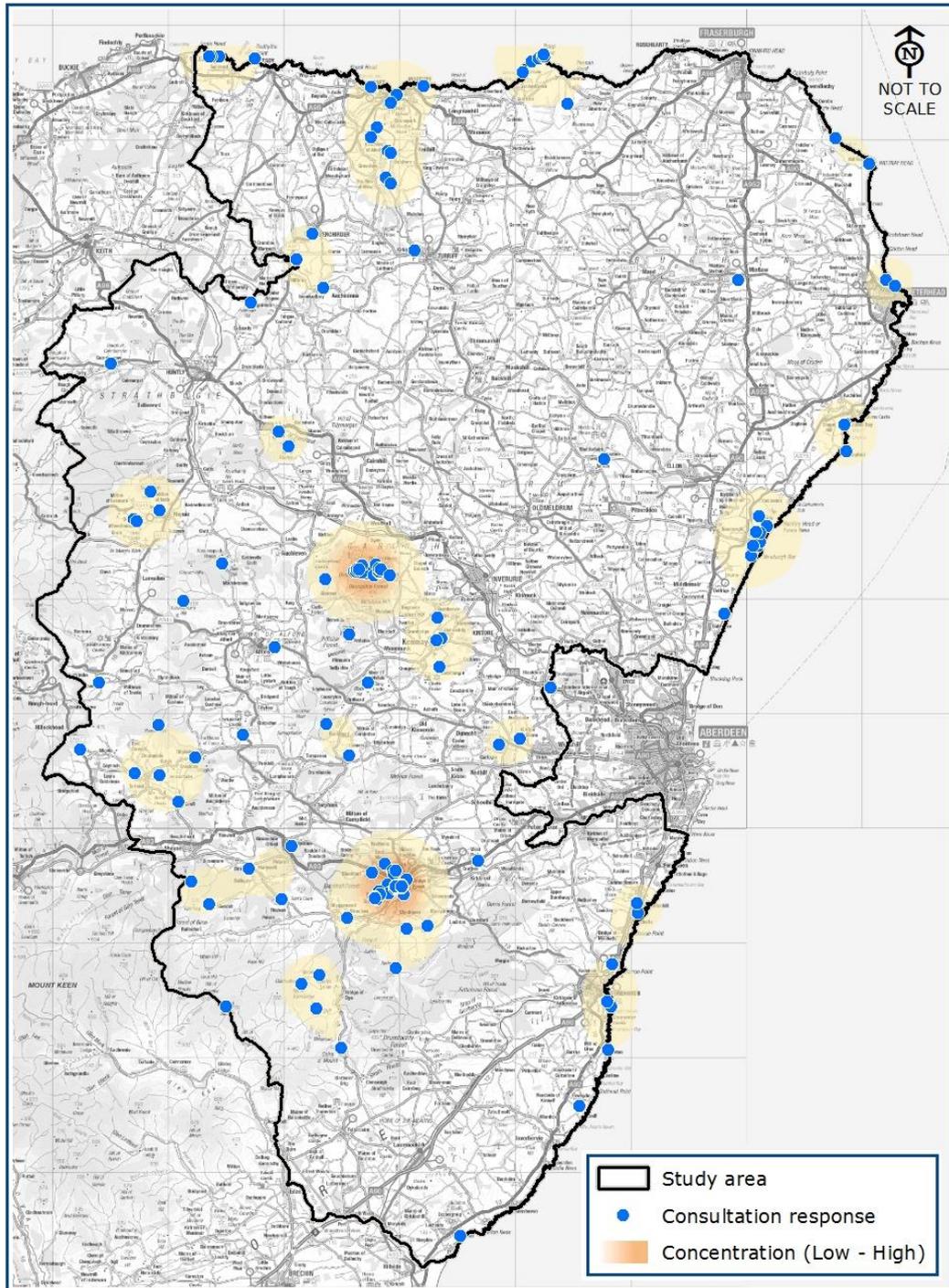
Respondents completing part 1 were overwhelmingly Aberdeenshire residents (82%). Over 50% were members of community councils, and 50% also identified as members of local or national heritage organisation. Most respondents were individuals, though responses were submitted on behalf of the organisations listed in Table A1 6. The results of the questionnaire in part 1 are extensively analysed in Appendix 6, since they formed the basis for the application of weighting.

A1 6 Organisations responding to stakeholder engagement II

| | |
|--|--|
| Aberdeenshire Council | Longside Community Council |
| Bailies of Bennachie | Mountaineering Council of Scotland |
| Banchory Community Council | New Aberdour, Tyrie and Pennan Community Council |
| Banff and Macduff Community Council | Newtonhill, Muchalls & Cammachmore Community Council |
| Birse and Ballogie Community Council | Peterhead Community Council |
| Cairngorms National Park Authority | RSPB Scotland |
| Cluny, Midmar and Monymusk Community Council | The MacRobert Trust |
| Cruden Community Council | VisitScotland |
| Kemnay Community Council | |

The results of the interactive map in part 2 are shown on Figure A1 7A1 7. Each blue dot represents a place identified as special. The shading indicates relative concentrations of dots. It should be noted that some points were selected by the respondent as representing a much wider area. Nevertheless, some clear patterns can be identified. The most obvious clusters are around Bennachie, and in the Banchory/Scolty Hill area of Deeside. A number of dots are located on the coasts, and the Deveron valley also has a number of selections. Of the more scattered locations, most are within the area between the Mounth and the Don, with very few selections across the north east of Aberdeenshire.

A1 7 Locations of 'favourite landscapes' identified during stakeholder engagement II



The distribution of these selected places informed the identification of search areas (see Section 6) as well as the refinement of these towards the candidate SLAs (Section 7). The online map tool allowed respondents to leave a short comment with their selection. These comments have informed the development of statements of significance and qualifying interests of the candidate SLAs. The comments were limited in length due to the technology used, and some longer comments were forwarded by email to the project team. In addition, two more detailed submissions were received at this stage, from the Marnoch and Deveron Valley Protection Group and from Alvah and Forglen Community Council. These representations provided detailed justification for the inclusion of certain areas as candidate SLAs, supported by maps and photographs. All of these submissions were drawn upon in drafting the candidate SLAs and describing their qualifying interests.

Stakeholder engagement III

The final stage of engagement took place once draft candidate SLAs had been devised and discussed with the Steering Group. A targeted approach was taken, focusing on those local groups with an interest in the area of each candidate SLA. Aberdeenshire Council analysed the draft areas against community council boundaries and provided a list of the areas which overlapped. The consultation included 47 community councils and two local interest groups (Bailies of Bennachie and the Marnoch and Deveron Valley Protection Group).

Each group was sent a map, a short description of the boundaries and a draft list of qualifying interests of the candidate SLA(s) within their area of interest. These were distributed by email with a covering note, which is reproduced in Appendix 5.3. Feedback was requested on three questions:

- What should this candidate SLA be called?
- Are the boundaries in the right place?
- What are the 'qualifying interests' of this candidate SLA?

A total of 13 representations were received in response to this consultation, from the organisations listed in Table A1 8. All responses expressed support for the SLA, though with some hesitation in one case, given that the policies to be applied to the SLAs have not yet been formulated. Several groups suggested amendments to boundaries which were considered by the project team and adopted where appropriate. Most responses included suggestions for additional qualifying interests, and these were incorporated into the revised statements of significance wherever appropriate.

A1 8 Responses to stakeholder engagement III

| Organisation | Candidate SLA |
|---|--|
| Aberdour, Tyrie and Pennan Community Council | North Aberdeenshire Coast |
| Alvah & Forglen Community Council | Deveron Valley |
| Bailies of Bennachie | Bennachie |
| Catterline, Kinneff & Dunnottar Community Council | South East Aberdeenshire Coast |
| Cluny, Midmar & Monymusk Community Council (two separate responses) | Bennachie |
| Cromar Community Council | Howe of Cromar |
| Feughdee Community Council | Forest of Birse & Clachnaben; Dee Valley |
| Marnoch and Deveron Valley Protection Group | Deveron Valley |
| Newtonhill, Muchalls & Cammachmore Community Council | South East Aberdeenshire Coast |
| Save Bennachie Alliance | Bennachie |
| Strathbogie Community Council | Deveron Valley |
| Torphins Community Council | Dee Valley |

Appendix 5.1: Consultation paper, stakeholder engagement I

Aberdeenshire Special Landscape Areas: Consultation

Aberdeenshire Council is currently refreshing the provision of landscape protection within the council area, excepting that part within the Cairngorms National Park. Currently, landscape protection is achieved with reference to landscape character, supplemented by a series of defined Valued Views. The Council has concluded that the Valued Views approach is not fit for purpose. The Main Issues Report of 2013 confirmed that the Council's preferred option was to remove the Valued Views policy, and to replace it with a more comprehensive policy on local landscape value.

Support was expressed for this approach, and the Council has therefore appointed LUC to implement a review of the landscape of Aberdeenshire (except that part within the Cairngorms National Park) that will lead to the identification of Special Landscape Areas. Consultation with communities is an essential part of this process, and this consultation paper is therefore the first stage of the overall process. There will be further opportunities for the public to nominate valued landscapes over the coming months, and we will keep you informed of these.

As the project commences, we are keen to gather your views on the fundamental basis of the review, which will guide the way that landscapes are selected. This short initial consultation paper focuses on two key questions:

- The purpose of the Aberdeenshire Special Landscape Areas; and
- The criteria which will be used to select Special Landscape Areas.

Responses

Please respond to the two questions in this paper by **Friday 10 July**, by email to:

aberdeenshireSLA@landuse.co.uk

Alternatively, please post your response to:

LUC, 28 Stafford Street, Edinburgh EH3 7BD

If you have any queries on this consultation, please email aberdeenshireSLA@landuse.co.uk in the first instance.

Purpose

Scottish Planning Policy (2014) suggests alternative purposes for local landscape designations:

- *"safeguard and enhance the character and quality of a landscape which is important or particularly valued locally or regionally; or*
- *promote understanding and awareness of the distinctive character and special qualities of local landscapes; or*
- *safeguard and promote important local settings for outdoor recreation and tourism."*

The Council has indicated that the purpose of Special Landscape Areas in Aberdeenshire should focus on the first of these. That is, the review should seek to identify landscapes which are *"important or particularly valued locally or regionally"*. The identified areas will then be safeguarded by planning policy being developed by Aberdeenshire Council.

Question 1

Do you agree that the primary purpose of Special Landscape Areas in Aberdeenshire should be to safeguard and enhance the character and quality of a landscape which is important or particularly valued locally or regionally?

Your response will help to guide the overall direction of the review process, in defining the aim of the Special Landscape Area designation.

Landscape criteria

The review will be carried out in accordance with the approach described in *Guidance on Local Landscape Designations* (2006), published jointly by Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Scotland. This presents a series of principles which will be followed to identify landscapes meriting protection. It recommends the use of existing landscape character information as a basis for the review, and the application of a number of criteria.

It is proposed that the following criteria will be used to identify the areas which should be included within the Special Landscape Areas. These are based on criteria drawn from the Guidance, with additional aspects included following initial discussion with the Council.

Representativeness: Landscapes which represent Aberdeenshire as a whole, and which contribute to local or regional identity and sense of place.

Rarity: Landscapes which are rare or unique to Aberdeenshire, or which are uncommon elsewhere.

Condition: Landscapes that are intact and distinctive and in a good state of repair, having been unaffected by development over a considerable period of time.

Wildness: Landscapes that have a high degree of wildness or tranquillity, relative to the rest of Aberdeenshire, including lack of human features, remoteness and rugged terrain.

Scenic qualities: Landscapes that contain pleasing combinations of features, or which prompt strong sensory appeal, either on their own or in combination.

Enjoyment: Landscapes which provide access and recreation opportunities for local people and visitors, including walking, cycling, scenic drives or other outdoor pursuits.

Built heritage assets: Landscapes in which historic buildings or sites make a substantial contribution to local distinctiveness.

Cultural qualities: Landscapes which have strong cultural associations with, for example, literature, music, art, local history or legend.

Naturalness: Landscapes in which features of natural heritage interest, including important habitats, protected sites and geology, make a substantial contribution to local distinctiveness.

Settlement setting: Landscapes which are of particular importance to the setting of towns and villages.

Views: Landscapes which are widely seen from locations inside Aberdeenshire and beyond, or which are seen from important viewpoints.

Question 2

Do you agree that all of these criteria are appropriate to the identification of Special Landscape Areas in Aberdeenshire? Are there any other criteria that you think should be considered as part of the review?

Your response will help to shape the review process and to determine the types of landscape which are likely to be included within the recommended Special Landscape Areas.

References

Scottish Planning Policy (2014) <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/Policy>

Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan: Main Issues Report 2013
http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans_policies/LDP2016MainIssuesReportFINAL.PDF

Aberdeenshire Council Position Paper 9: Valued Views (2013)
http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans_policies/PositionPaper9ValuedViews.pdf

Guidance on Local Landscape Designations (Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Scotland, 2006)
<http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/heritagemanagement/GuidanceonLocalLandscapeDesignations.pdf>

Appendix 5.2: Questionnaire and map-based survey, stakeholder engagement II

Aberdeenshire Special Landscape Areas

On behalf of Aberdeenshire Council, LUC is carrying out an assessment of Aberdeenshire's landscapes to identify those which are the most appropriate candidates for protection as Special Landscape Areas. The main purpose of Special Landscape Areas is to safeguard and enhance the character and qualities of landscapes that are important or particularly valued locally or regionally. To help with the process of identifying special landscapes, we would like to hear your views on what makes landscapes important, and about your favourite landscapes and places in Aberdeenshire.

Question One asks about the importance of different aspects of landscapes. Question 2 asks for some information about you to help us analyse the results. Question 3 asks you to identify your favourite Aberdeenshire landscape(s) and explain why you consider each to be important.

Information you give us about your favourite landscapes and places will inform a technical appraisal which is being carried out using an approach suggested by Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Scotland. This will inform the preparation of planning policy on Special Landscape Areas, which will be the subject of more public engagement in the future.

If you have any queries please contact AberdeenshireSLA@landuse.co.uk

You can return this form by post to **LUC, 28 Stafford Street, Edinburgh EH3 7BD** or by email to AberdeenshireSLA@landuse.co.uk. Alternatively you can complete the survey online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/93GRCLS>. Please return completed forms by 30 October 2015.

Question 1

We would like to understand what you value most about the landscape of Aberdeenshire. To inform the evaluation, we have developed a series of criteria or aspects of the landscape we will assess.

Please rank the following aspects of landscape in order of their importance to you. Please select '1' for the most important aspect and '12' for the least important.

| Criteria | Your ranking 1-12 |
|--|-------------------|
| Landscapes which are important for natural habitats and species | |
| Landscapes which have a strong sense of wildness or tranquillity | |
| Landscapes which form an essential setting for one or more settlements | |
| Landscapes which contain important built heritage | |
| Landscapes which have widely known cultural associations | |
| Landscapes which are highly visible from a wide area | |
| Landscapes which are essential for outdoor recreation and tourism | |
| Landscapes which have outstanding scenic qualities | |
| Landscapes which contribute to the wider identity, image and sense of place of Aberdeenshire | |
| Landscapes which are unique or rare either regionally or nationally | |
| Landscapes which are well maintained or in a good state of repair | |
| Landscapes which provide important connections for people or wildlife | |

Question 2

If you are responding on behalf of an organisation (such as a Community Council), please give its name:

Do you: (please tick)

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Live in Aberdeenshire? | |
| Work in Aberdeenshire? | |
| Visit Aberdeenshire? | |
| Other (please specify) | |

Please could you give the first half of your postcode (e.g. AB33):

Do any of the following statements apply to you? (please tick)

| | |
|--|--|
| I own or manage land in Aberdeenshire | |
| I am a member of an outdoor recreation organisation (e.g. Ramblers, Mountaineering Council of Scotland) | |
| I am a member of a local or national heritage organisation (e.g. National Trust for Scotland, John Muir Trust) | |
| I am a member of a community organisation in Aberdeenshire | |

Please provide an email address if you would like to be kept up to date with the review.

Your email address will only be used to provide you with updates on this project.

FAIR PROCESSING NOTICE

Who may process your personal data?

The information which you provide this form will be processed by Aberdeenshire Council, which is a Data Controller of this information for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 1998, and by LUC Ltd on behalf of Aberdeenshire Council.

What personal data will be collected?

Your personal email address will be collected if you choose to provide it.

For what purposes will your personal data be used?

The personal data that you provide will be used only for the purpose of updating you on the progress of the Special Landscape Areas project.

Will Aberdeenshire Council disclose your personal data to anyone else?

Only LUC Ltd and Aberdeenshire Council will have access to your personal data.

By submitting your response to this survey, you confirm that you have read and understood the fair processing notice and understand that you have the right to withdraw consent in the future.



Question 3

This question asks you to select your favourite landscapes in Aberdeenshire and tell us why you value them. They may be hills or glens, coasts or farmland. They may be close to your home or further afield, places you visit or may suggest to visitors to the area. They may be hidden, special places or landscapes that are important in your everyday life.

Please choose locations which are within Aberdeenshire but not in the Cairngorms National Park. Use the text boxes to describe your chosen place, and then pick its location on the map below. You can tell us about as many landscapes as you wish.

What is the name of the area or location you are nominating? Please give enough detail to help us identify the location, and give an indication of the extent of the area you have in mind.

Why is this landscape important? Please tick *up to five* aspects below which are the most important to your appreciation of this place.

| | |
|--|--|
| This landscape is essential to the wider identity, image and sense of place of Aberdeenshire | |
| This landscape is unique or rare | |
| This landscape is very well maintained and in a good state of repair | |
| This landscape has a strong sense of wildness or tranquillity | |
| This landscape has outstanding scenic qualities | |
| This landscape is essential for outdoor recreation and tourism | |
| This landscape contains important built heritage | |
| This landscape has widely known cultural associations | |
| This landscape is important for natural habitats and species | |
| This landscape forms an essential setting for one or more villages or towns | |
| This landscape is highly visible from a wide area | |
| This landscape provides important connections for people or wildlife | |

Please describe why this landscape is important to you:

Appendix 5.3: Consultation paper, stakeholder engagement III

Aberdeenshire Special Landscape Areas: Consultation

Aberdeenshire Council is currently refreshing the provision of landscape protection within Aberdeenshire (excluding the Cairngorms National Park). Currently, landscape protection is achieved with reference to landscape character, supplemented by a series of defined Valued Views. The Council has concluded that the Valued Views approach is not fit for purpose. The Main Issues Report (2013) for the next Local Development Plan confirmed that the Council's preferred option was to replace the Valued Views policy with a more comprehensive policy on 'Special Landscape Areas' of local importance, as well as a continuing emphasis on landscape character.

The Council is progressing with this preferred approach and has therefore appointed LUC to implement a review of the landscape of Aberdeenshire (except that part within the Cairngorms National Park) that will lead to the identification of candidate Special Landscape Areas (SLA). This review is being progressed in accordance with Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Scotland's 2006 'Guidance on Local Landscape Designations'.

Consultation with communities is an essential part of this process, and input has already been sought at two stages of the process: to inform the purpose of SLAs and the approach to the review (Summer 2015); and to inform the selection of areas (Autumn 2015).

The review has now reached the stage of drafting the boundaries and descriptions of the candidate SLAs. Your Community Council area/area of interest contains part of one or more suggested candidate SLA(s), and given your local knowledge of the area, we are seeking your feedback to inform the boundaries and descriptions of these candidate SLA(s). Please note this is a targeted consultation and we are only contacting relevant Community Councils and local interest groups at this stage.

The finalised candidate SLAs and their supporting statements will inform Supplementary Guidance that will be prepared by the Council. The proposed Supplementary Guidance will be subject to formal public consultation in Spring 2016, prior to appropriate revision and formal adoption alongside the next Local Development Plan expected to be adopted in late 2016.

Consultation questions

Enclosed with this note are:

- map(s) showing the draft boundary of the candidate SLA(s) in your area – this will be the extent of the area over which the SLA policy will apply (paper copies of the maps are available on request); and
- short statement(s) on the reasons for selecting the candidate SLA(s), and a list of the 'qualifying interests' that make this area worthy of designation – these will be a key component of the supporting statements that will provide the justification for SLA status.

We would be grateful if you could look carefully at these documents and consider the following questions on the names, boundaries and qualifying interests of each candidate SLA. The more detail you can provide, the more relevant and specific we can make the finalised candidate SLAs and supporting statements.

Question 1

What should this candidate SLA be called?

The name should be relatively short, and be recognisable as a description of the area covered. We have assigned a name to the candidate SLA but we welcome your suggestions on locally specific and recognised names for this area.

Question 2

Are the boundaries in the right place?

The boundaries of a candidate SLA should define a recognisable area with a coherent identify and sense of place. Ideally, boundaries should follow physical features such as roads or rivers, or visual boundaries such as ridge-lines. Please comment on any areas that should be included or excluded from the candidate SLAs, giving your reasons for proposed changes. We would be happy for you to annotate the attached maps and return them to us, either as paper copies or scans.

Question 3

What are the 'qualifying interests' of this candidate SLA?

Qualifying interests are the reasons for designating the SLA. They will form the basis for the supporting statement which will set out the features that SLA designation should aim to protect. We have identified some qualifying interests for each candidate SLA. Please suggest any amendments to these and highlight any other aspects or features that contribute to the importance of this landscape, and which should be identified in its supporting statement. Qualifying interests can include all natural and man-made aspects of the landscape, as well as perceptual aspects such as views or tranquillity.

Responses

We appreciate your views and welcome your response to the questions above by **Wednesday 10 February 2016**, by email to:

aberdeenshireSLA@landuse.co.uk

Alternatively, please post your response to:

LUC, 28 Stafford Street, Edinburgh EH3 7BD

If you have any queries on this consultation, or would like to request paper copies of maps, please email aberdeenshireSLA@landuse.co.uk in the first instance.

References

Scottish Planning Policy (2014) <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/Policy>

Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan: Main Issues Report (2013)
http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans_policies/LDP2016MainIssuesReportFINAL.PDF

Aberdeenshire Council Position Paper 9: Valued Views (2013)
http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans_policies/PositionPaper9ValuedViews.pdf

Guidance on Local Landscape Designations (Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Scotland, 2006)
<http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/heritagemanagement/GuidanceonLocalLandscapeDesignations.pdf>

Appendix 6

Approach to weighting

The following note discusses potential approaches to weighting of the evaluation criteria.

Introduction

The purpose of this appendix is to discuss potential approaches to weighting of the evaluation criteria. Weighting can be used to reflect any variations in the relative importance of different criteria. It can also be used as way of testing the evaluation process and the robustness of its outcomes. If the ranking of landscape units remains largely unchanged when weighting is applied the findings can be regarded as more reliable than if the weighting alters the overall pattern of results.

Application of weighting was discussed at the steering group meeting on 10 September 2015, at which LUC stated that any weighting “*will depend on a clear steer from consultation*”. The application of weighting should also depend upon whether the resulting outputs would be improved through its use.

Survey Results

Question 1 of the online survey (see Appendix 5.2) allowed people to rank the 12 criteria from most to least important, and the purpose of this question was to understand which aspects of the landscape were seen as being most important in selecting areas for designation. Analysis of the results has informed the potential approaches to weighting set out in this note.

The SurveyMonkey form was closed on Monday 2nd November to allow analysis to commence. There were 135 responses to the survey, of which 130 people completed, or partially completed, the ranking of the evaluation criteria in Question 1. In 26 cases, respondents did not rank all 12 criteria. Most of these partial completions included the higher ranks, but not the lower ranks. Only 10 respondents did not rank their ‘top three’ criteria. Given that more people selected higher ranks, these selections formed the focus for analysis, and are shown in Table A1 9 below.

A1 9 Criteria chosen as most important

| Criterion | Number of people selecting this criterion as... | | |
|-----------------------|---|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| | ...most important | ...second most important | ...third most important |
| Representativeness | 13 | 12 | 11 |
| Rarity | 12 | 5 | 9 |
| Condition | 3 | 7 | 2 |
| Wildness/tranquillity | 21 | 17 | 21 |
| Scenic quality | 32 | 18 | 10 |
| Recreation | 5 | 9 | 18 |
| Built heritage | 3 | 9 | 5 |
| Cultural associations | 2 | 4 | 5 |
| Natural heritage | 20 | 9 | 15 |
| Settlement setting | 3 | 7 | 5 |
| Visibility | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| Connectivity | 6 | 16 | 16 |

It can be seen that ‘scenic quality’ is by far the most frequently chosen as most important (32 respondents), followed by ‘wildness/tranquillity’ (21 respondents) and ‘natural heritage’ (20 respondents). When asked to rank the second most important criteria, there was less variation, with 18 choosing ‘scenic quality’, 17 ‘wildness/tranquillity’ and 16 ‘connections for wildlife or people’. For their third choice, 21 chose ‘wildness/tranquillity’, 18 ‘recreation and tourism’ and 16 ‘connections for wildlife or people’.

When these rankings are combined, 60 respondents chose 'scenic quality' among their top three (46.2%), closely followed by 'wildness/tranquillity' with 59 respondents (45.4%). 44 respondents (33.8%) chose 'natural heritage' as one of the top three most important criteria. Least frequently chosen were 'cultural associations' (8.5%), 'condition' (9.2%) and 'settlement setting' (11.5%). Table A1 10 shows these figures for all criteria, in order of preference.

A1 10 Top-ranked criteria

| Criterion | Number of people who ranked this criterion as 1-3 | As a % of total respondents (130) |
|-----------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Scenic quality | 60 | 46.2 |
| Wildness/tranquillity | 59 | 45.4 |
| Natural heritage | 44 | 33.8 |
| Connectivity | 38 | 29.2 |
| Representativeness | 36 | 27.7 |
| Recreation | 32 | 24.6 |
| Rarity | 26 | 20.0 |
| Visibility | 24 | 18.5 |
| Built heritage | 17 | 13.1 |
| Settlement setting | 15 | 11.5 |
| Condition | 12 | 9.2 |
| Cultural associations | 11 | 8.5 |

Although fewer people completed the lowest rankings, these were analysed as a cross-check. These are shown in Table A1 11.

A1 11 Criteria chosen as least important

| Criterion | Number of people selecting this criterion as... | | |
|-----------------------|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| | ...12 th (least important) | ...11 th | ...10 th |
| Representativeness | 3 | 7 | 10 |
| Rarity | 6 | 6 | 3 |
| Condition | 40 | 19 | 7 |
| Wildness/tranquillity | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Scenic quality | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Recreation | 4 | 6 | 8 |
| Built heritage | 14 | 20 | 24 |
| Cultural associations | 11 | 16 | 13 |
| Natural heritage | 0 | 3 | 2 |
| Settlement setting | 15 | 14 | 22 |
| Visibility | 12 | 7 | 9 |
| Connectivity | 3 | 9 | 10 |

It is notable that the three criteria most commonly selected as most important, are those which are least commonly selected as least important. Table A1 12 shows combined rankings of 10th, 11th and 12th preferences, alongside percentages. Again, the three criteria most commonly selected in the top three (scenic quality, wildness/tranquillity and natural heritage) are least commonly found in the bottom three. The criteria least commonly found in the top three (cultural associations, condition, settlement setting and built heritage) correlate to those most commonly found in the bottom three.

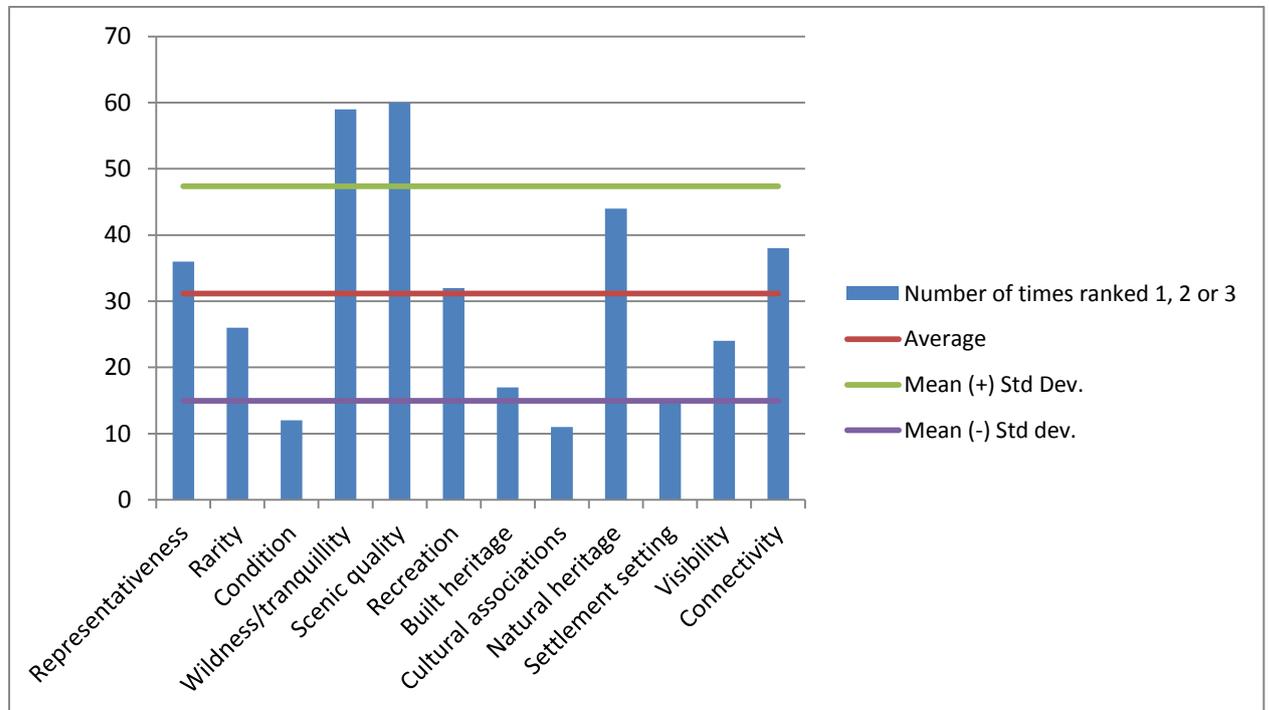
A1 12 Lowest ranked criteria

| Criterion | Number of people who ranked this criterion as 10-12 | As a % of total respondents (130) |
|-----------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Condition | 66 | 50.8 |
| Built heritage | 58 | 44.6 |
| Settlement setting | 51 | 39.2 |
| Cultural associations | 40 | 30.8 |
| Visibility | 28 | 21.5 |
| Connectivity | 22 | 16.9 |
| Representativeness | 20 | 15.4 |
| Recreation | 18 | 13.8 |
| Rarity | 15 | 11.5 |
| Wildness/tranquillity | 7 | 5.4 |
| Scenic quality | 7 | 5.4 |
| Natural heritage | 5 | 3.8 |

Findings

Based on the analysis of the higher rankings, 'scenic quality' and 'wildness/tranquillity' are recognised in the consultation exercise as being the most important criteria. Applying statistical analysis to the selections of criteria ranked 1-3 (most important) indicates that these two criteria were also the only ones lying outside of one standard deviation from the mean, i.e. they were significantly more likely to be selected as the most important criterion, as shown in Figure A1 13.

Figure A1 13



Weighting

In the absence of weighting, all criteria are treated equally when scoring is applied to the evaluation results. The overall scores were calculated by assigning a value of 1 to a *low* rank, 2 to *medium* and 3 to *high*. The results of the evaluation are shown in Table A1 14, in the column labelled 'unweighted score'. Initial review of the evaluation, combined with more detailed analysis looking beyond the landscape units, has resulted in the identification of 'search areas' within which candidate designations are likely to be found.

It is possible to apply weighting to emphasise the importance of certain criteria. The two most important criteria have been identified through consultation as 'scenic quality' and 'wildness/tranquillity', and therefore weighting options have been explored that apply to these criteria only:

- Weighting 1.1: multiply 'scenic quality' and 'wildness/tranquillity' scores by 1.1; or
- Weighting 1.2: multiply 'scenic quality' and 'wildness/tranquillity' scores by 1.5.

Alternatively, negative weighting could be applied to those criteria which were significantly less likely to be selected as most important. These are 'condition' and 'built heritage' as shown in Figure A1 13.

- Weighting 2.1: multiply 'scenic quality' and 'wildness/tranquillity' scores by 1.1, and 'condition' and 'built heritage' by 0.9; or
- Weighting 2.2: multiply 'scenic quality' and 'wildness/tranquillity' scores by 1.5; and 'condition' and 'built heritage' by 0.5.

The overall scores that result from applying each of these weighting schemes are A1 14. Tables A1 15 to

A1 19A1 19 show the ranking of character areas, from highest to lowest, under each weighting scheme. Of primary interest for the identification of Special Landscape Areas are the highest-scoring landscape units, and the top one-third of these is highlighted in each table.

Examination of Tables A1 15 to A1 19 shows that there is relatively little difference in the overall order of ranking. The units included in the top one-third do not change at all, there are only minor differences in ordering. The only substantial change in ranking occurs in weighting 2.2, where the Cromar Farmlands move from 23rd to 19th rank.

The following observations can be made:

- The adoption of a weighting scheme on the lines presented will make little difference to the overall ranking of character units;
- The differences that do occur are unlikely to affect the selection of 'search areas' for designation;
- A stronger weighting system (doubling or tripling the scores, say) would more substantively affect the overall ranking but could equally be seen as distorting the results;
- The introduction of a weighting scheme would add another layer of complexity to the study, potentially reducing the transparency of the process; and
- The ranking of character units is in itself an intermediate step, requiring further detailed analysis to draw out particular areas that may merit designation (starting with the 'search areas'), which may occur within or across landscape units.

Conclusion

It is recommended that the unweighted scores be used in the identification of candidate Special Landscape Areas, since no significant advantage has been identified that would justify implementation of weighting, and there are potential disadvantages as outlined above. The fact that overall ranking did not change greatly when weightings were tested suggests that the results are relatively robust, in that the evaluation reliably identifies the landscapes which meet most of the desired criteria.

A1 14 Total scores under each weighting scheme

| Unit ID | Unit Name | Unwt. | Wt. 1.1 | Wt. 1.2 | Wt. 2.1 | Wt. 2.2 |
|---------|---|-------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1 | Cliffs of the North and South East Coasts | 33 | 33.5 | 35.5 | 33 | 33 |
| 2 | Western Coastal Farmland | 18 | 18.3 | 19.5 | 18 | 18 |
| 3 | Knockhill and Aberchirder | 21 | 21.3 | 22.5 | 20.9 | 20.5 |
| 4 | Deveron and Upper Ythan Valleys | 29 | 29.4 | 31 | 28.8 | 28 |
| 5 | Coastal Farmland East of Macduff | 14 | 14.2 | 15 | 14 | 14 |
| 6 | Sandstone Ridges and Valleys South of Troup | 21 | 21.4 | 23 | 21.2 | 22 |
| 7 | North East Coastal Farmland | 16 | 16.2 | 17 | 15.9 | 15.5 |
| 8 | Agricultural Heartland | 19 | 19.3 | 20.5 | 19 | 19 |
| 9 | Wooded Estates Around Old Deer | 26 | 26.3 | 27.5 | 25.8 | 25 |
| 10 | Eastern Coastal Agricultural Plain | 22 | 22.3 | 23.5 | 21.9 | 21.5 |
| 11 | Dunes and Beaches from Fraserburgh to Peterhead | 32 | 32.5 | 34.5 | 32 | 32 |
| 12 | Formartine Links and Dunes | 31 | 31.5 | 33.5 | 31.1 | 31.5 |
| 13 | Formartine Lowlands | 22 | 22.3 | 23.5 | 21.9 | 21.5 |
| 14 | Ythan Strath Farmland | 23 | 23.3 | 24.5 | 22.8 | 22 |
| 15 | Northern Rolling Lowlands | 21 | 21.3 | 22.5 | 21 | 21 |

| Unit ID | Unit Name | Unwt. | Wt. 1.1 | Wt. 1.2 | Wt. 2.1 | Wt. 2.2 |
|---------|------------------------------------|-------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 16 | Upland Ridges South of the Deveron | 19 | 19.3 | 20.5 | 19 | 19 |
| 17 | Insch Basin | 23 | 23.3 | 24.5 | 22.8 | 22 |
| 18 | Deveron and Bogie Straths | 26 | 26.4 | 28 | 26 | 26 |
| 19 | Daugh of Cairnborrow | 19 | 19.4 | 21 | 19.2 | 20 |
| 20 | Grampian Outliers | 30 | 30.5 | 32.5 | 30 | 30 |
| 21 | Lumsden Valley | 23 | 23.5 | 25.5 | 23.2 | 24 |
| 22 | Donside | 25 | 25.4 | 27 | 24.9 | 24.5 |
| 23 | Cromar Farmlands | 22 | 22.4 | 24 | 22.1 | 22.5 |
| 24 | Howe of Cromar | 22 | 22.3 | 23.5 | 21.9 | 21.5 |
| 25 | Muir of Dinnet | 25 | 25.4 | 27 | 25 | 25 |
| 26 | Howe of Alford | 23 | 23.3 | 24.5 | 22.8 | 22 |
| 27 | The Cromar Uplands | 21 | 21.3 | 22.5 | 20.8 | 20 |
| 28 | Central Wooded Estates | 25 | 25.3 | 26.5 | 24.8 | 24 |
| 29 | Deeside | 30 | 30.4 | 32 | 29.9 | 29.5 |
| 30 | Upper Deeside Estates | 30 | 30.5 | 32.5 | 30 | 30 |
| 31 | The North-eastern Hill Ranges | 26 | 26.6 | 29 | 26.2 | 27 |
| 32 | The Mounth | 28 | 28.6 | 31 | 28.2 | 29 |
| 33 | Kincardine Plateau | 19 | 19.2 | 20 | 18.9 | 18.5 |
| 34 | Kincardine Cliffs | 32 | 32.5 | 34.5 | 32 | 32 |
| 35 | Garvock and Glenbervie | 23 | 23.3 | 24.5 | 22.8 | 22 |
| 36 | Howe of the Mearns | 24 | 24.3 | 25.5 | 23.8 | 23 |
| 37 | Kincardine Links | 29 | 29.4 | 31 | 29 | 29 |

A1 15 Unweighted Ranking

| Unit ID | Unit Name | Score |
|-----------|--|-----------|
| 1 | Cliffs of the North and South East Coasts | 33 |
| 11 | Dunes and Beaches from Fraserburgh to Peterhead | 32 |
| 34 | Kincardine Cliffs | 32 |
| 12 | Formartine Links and Dunes | 31 |
| 20 | Grampian Outliers | 30 |
| 30 | Deeside | 30 |
| 29 | Upper Deeside Estates | 30 |
| 4 | Deveron and Upper Ythan Valleys | 29 |
| 37 | Kincardine Links | 29 |
| 32 | The Mounth | 28 |
| 31 | Wooded Estates Around Old Deer | 26 |
| 18 | Deveron and Bogie Straths | 26 |
| 9 | The North-eastern Hill Ranges | 26 |
| 22 | Donside | 25 |
| 25 | Muir of Dinnet | 25 |
| 28 | Central Wooded Estates | 25 |
| 36 | Howe of the Mearns | 24 |
| 21 | Ythan Strath Farmland | 23 |
| 14 | Insch Basin | 23 |
| 17 | Lumsden Valley | 23 |
| 26 | Howe of Alford | 23 |
| 35 | Garvock and Glenbervie | 23 |
| 23 | Eastern Coastal Agricultural Plain | 22 |
| 10 | Formartine Lowlands | 22 |
| 13 | Cromar Farmlands | 22 |
| 24 | Howe of Cromar | 22 |
| 6 | Knockhill and Aberchirder | 21 |
| 3 | Sandstone Ridges and Valleys South of Troup | 21 |
| 15 | Northern Rolling Lowlands | 21 |
| 27 | The Cromar Uplands | 21 |
| 19 | Agricultural Heartland | 19 |
| 8 | Upland Ridges South of the Deveron | 19 |
| 16 | Daugh of Cairnborrow | 19 |
| 33 | Kincardine Plateau | 19 |
| 2 | Western Coastal Farmland | 18 |
| 7 | North East Coastal Farmland | 16 |
| 5 | Coastal Farmland East of Macduff | 14 |

A1 16 Weighting 1.1 Ranking

| Unit ID | Unit Name | Score |
|-----------|--|-------------|
| 1 | Cliffs of the North and South East Coasts | 33.5 |
| 11 | Dunes and Beaches from Fraserburgh to Peterhead | 32.5 |
| 34 | Kincardine Cliffs | 32.5 |
| 12 | Formartine Links and Dunes | 31.5 |
| 20 | Grampian Outliers | 30.5 |
| 30 | Upper Deeside Estates | 30.5 |
| 29 | Deeside | 30.4 |
| 4 | Deveron and Upper Ythan Valleys | 29.4 |
| 37 | Kincardine Links | 29.4 |
| 32 | The Mounth | 28.6 |
| 31 | The North-eastern Hill Ranges | 26.6 |
| 18 | Deveron and Bogie Straths | 26.4 |
| 9 | Wooded Estates Around Old Deer | 26.3 |
| 22 | Donside | 25.4 |
| 25 | Muir of Dinnet | 25.4 |
| 28 | Central Wooded Estates | 25.3 |
| 36 | Howe of the Mearns | 24.3 |
| 21 | Lumsden Valley | 23.5 |
| 14 | Ythan Strath Farmland | 23.3 |
| 17 | Insch Basin | 23.3 |
| 26 | Howe of Alford | 23.3 |
| 35 | Garvock and Glenbervie | 23.3 |
| 23 | Cromar Farmlands | 22.4 |
| 10 | Eastern Coastal Agricultural Plain | 22.3 |
| 13 | Formartine Lowlands | 22.3 |
| 24 | Howe of Cromar | 22.3 |
| 6 | Sandstone Ridges and Valleys South of Troup | 21.4 |
| 3 | Knockhill and Aberchirder | 21.3 |
| 15 | Northern Rolling Lowlands | 21.3 |
| 27 | The Cromar Uplands | 21.3 |
| 19 | Daugh of Cairnborrow | 19.4 |
| 8 | Agricultural Heartland | 19.3 |
| 16 | Upland Ridges South of the Deveron | 19.3 |
| 33 | Kincardine Plateau | 19.2 |
| 2 | Western Coastal Farmland | 18.3 |
| 7 | North East Coastal Farmland | 16.2 |
| 5 | Coastal Farmland East of Macduff | 14.2 |

A1 17 Weighting 1.2 Ranking

| Unit ID | Unit Name | Score |
|-----------|--|-------------|
| 1 | Cliffs of the North and South East Coasts | 35.5 |
| 11 | Dunes and Beaches from Fraserburgh to Peterhead | 34.5 |
| 34 | Kincardine Cliffs | 34.5 |
| 12 | Formartine Links and Dunes | 33.5 |
| 20 | Grampian Outliers | 32.5 |
| 30 | Upper Deeside Estates | 32.5 |
| 29 | Deeside | 32 |
| 4 | Deveron and Upper Ythan Valleys | 31 |
| 37 | Kincardine Links | 31 |
| 32 | The Mounth | 31 |
| 31 | The North-eastern Hill Ranges | 29 |
| 18 | Deveron and Bogie Straths | 28 |
| 9 | Wooded Estates Around Old Deer | 27.5 |
| 22 | Donside | 27 |
| 25 | Muir of Dinnet | 27 |
| 28 | Central Wooded Estates | 26.5 |
| 36 | Howe of the Mearns | 25.5 |
| 21 | Lumsden Valley | 25.5 |
| 14 | Ythan Strath Farmland | 24.5 |
| 17 | Insch Basin | 24.5 |
| 26 | Howe of Alford | 24.5 |
| 35 | Garvock and Glenbervie | 24.5 |
| 23 | Cromar Farmlands | 24 |
| 10 | Eastern Coastal Agricultural Plain | 23.5 |
| 13 | Formartine Lowlands | 23.5 |
| 24 | Howe of Cromar | 23.5 |
| 6 | Sandstone Ridges and Valleys South of Troup | 23 |
| 3 | Knockhill and Aberchirder | 22.5 |
| 15 | Northern Rolling Lowlands | 22.5 |
| 27 | The Cromar Uplands | 22.5 |
| 19 | Daugh of Cairnborrow | 21 |
| 8 | Agricultural Heartland | 20.5 |
| 16 | Upland Ridges South of the Deveron | 20.5 |
| 33 | Kincardine Plateau | 20 |
| 2 | Western Coastal Farmland | 19.5 |
| 7 | North East Coastal Farmland | 17 |
| 5 | Coastal Farmland East of Macduff | 15 |

A1 18 Weighting 2.1 Ranking

| Unit ID | Unit Name | Score |
|-----------|--|-------------|
| 1 | Cliffs of the North and South East Coasts | 33 |
| 11 | Dunes and Beaches from Fraserburgh to Peterhead | 32 |
| 34 | Kincardine Cliffs | 32 |
| 12 | Formartine Links and Dunes | 31.1 |
| 20 | Grampian Outliers | 30 |
| 30 | Upper Deeside Estates | 30 |
| 29 | Deeside | 29.9 |
| 37 | Kincardine Links | 29 |
| 4 | Deveron and Upper Ythan Valleys | 28.8 |
| 32 | The Mounth | 28.2 |
| 31 | The North-eastern Hill Ranges | 26.2 |
| 18 | Deveron and Bogie Straths | 26 |
| 9 | Wooded Estates Around Old Deer | 25.8 |
| 25 | Muir of Dinnet | 25 |
| 22 | Donside | 24.9 |
| 28 | Central Wooded Estates | 24.8 |
| 36 | Howe of the Mearns | 23.8 |
| 21 | Lumsden Valley | 23.2 |
| 14 | Ythan Strath Farmland | 22.8 |
| 17 | Insch Basin | 22.8 |
| 26 | Howe of Alford | 22.8 |
| 35 | Garvock and Glenbervie | 22.8 |
| 23 | Cromar Farmlands | 22.1 |
| 10 | Eastern Coastal Agricultural Plain | 21.9 |
| 13 | Formartine Lowlands | 21.9 |
| 24 | Howe of Cromar | 21.9 |
| 6 | Sandstone Ridges and Valleys South of Troup | 21.2 |
| 15 | Northern Rolling Lowlands | 21 |
| 3 | Knockhill and Aberchirder | 20.9 |
| 27 | The Cromar Uplands | 20.8 |
| 19 | Daugh of Cairnborrow | 19.2 |
| 8 | Agricultural Heartland | 19 |
| 16 | Upland Ridges South of the Deveron | 19 |
| 33 | Kincardine Plateau | 18.9 |
| 2 | Western Coastal Farmland | 18 |
| 7 | North East Coastal Farmland | 15.9 |
| 5 | Coastal Farmland East of Macduff | 14 |

A1 19 Weighting 2.2 Ranking

| Unit ID | Unit Name | Score |
|-----------|--|-------------|
| 1 | Cliffs of the North and South East Coasts | 33 |
| 11 | Dunes and Beaches from Fraserburgh to Peterhead | 32 |
| 34 | Kincardine Cliffs | 32 |
| 12 | Formartine Links and Dunes | 31.5 |
| 20 | Grampian Outliers | 30 |
| 30 | Upper Deeside Estates | 30 |
| 29 | Deeside | 29.5 |
| 37 | Kincardine Links | 29 |
| 32 | The Mounth | 29 |
| 4 | Deveron and Upper Ythan Valleys | 28 |
| 31 | The North-eastern Hill Ranges | 27 |
| 18 | Deveron and Bogie Straths | 26 |
| 9 | Wooded Estates Around Old Deer | 25 |
| 25 | Muir of Dinnet | 25 |
| 22 | Donside | 24.5 |
| 28 | Central Wooded Estates | 24 |
| 21 | Lumsden Valley | 24 |
| 36 | Howe of the Mearns | 23 |
| 23 | Cromar Farmlands | 22.5 |
| 14 | Ythan Strath Farmland | 22 |
| 17 | Insch Basin | 22 |
| 26 | Howe of Alford | 22 |
| 35 | Garvock and Glenbervie | 22 |
| 6 | Sandstone Ridges and Valleys South of Troup | 22 |
| 10 | Eastern Coastal Agricultural Plain | 21.5 |
| 13 | Formartine Lowlands | 21.5 |
| 24 | Howe of Cromar | 21.5 |
| 15 | Northern Rolling Lowlands | 21 |
| 3 | Knockhill and Aberchirder | 20.5 |
| 27 | The Cromar Uplands | 20 |
| 19 | Daugh of Cairnborrow | 20 |
| 8 | Agricultural Heartland | 19 |
| 16 | Upland Ridges South of the Deveron | 19 |
| 33 | Kincardine Plateau | 18.5 |
| 2 | Western Coastal Farmland | 18 |
| 7 | North East Coastal Farmland | 15.5 |
| 5 | Coastal Farmland East of Macduff | 14 |