Extracts from SNH Landscape Character Assessment of Aberdeen (ALCA)
BRIMMOND and ELRICK HILLS

This area consists of smooth, rounded hills that reach a height of 266 metres (Brimmond Hill) and 200 metres (Elrick Hill). They form part of the distinctive curve of hills which encloses Aberdeen to the west. Panoramic views are possible from the summits of the hills: eastwards to the sea and westwards over the undulating farmland to Bennachie and the Grampian foothills.

Agriculture on the lower slopes of the hills gives way to unenclosed moorland closer to the summits. The faint outlines of abandoned fields can be seen on the higher slopes of Brimmond Hill. Elrick Hill has areas of mixed or broadleaved woodland up to its summit, but Brimmond Hill is treeless. This provides a contrast with the extensive areas of coniferous plantation which cap the other hills in the range around the west of the city.

The cluster of masts on the summit of Brimmond Hill is a distinctive feature for some distance, and is the dominant man-made element in the area. Otherwise, one or two traditional farm steadings, and some cottages within woodland on Elrick Hill, are the only signs of settlement within the area itself. A minor road runs between the two hills, and a maintenance track leads up to the masts on the summit. A footpath network has been laid out on the hills as part of the Four Hills Country Walks Project.

Summary of Distinctive Landscape Features:-

- A very visible area of high ground;
- Forms part of “ring” of hills around the western edge of the urban area;
- Unclosed moorland on Brimmond Hill;
- The presence of telecommunications masts;
- The area forms a strong, visible contrast with the urban area.

Sensitivity to Landscape Change

Visibility
This area is highly visible from many surrounding viewpoints, including much of the city and several of the main approach roads to Aberdeen.

Built Development, Transportation, Extraction / Landfill
The high visibility, steep slopes and open moorland that are characteristic of this area make it sensitive to new built development, transport infrastructure or landfill / extraction landuses. However, significantly increasing the number of masts on the summit of Brimmond Hill could have a greater clustering effect, and this might have a detrimental impact on the area.

Agriculture and Forestry
Moorland is the characteristic vegetation type and landuse of this area, which is unusual within the district. Anything that reduced the area or quality of this resource would have a significant effect on the character of the area and on views from outwith it. There is therefore limited or no potential for increasing forestry or agricultural influence in the area.
Recreation
The area is currently used as part of the Four Hills Country Walks Project in the hinterland of Aberdeen, with some areas of low-key car parking to service these routes. Extension in the form of built development, even small-scale, could be difficult to integrate.

Summary of Sensitivity to Landscape Change:-

The area forms a distinctive landmark from the city and surrounds, with a characteristic open moorland vegetation that is unusual within the district. There are very limited options for any development without seriously affecting the existing rural character that currently provides a visible strong contrast to the city.

Landscape Guidelines

Conserve
• Unenclosed moorland on Brimmond Hill should be maintained as a contrast to the vegetation on the other hills in the area west of the city; preparation of a moorland vegetation management plan is recommended;

Enhance
• Some native trees could be introduced on lower slopes, and on Elrick Hill to link with existing woodland patterns, without losing the open character of the hilltop on Brimmond Hill.
This is a large area of smoothly rounded hill ground which rises to a height of 233 metres. The area forms the southern side of the Don valley and the northern end of the belt of hills that curve around the western edge of Aberdeen. The height of the landform in the area affords long views in all directions: east and south over the city towards the sea, and north and west over the Don valley and farmland beyond.

Coniferous plantation and farmland constitute the dominant landuses of the area. The coniferous woodland distinctively caps the hill in a single plantation, down to a height of approximately 150 metres. Smaller plantations are located on the lower slopes to the west, north and east. Below these, mixed shelterbelts and clumps of trees divide the open areas of farmland. The shape of agricultural fields on the upper slopes is emphasised by the adjacent forestry which follows their boundaries. Lower on the hill, dykes and fences are both used to edge fields. In several places the boundary fences are reinforced by lines of gorse and, occasionally, trees.

Settlement is sparse, consisting of a few traditional - style farmsteads served by minor roads. The most obvious man-made features are the high voltage electricity lines cross the north-east corner of the area, and the A96 Aberdeen - Inverness trunk road which crosses the southern extremity of the area.

Summary of Distinctive Landscape Features:-

- The large - scale hill landform with rounded slopes;
- The mixture of woodland and agriculture, particularly the coniferous - capped hill;
- Its prominence in views from many parts of the city and surrounding area.

Sensitivity to Landscape Change

Visibility
The height of this area makes it highly visible, and it forms the termination of many viewpoints from within the city and several approach roads. Its eastern flank is adjacent to the airport and Dyce industrial estate, and the A96 trunk road skirts the hill to the south. It provides a visible rural contrast with the nearby areas of built development, and a pleasant backdrop to north western approaches to the city which includes air traffic at the airport.

Built Development
The sloping topography and consequent lack of level ground would make construction of built development difficult. The existing settlement pattern is of scattered individual traditional-style dwellings. On the upper slopes, the removal of forestry that would be required could heighten the impact of built development by interrupting the vegetation pattern which at present is large scale and simple.

Transportation
Additional roads in this area would probably be highly visible because of its elevation and topography.

Extraction / Landfill
The steepness and elevation of the area would make this kind of activity highly visible from adjacent roads and residential and commercial areas.
**Agriculture and Forestry**

The existing plantations and shelter belts could be extended, but the diversity of forestry and agriculture is notable on this visible area. A similar proportion of woodland to open space should be maintained to retain this characteristic.

**Recreation**

Access to the hill is limited in some places by the forestry, but many paths open to the public criss-cross the area. Part of the hill forms a section of the Four Hills Country Walks Project. Extensions to walking / cycling / horse-riding routes may be feasible without significantly altering the character of the area.

**Summary of Sensitivity to Landscape Change**:

Higher levels of development would alter the existing rural character of this area, which provides a visual contrast with nearby urban areas, which is a landmark in many views from within the city and surrounding areas, and an attractive feature to visitors entering from the north-west.

**Landscape Guidelines**

**Conserve / Manage**

- Manage woodland, including shelterbelts, to maintain the characteristic proportions of woodland to open space;
- Maintain boundary vegetation.
This is a wide, shallow, saucer-shaped landform which rises gently on all sides except the east, where a break in slope drops more steeply down to Bucksburn and the urban area. Heights range from 100 to 200 metres. Views are generally enclosed by the rising landform outwith the area. However, the altitude of the area allows views to the industrial estate at Dyce and the radar installation at Perwinnes, as well as the nearby urban edge.

Within the area agriculture is the main landuse. Large, square fields, divided by either post-and-wire fences or stone dykes, are used for both arable and pasture. There are no large areas of woodland. However, extensive shelterbelts, particularly in the southern half of the area, contribute to the variety of vegetation types. There are also some hedgerows, although they tend to be “gappy”. A moss occupies low-lying ground in the centre of the area.

Settlement is limited within the area, but consists of both modern and traditional buildings. The individual farmsteads and cottages that are the most common type of development tend to be traditional in style. A large institutional building is the most prominent modern development. Minor roads run round the edges of the area, but the marshy ground in the lowest part of the area precludes links directly across it. Part of the urban edge is adjacent to this area.

Summary of Distinctive Landscape Features:

- The wide, “saucer-shaped” landform;
- The open character of the central area around the moss;
- The range of hedgerow trees and shelterbelts, sometimes lining minor tracks (beech is the dominant species);
- Stone walls and occasional hedgerows form distinctive field boundaries;
- The abrupt edge of the urban area at Kepplehills Road / Bucksburn;
- Views to the hills west of Aberdeen, Dyce and Perwinnes.

Sensitivity to Landscape Change

Visibility
This area is quite highly visible, as it can be seen from the Kingswells road and from the surrounding residential edge of Bucksburn and Sheddocksley. It can also be seen from Brimmond Hill.

Built Development
The area is adjacent to the urban edge of the city, but it is visually separated from it by a line of mature trees. Within the area, the existing settlement pattern consists of individual houses that are quite widely scattered, with varying amounts of tree cover that help to integrate existing small-scale development. Much of the landform is gently sloping, and new development could easily interrupt the smooth basin topography that at present can be appreciated as a whole.

Transportation
The existing minor roads (to Kingswells) are busy, but tend to follow the contours of the landform, and are therefore - apart from their traffic - not highly visible.
Extraction / Landfill
The area would be sensitive to development of this type because of the open, sloping
landform and higher level views provided by the busy roads around the edge of the area.

Agriculture and Forestry
A characteristic of the area is the amount of definition provided by boundary vegetation -
gorse and occasional trees or hedges, as well as the more common stone dykes. The area
would be sensitive to any proposals that diluted this. There is scope for increasing the
amount of woodland in the area, if it were planted in the form of clumps or belts. Other,
larger-scale types of woodland could affect the open character of the central area.

Recreation
There are opportunities for informal provision for recreation, such as footpaths and cycle or
equestrian routes, on existing tracks.

Summary of Sensitivity to Landscape Change:-

The area has a distinctive landform and boundary vegetation. It is predominantly rural in
character despite its proximity to the city and views of parts of the built-up area.

Landscape Guidelines

Conserve / Manage
• Maintain the existing, distinctive tree / woodland pattern;
• Maintain the moss area for wildlife value;
• Maintain dykes and hedgerows.

Enhance
• Extend the tree pattern to help integrate urban edge.
DYCE PLAIN

Here, the Don valley widens out into a broad, shallow “basin” landform, in contrast to the more enclosed stretches of river immediately up- and down-stream. The topography of the area itself is predominantly flat and even, with the ground rising gently to the lower slopes of Kirkhill and Tyrebagger hills in the west from the river Don to the east.

The landuse in and around the area is varied. Commercial and residential areas and transport infrastructure dominate the developed parts of the area, but farmland is located on the fringe on the rising ground to the west. Stone dykes are the commonest type of field boundary, and they divide the sloping fields into a prominent pattern. Woodland cover is very limited in extent in this area. However, small pockets of woodland occur within the area, and these link with extensive coniferous plantations situated in the character area immediately to the west. Much of the farmland is improved grassland. There are some pockets of low scrubby vegetation or rough grassland in areas adjacent to the industrial estates.

Man-made elements dominate this area. Aberdeen Airport (Dyce) is located within the plain, with a large industrial estate adjacent to its western edge. Between the airport and the river lies the large residential area of Dyce, in which a small traditional-style core is surrounded by modern areas of more recent expansion. Roads encircle and cross the area, including the main road to Banff and the Inverness to Aberdeen trunk road. Wide views are possible to the undulating farmland that extends northwards from the opposite bank of the Don and eastwards to the city.

Summary of Distinctive Landscape Features:

- Topography - a plain gently sloping up from the River Don to hill land on the fringe;
- The predominantly open character with few trees;
- The proximity of the large, busy airport and heliport;
- The proximity of extensive industrial estates - a cluster of large-scale buildings of varied colours;
- The proximity of large residential areas;
- A strong field pattern formed by stone dykes;
- Wide views from higher viewpoints to farmland and hills as well as the urban area.

Sensitivity to Landscape Change

Visibility
This area is highly visible despite its relatively low altitude, as it can be seen from the Aberdeen - Inverness trunk road and railway line, as well as from several nearby built-up areas. It can, of course, also be seen from the airport, which is the point of entry to Aberdeen for many people.
Built Development
There is already such an extent of built development within and near the area that extension to it might be fairly easily accommodated in visual terms, provided that the skyline was not breached. However, it may be that the physical capacity of lower-lying flatter ground has almost been reached. At present, development in the area is visually "contained" by the lower slopes of Tyrebagger Hill. This prevents the scale and number of the buildings being overwhelming, and brings a rural character in visual proximity to parts of the urban area. Expansion of development above a certain height (probably in the region of 100 metres) would compromise this.

Transportation
As with built development, construction of transport infrastructure on the flatter, lower ground would be unlikely to have a significant impact. On higher ground, the upgrading of routes or construction of new ones would probably be highly visible.

Extraction / Landfill
Disused quarries exist on the rising slopes, but they are becoming overgrown and are therefore less highly visible. New quarrying or landfill on the higher areas, or re-opening of the existing quarries, however, would open them to view from some distance. There is little scope for extraction or landfill on the flatter ground, which is close to either the airport or existing development.

Agriculture and Forestry
The agricultural fringe on the higher ground forms a significant component of this area. The field boundaries are generally formed from stone dykes, and this forms a distinctive element in the landscape that is noticeable when arriving in Aberdeen by air when the dykes contribute to the recognisably local character of the city.

Recreation
The opportunities for recreation are limited by the existing amount of development. However, there are possibilities of low-key routes linking with the nearby Four Hills Country Walk Project, and perhaps also for riverside routes.

Summary of Sensitivity to Landscape Change:-

It is a highly visible area which is located near to several main approaches to the city. Parts of it have a distinctive rural character at present. Development higher up the hillside would be highly visible and prominent.

Landscape Guidelines

Conserve / Manage
• Avoid expansion higher up the surrounding land;
• Maintain stone dykes.

Enhance
• Increase the amount of tree planting, to link with well-wooded adjacent areas, and to help to screen and integrate existing development;
• Tree planting along the river and road-sides would help to screen views of the industrial estate from nearby historical sites such as the Dyce churchyard.
PERWINNES

The topography of this area is gently rolling, with shallow basins at both north and south centred on the depressions of Perwinnes Moss and Corby Loch respectively. The ground varies in height from approximately 65 metres to 100 metres at the highest point. It is rather higher than adjacent character areas, and wide views are therefore possible from it. In the south the edge of the urban development can be seen, but in most directions the views are of open farmland and, more distantly, areas of woodland.

Improved pasture and rough grassland form the main vegetation types, with post-and-wire fences being the usual type of field boundary. There are only small areas of woodland. To the north there is an area of open water and marshy ground. There is also a small area of marsh vegetation, which is of botanical interest and designated as a SSSI, in the extreme south of the area at Scotstown Moor. Sand extraction occurs on the eastern edge of the area.

The area itself is sparsely settled, principally in the form of scattered traditional farmsteads, although it borders the expanded Bridge of Don housing estates to the east. A busy minor road, the B997 crosses the area, and other smaller roads also traverse it. The most obvious man-made element is the radar installation at Perwinnes. The movement and large size of the radars increase their visibility.

Summary of Distinctive Landscape Features:

- The presence of Corby Loch and Perwinnes Moss and their nature conservation interests;
- Few trees, and fences rather than dykes as field boundaries;
- The sparse, scattered settlement pattern;
- The radar installation;
- Mineral extraction;

Sensitivity to Landscape Change

Visibility
This area has a low visibility, being hidden from view from the city, and generally seen only from the minor, but busy, roads that pass through it.

Built Development
The lack of adjacent infrastructure, the preponderance of poorly drained ground, the nearby local nature reserve at Scotstown Moor, and the lack of visual continuation with the existing urban fringe all combine to make this area sensitive to development.

Transportation
The existing minor road through the area is very busy with both car and commercial traffic. Widening of current roads could probably be incorporated quite easily, but structures that crossed the bowl-shaped terrain would be obtrusive.

Extraction / Landfill
There are some existing extractive sites in the area and nearby. The proximity of nature conservation interests limits the scope for extending these.
Agriculture and Forestry
Some new planting could link into adjoining areas of existing woodland, e.g. around the Ashwood development area. Large-scale planting would alter the existing open-ness of much of the character area. The predominant landuse is agricultural, and the area would be sensitive to any changes that altered its current open character.

Recreation
The busy roads and the nearby nature conservation interests could limit the potential of this area for informal recreation. However, low-key “cross-country” routes for pedestrian and cycle or equestrian use could be implemented without detriment to the landscape character.

Summary of Sensitivity to Landscape Change:-

The area has an open rural character and a rolling topography that would make it sensitive to development. The separateness of the area from the city means that it is generally hidden from wider views.

Landscape Guidelines

Conserve
- Maintain the open character of the area;
- Maintain nature conservation interests around Corby Loch and Perwinnes Moss.

Enhance
- Some small areas of tree planting could be introduced.
This area has a smoothly undulating topography, ranging in height from 50 to 100 metres. The land slopes down eastwards towards the coast. Views are limited by rising land to the west, and, at a greater distance, to the south. Wider views are possible northwards over similar land and eastwards towards the sea.

Agriculture - both arable and grazing - is the dominant landuse. The fields, which are medium-sized, are divided by dykes. These are generally in poor condition and are frequently reinforced by post-and-wire fences. Gorse is quite common along field boundaries and there are occasional hedgerows, particularly in the north of the area. There are no large areas of woodland, but the presence of single lines of trees as slender shelterbelts forms a significant landscape feature.

Settlement is sparse, comprising scattered traditional-style farmsteads. Outwith the area views to the urban residential and commercial areas at Denmore are possible, and also to the radar station at Perwinne. Some of the extensive gravel workings situated to the east of the area are now landfill sites; others have been restored to agricultural use.

Summary of Distinctive Landscape Features:
- Agriculture dominant, with little woodland;
- The distinctive shelterbelts;
- Sparse settlement;
- Stone dykes and occasional hedgerows as field boundaries;
- Views eastward to the sea;
- Views to the urban edge.

Sensitivity to Landscape Change

Visibility
This area is visible from several areas. These include the A92 Aberdeen - Peterhead trunk road; parts of the urban area at Bridge of Don; and, from a distance, the blocks of flats at Northfield.

Built Development
At present there are relatively few buildings within the area. They consist mostly of individual steadings that are widely scattered and generally traditional in style. The undulating topography of the area has influenced the settlement pattern, with most buildings being located in sheltered hollows as well as being associated with a group of trees. Groups of buildings, other than that of a single farmstead, tend not to occur. Large-scale development would not fit in with the existing pattern. Buildings are located below the skyline when viewed from the A92 or other roads.

Transportation
The existing road network within the area consists of minor roads, generally oriented north - south with smaller connecting routes running east - west. Any new routes, such as the western peripheral road, that crossed the undulating landform of this area could be obtrusive, and should be carefully sited to follow the topography as much as possible.
Extraction / Landfill
Extraction on higher ground would be difficult to screen - it would involve bunding and tree belts, which would take some time to become effective. Some existing sites are located on lower ground, where they are generally better or more easily screened.

Agriculture and Forestry
The extent of agriculture in this area is a notable characteristic. Stone dykes are prominent as field boundaries, and the area would be sensitive to alterations to this pattern. Large or medium-sized blocks of woodland would tend to alter the character, although extension of the tree belts or small tree groups around buildings, may not.

Recreation
Access to the area is limited and the minor roads are quite busy. The views from the area, and the diversity of landform and vegetation, mean that the area could be attractive for informal recreation. It is also close to Scotstown Moor, to which links might be established. Low-key recreational development would be unlikely to significantly affect the landscape character of the area.

Summary of Sensitivity to Landscape Change:

The open, agricultural, and relatively un-settled character, together with the undulating landform are notable, and could make new development difficult to locate here. Buildings are accommodated below the skyline.

Landscape Guidelines

Conserve / Manage
- Manage tree belts to ensure their retention;
- Maintain stone dyke field boundaries;
- Maintain hedgerows.

Enhance
- Expand areas of tree belts.
MURCAR

AREA 7

The landform of this area is unvaried, with a gentle overall slope from a height of 50 metres in the west to 20 metres near the coast. Extensive views in all directions are possible, particularly out over the sea and along the coast.

Agriculture, principally grazing, is the dominant landuse. The large fields are divided by dykes and fences. There is no forestry, although there are clumps of trees around many of the buildings in the area, and, infrequently, thin lines of trees, or gorse, along field boundaries.

The Aberdeen to Peterhead trunk road runs through the area, and several cottages and farmsteads are located along it or are accessed from it. These buildings occur frequently and are mostly traditional in style. Some buildings have been extended beyond their original size and therefore have a greater impact, for example the hotel at Mill of Mundurno. The urban fringe is prominent, with large commercial buildings in a range of corporate liveries creating a colourful edge to the city approaches. Landfill sites are located to the north and west of the area, based on old mineral extraction areas.

Summary of Distinctive Landscape Features:

- The low-lying, flattish topography;
- The open character;
- Occasional clumps of trees around traditional buildings;
- Many scattered houses;
- The abrupt urban edge at industrial estate;
- The presence of the trunk road;
- The presence of landfill sites;
- Views to sea and along coast.

Sensitivity to Landscape Change

Visibility
This area lies on one of the main approach roads to Aberdeen, the A92 trunk road from Peterhead, and is therefore highly visible.

Built Development
The existing settlement pattern consists of frequent, scattered houses that are often associated with the road and occasionally occur in small groups. Large-scale commercial development is present on the southern edge of the development. Extension of the present road-side development pattern could lead to ribbon development, and there is no visible precedent for large-scale housing. There is an existing large-scale industrial / commercial estate on the urban edge, and other, separate industrial areas such as a cement works within the area. The coalescence of these areas would significantly increase their impact and scale.

Transportation
No significant change to the existing road system that would have a major impact on the landscape is likely. The dual-carriageway trunk road is already a major feature of the landscape.
Extraction / Landfill
Former extractive areas, which are currently being landfilled with waste, exist to the west of the area. Their degree of visibility depends on how successful the screening treatment of the workings is. Screening is most effective where it echoes the rolling nature of the surrounding landform.

Agriculture and Forestry
At present, much of the area consists of urban fringe agriculture. The area would be sensitive to anything that altered its wide, open nature. There are a few low stone dykes as field boundaries, and occasional hedge remnants (principally gorse and hawthorn). Solid blocks of woodland would lessen the openness of the area, although some small tree groups could be accommodated, as could screen plantings for existing development on the western edge of the area, where it would link visually with inland character areas beyond.

Recreation
Golf courses on the adjacent links are currently the main recreational resource near this area. There is limited public access to the coast as a result. There is little existing provision for formal or informal recreation.

Summary of Sensitivity to Landscape Change:-

This is an open, coastal landscape with considerable amounts of existing development, but which is sensitive to new development in terms of its siting and integration. Its location on the main northern road access to the city increases its visibility and sensitivity to the impacts of development.

Landscape Guidelines

Enhancement
- Planting trees around buildings could echo the pattern of traditional development and aid integration into the landscape without losing its characteristic open-ness.
- Management of existing planting / new planting at the industrial estate could help to integrate it with the surrounding more rural landscape.
KINGSWELLS

Here, there is an undulating topography that rises to hilly ground on its west and south sides. Cloghill and Newpark Hill reach heights of 200 and 184 metres respectively. To the north, the ground rises to Brimmond Hill which lies just outside the character area. The lowest point in the area, at its eastern end, lies at approximately 140 metres. Views are limited to the north, west, and south by the higher surrounding ground. Eastwards, they extend across the flatter ground of the adjacent area, but beyond this the drop in height generally precludes views to the city, which is located on lower ground east of the break in slope.

Land use is varied, with agriculture, woodland and developed areas all occurring within or immediately adjacent to the area. The small to medium-sized fields, in which pasture is more common than arable crops, are bounded by dykes more often than fences. The boundaries are often reinforced by single trees and gorse. Several of the stone walls are notable examples of consumption dykes. The area is well-wooded, although this is due to the presence of tree clumps, boundary trees and shelterbelts rather than large areas of woodland. Tree species are both broadleaved and coniferous.

The adjacent urban area of Kingswells visually dominates the area. The modern settlement has developed to the north of the original village. In some areas its edges have been planted with trees, although these have not yet reached a significant size, and the development tends to form an abrupt edge with the adjacent landscape. One minor but busy road crosses the area, and minor tracks branch from it. Views to the masts on Brimmond Hill are possible.

Summary of Distinctive Landscape Features:

- The varied topography;
- The amount and variety of woodland forms - shelterbelts, clumps and boundary trees;
- Stone dykes (including notable examples of consumption dykes) dividing farmland into small fields;
- Abrupt urban edge of parts of Kingswells immediately adjoining the character area;
- The degree of visual enclosure due to the surrounding landform;
- Views to masts on Brimmond Hill.

Sensitivity to Landscape Change

Visibility
The area has a medium level of visibility. Although it is fairly well visually contained by rising ground, thereby limiting inward views from outside the area, the road running through it is busy.

Built Development
The intimate scale of the area and the rising slopes of the land limit the potential for development. There is no precedent for commercial or industrial development, and the scale of the area and the proximity of a large residential community would make its location difficult.
Transportation
The Western Peripheral Route alignment, if it ran through this area, should take particular account of the many fine consumption dykes that are such a feature here. The edge of the road should be carefully planned, preferably avoiding continuous lines of trees but with planting in parts, to reflect the existing pattern of trees in this landscape. Other road developments would be obtrusive given the sloping landform.

Extraction / Landfill
This area would be sensitive to this type of development, as it would be highly visible on the slopes of the area, and, even if it were located on lower ground, would be close to housing and a busy transport corridor.

Agriculture and Forestry
This area would be sensitive to a further reduction in rural character, despite the location of Kingswells within it. Agriculture, and the notable consumption dykes that frequently form field boundaries, is a major part of this. The varied woodland is also characteristic, generally occurring in small clumps or belts and located on higher slopes and around hill tops. This pattern could be extended a little without losing the present character of the area.

Recreation
Low-key informal recreation could be appropriate. Walks or cycle routes following the field dykes could provide educational opportunities.

Summary of Sensitivity to Landscape Change:
This is a small-scale area with a generally rural character, containing notable consumption dyke field boundaries, and adjacent to a discrete large settlement.

Landscape Guidelines

Conserve / Manage
- Maintain and manage the characteristic woodland;
- Maintain stone dykes.

Enhance
- Increase structure planting around settlement
CRAIBSTONE

This area has a strongly undulating, hummocky landform, which forms a small-scale landscape. It ranges from 80 to 150 metres in height and it forms a distinctive approach to the city from the north-west. Westwards, views are limited by the rising ground at Tyrebagger, but eastwards long views are possible over the city and the lower Don valley to the sea.

Woodland and agriculture are the most significant landuses. The area is well-wooded with coniferous forestry plantations being dominant. Grazing is more common than arable, with the fields being divided by either stone dykes or post-and-wire fences. Gorse is present along some field boundaries.

Within the area settlement is sparse. Occasional traditional-style farmsteads and cottages are located both as isolated buildings and in small clusters at road junctions. A research institute and college are located in the area. The college is in well-wooded grounds, and not visible from the main road, while the research institute is open to view from the Aberdeen-Inverness trunk road which runs through the area. The car parks and forest walks located within the coniferous plantations are hidden from view from the road.

Summary of Distinctive Landscape Features:-

- The hummocky, small-scale landform;
- The proportion and variety of woodland;
- Stone dykes as field boundaries;
- The research institute complex;
- Views eastwards to the city and coast, forming part of a distinctive approach to Aberdeen.

Sensitivity to Landscape Change

Visibility
This area is highly visible from the A96 trunk road, the main north-western approach route to the city. It has a strongly hummocky landform that frames distinctive views eastwards to the coast.

Built Development
The small-scale, hummocky landform and the sparse settlement pattern make this area highly sensitive to development.

Transportation
The A96 route corridor follows a low alignment through the area. Currently a dual carriageway, any widening would have a significant impact on the small-scale landscape around it. Any new routes that followed a different alignment would be likely to have an even greater impact on the area.
Extraction / Landfill
The scale and visibility of the landscape is such that this type of development would be likely to have considerable impacts. The nature of the undulating landform could make screening and restoration difficult.

Agriculture and Forestry
The existing mix of open space and woodland is characteristic and emphasises the distinctive landform. Significant change to it would have a high impact on the area.

Recreation
There is existing use of the forests in the area for informal recreation, with forest walks, wayfaring and sculpture trails, and associated car parks. Extension to this within the forest may be possible without detriment to the existing character.

Summary of Sensitivity to Landscape Change:-

The high visibility of the area and its small-scale and undulating landform would make it sensitive to any built development. In addition, the rural character of the area provides a contrast with the nearby urban area.

Landscape Guidelines

Conserve / Manage
- Ensure retention of some clear views to the characteristic hummocky landform;
- Manage the woodland to retain the diversity of tree cover to open space in the area;
- Maintain stone dykes.
BRAES OF DON                  AREA 4

This area has a very gently rolling - almost flat - topography, that varies in height by only about 20 metres in total. At its southern edge a change in slope forms a shoulder above the northern bank of the lower Don valley. Views are of similar nearby areas of wooded, agricultural land. Towards the south of the area there are glimpses of the lower Don valley and the city.

Within the area, agriculture and woodland are the main landuses, although an area of residential development is also located within and adjoining it. The area is well-wooded, with approximately one-third of its area being under trees. In the north and west these trees are principally located in large areas of woodland, either mixed or broad-leaved, whereas to the east and south shelterbelts and clumps of trees are more dominant. The line of mature trees along the ridgeline above the Don valley at Whitestripes is a distinctive landmark for some distance. Grandholme Moss is a noticeable feature on the lower ground of the area. The farmland is more pasture than arable, with the land divided into medium-sized fields by both stone dykes and post-and-wire fences.

Within the area itself there is little visible development. High voltage power lines cross the area from north to south, and the area is served by several minor, but busy, roads. The housing area on the north-western edge of Bridge of Don forms the major man-made element adjacent to the area, although it is visible from only certain points within the zone.

Summary of Distinctive Landscape Features:-

- The mixture of farmland and woodland;
- The presence of distinctive shelterbelts;
- The "un-softened" edge to urban development within the area;
- Varying degrees of visibility of residential development;
- Nature conservation interests on Grandholme Moss;
- The presence of stone dykes as field boundaries.

Sensitivity to Landscape Change

Visibility
In the main, this area cannot be seen from many other viewpoints, but the row of mature ridgeline trees on the southern edge of the area at Whitestripes is a landmark that is visible from many parts of the city.

Built Development
Glimpses of the housing at Bridge of Don are possible, but it is visually contained by significant lines of boundary trees. Apart from this urban edge, there are only scattered isolated houses, which are generally associated with small clumps of trees.

Transportation
Any new roads traversing the area would have significant impacts, but improvements, such as minor widening of existing roads, would be unlikely to have a major visual effect.

Extraction / Landfill
The proximity of residential development and the vegetation pattern in the area would make it difficult to integrate this type of development into the landscape.
Agriculture and Forestry
There is a high proportion of woodland in the area at present, in a variety of forms ranging from plantation to shelterbelts. New planting could link into this fairly easily. Discrete blocks and a range of species, with the retention of areas of open space, would not conflict with the existing pattern. The stone dyke field boundaries emphasise the field pattern.

Recreation
The area has considerable potential for cycle, pedestrian and equestrian routes, which could be easily accessed from the Bridge of Don housing area. This would be likely to have minimal landscape impacts. On open ground, however, any formalised facilities including buildings and an associated infrastructure of car parks, lighting and roads could be obtrusive.

Summary of Sensitivity to Landscape Change:-

The area has a degree of visual separation of the area from the city, and has a predominantly rural character. The existing woodland pattern is distinctive, and is important in reducing the visual impacts of nearby development in adjacent landscape character areas. Part of the woodland forms a distinctive landmark from the city.

Landscape Guidelines

Conserve / Manage
- Tree and woodland management to retain a balance between open and wooded ground and retain the distinctive tree belt landmark;
- Maintain the stone dykes - particularly the distinctive coursed dykes associated with shelterbelts (that usually comprise beech trees).
LOWER DON VALLEY

This area is a large valley with a narrow floodplain through which the River Don winds. At the eastern end, nearer the sea, the river becomes more constricted, flowing between tightly enclosing, steep banks. Further west, the valley sides are located further from the river and are more gently sloping. Views outwith the valley are restricted, and from higher viewpoints on the sides the river is often hidden from view. The valley stretches through the urban area. It is therefore visible to many people from the transport corridor which follows the valley; from the bridging points of the river; or from the residential areas.

A variety of landuses is present in the area. Recreational use is located on parts of the valley floor, where the flat ground is used for sports pitches, as well as on higher ground, for example at the Aberdeen University playing fields. In the upper reaches on the north bank, agriculture (both grassland and arable) is more prevalent. Woodland occurs extensively throughout the area, on the steep valley sides downstream, and as policy woodland around Grampolmole at the western end of the area. In between, shelterbelts and clumps of trees are prominent.

There are extensive man-made elements in the area. Large-scale residential areas are situated on the slopes of the lower valley, and several industrial premises are located on the valley floor or low on the sides. These are principally paper and textile mills, but also include other uses, for example a dairy. Main roads and a railway line form a transport corridor that makes use of the valley landform. Three bridges cross the river, two of which, at Persley and Donmouth, are prominent features. They also provide striking viewpoints of the area.

Summary of Distinctive Landscape Features:

- The large-scale valley landform;
- The amount and diversity of woodland and tree planting, particularly the shelterbelts;
- The balance between open and built-up areas;
- The occasional use of stone dykes as field boundaries;
- Transport and industrial uses associated with the valley and the river;
- Visibility of parts of the open valley slopes from within the city;
- Views along the valley.

Sensitivity to Landscape Change

Visibility

Much of this area is highly visible from a range of viewpoints that include large areas of residential development; major city road routes; and the Aberdeen - Inverness railway line.

Built Development

The upstream parts of the area have a much lower number of buildings than the downstream areas. However, these are often in close proximity to large scale industrial development, and have views across to residential areas of the city. Throughout the area either the flood plain or the sloping topography of the valley sides tend to preclude development. In the highly developed lower section of the area the areas of open space make a significant contribution to the character of the area on the highly visible side slopes of the valley. Infilling these areas would be detrimental to the existing landscape character and would have significant visual impacts from many viewpoints.
Transportation
Any new roads traversing north to south would require embankments or bridges and would be visually obtrusive. The major roads in and near the area are all busy. They tend to be open to view and unscreened by hedgerows or roadside trees.

Extraction / Landfill
Such development would be likely to have significant impacts due to the proximity of residential areas and the topography of the area.

Agriculture and Forestry
In both parts of the area, landscape structure is provided by woodland. Upstream, mostly deciduous woodland dominates the steep river banks, and it also occurs in clumps and belts away from the river. Some extension to this farm woodland type of landscape could be carried out without losing the rural aspects of the area, and could also increase the screening of the factories that are one of its features. Downstream, the area will become sensitive in the future to the over-maturity, and possible loss, of the even-aged shelterbelts that are so distinctive.

Recreation
The river valley and its associated transport corridor could provide opportunities for informal recreation routes out of the city. Downstream, some of the existing areas of open space consist of sports pitches.

Summary of Sensitivity to Landscape Change:-

The area has a distinctive landform, being one of the main river valleys of Aberdeen. The mixture of open space to developed areas is characteristic, as is the extent and variety of woodland; these attributes would be sensitive to change.

Landscape Guidelines

Conserve / Manage
- Tree and woodland management and retention, particularly where it “softens” urban and industrial development;
- Maintain stone dykes;
- Retain open areas to maintain the character of the area and its characteristic skyline.

Enhance
- Extend tree planting along Balgownie Road to continue the distinctive sky-line trees;
- The shelterbelt pattern could be extended to the edge of housing areas, to better integrate these areas with the landscape;
- Tree and shrub planting along the roadsides could help to screen traffic from residential areas as well as vice versa;
- Investigate the possibilities of encouraging tree planting within gardens to help integrate the housing areas with their surroundings.
UPPER DON VALLEY

This area consists of the southern side of a valley landform that is enclosed by gently sloping and undulating hills. The landform continues beyond the river Don which marks the administrative boundary. The valley character is strong in this area, in contrast to both down-stream and up-stream where the topography becomes flatter and wider and loses much of its enclosing nature. The hillsides channel long views along the east-west trending valley and block views to north and south. To both east and west the topography changes and wider views beyond the Don valley can be glimpsed, for example to the industrial estate at Dyce.

The main landuses are agriculture and woodland. The valley floor and lower hill-slopes are farmed, the fields being divided by a mixture of dykes and fences. There is a significant amount of woodland in this and adjacent areas. Woodland, generally consisting of broadleaved species, occurs as occasional lines of boundary trees and as clumps. Southwards, where the land rises, the amount of tree cover increases to include large areas of planted woodland and forestry, which is frequently coniferous.

The area is relatively sparsely settled, with occasional traditional farmsteads located on the lower hill slopes; there are none on higher ground. The flood plain itself is free of housing but the ruins of St Fergus’ Church at Dyce with its adjacent cemetery, sited on a spur of higher ground near the river, are a feature. A line of high voltage power lines follows the line of the valley, the pylons descending the western end of the hillside to run eastwards along the valley floor. Also prominent on the low flat area is a large sand extraction site at the eastern end of the character area. Liddell’s Monument, a small masonry obelisk, is located within the quarry and it stands on an island remnant of high ground amongst the workings. The remnants of the gravel ridge may hold evidence of Bronze Age activity.

Summary of Distinctive Landscape Features:-

• The large-scale valley landform;
• The amount and variety of tree cover, occurring as clumps, belts and in sizeable areas of woodland;
• Prominent sand extraction site;
• St Fergus’ Church and Liddell’s Monument
• Views to River Don;
• Views eastwards to adjacent urban and industrial areas, and westwards to distant hills.

Sensitivity to Landscape Change

Visibility
This area is not visible from the main urban area. However, it is open to views from the busy minor road to Hatton of Fintry nearby. Despite its proximity to Aberdeen, it has a strongly rural character.
Built Development
There is no visible precedent within the area for large scale residential, industrial or commercial built development. The existing settlement pattern is of individual or very small loose clusters of houses. The floodplain location precludes built development and the flat land would prevent effective topographic screening from elevated ground in adjacent areas. Land not adjacent to the river is sloping, and development of it could be visually obtrusive.

Transportation
As a river valley, the existing communication routes (a minor road and the Aberdeen-Inverness railway line) follow the line of the valley. Any new routes that did not follow this pattern would involve river crossings and would be highly visible.

Extraction / Landfill
There is an existing large gravel pit in the base of the valley. Previous areas have been restored to agricultural use, but the current working area is highly visible. There are also areas set aside for the processing and storage of building materials. An increase in the proportion of worked to restored area would have a consequent visual impact.

Agriculture / Forestry
The existing pattern of woodland is a feature of the area, and provides the opportunity for some extension without significantly altering its character. An intention to retain similar levels of open space, allowing views to the river, would limit the amount of woodland that could be planted, although road-side trees and occasional tree clumps could be accommodated. Felling of areas of forestry in adjacent character areas would have a visual impact on this area.

Recreation
The minor roads through the area are generally quiet, and may allow use for cycle routes. The river itself is an attractive element, and may provide the opportunity for a riverside walk or cycle route, using the valley as a physical link between the rural hinterland and the city.

Summary of Sensitivity to Landscape Change:-
Development on the floodplain or rising ground would be prominent or difficult to screen. The area has a rural character despite its proximity to the city.

Landscape Guidelines

Conserve / Manage
- Manage woodland to retain the well-wooded characteristic of the area.
- Felling coupes and any new way-leaves would need to be carefully sited and designed in this area, which is notable for its lack of straight lines (river meanders, hills are undulating)
- Retain open space near the river
- Maintain stone dyke boundaries.

Restore
- Reinstatement / restoration of quarry workings to follow existing valley floor pattern.
ABERDEEN LINKS

This is an area of distinctive topography consisting of shore, dunes and links. It is generally horizontal in form, although the short, steep seaward slopes of the dunes and promenade introduce minor variety to this. The height rises from sea level to a maximum of twenty metres. Views are panoramic and extensive, following the north-south sweep of the coast from the lighthouse at Girdle Ness in the south to fade out northwards towards Balmedie and Forvie. Inland, views are possible over the urban edge to Tyrebagger Hill and the rising ground near it.

Landuse is mainly recreational although part of the area, at Donmouth where the river reaches the sea, is designated as a nature reserve. Further north, where golf courses occupy the links, access is more restricted. Typical dune vegetation of marram grass with finer, close mown expanses of grass further inland form the main vegetation types. At Donmouth in particular there is coastal erosion, with the dunes being reduced by wave action. There are few trees, apart from the ornamental planted areas near the exhibition complex on the periphery of the area.

The esplanade and the buildings which are located on the inland side of it are the main man-made elements within the zone. Various recreational facilities, such as a golf driving range and a major football stadium, are located on the edge of the area. Two golf courses are located north of the Don. The eastern periphery of the city, with high-rise flats, forms an abrupt inland edge to the zone. In the north, away from the urban area, settlement is sparse, being limited to occasional farmsteads and golf clubhouses. The bridge across the river Don is a traditional masonry structure which carries the main road north out of the city.

Summary of Distinctive Landscape Features:-

- The coastal topography and features - dunes, beach, links;
- A strong contrast with the adjacent urban edge (which is rather cluttered and abrupt);
- Recreational facilities and buildings, some with typical seafront architecture;
- Lengthy coastal views.

Sensitivity to Landscape Change

Visibility
This is an area that is highly visible from the residential areas that abut it; from the many recreational and sports facilities that lie adjacent to it; and also from the popular esplanade route that passes through it.

Built Development
The open space that surrounds the existing buildings is valuable as a contrast with the urban edge and as a visual link with the beach and shore. It would be highly sensitive to new built development.

Transportation
The esplanade is very busy with traffic as well as pedestrians. It is elevated in relation to the surrounding land and any new routes linking with it, therefore, would be likely to have a significant impact on the area.
Extraction / Landfill
There is historical precedent for using the area for dumping (long since restored), but any new extraction or landfill developments would be likely to have unacceptably high impacts.

Agriculture and Forestry
There is no agriculture in the area. There is some tree planting, with scope for extending the planting of trees in groups around the housing and some recreational developments to help ameliorate the impact of the abrupt urban edge.

Recreation
Recreation is the primary use of the area - golf; football; informal use of open areas; the promenade; and the beach itself. The area would be sensitive to new built developments with the associated car parking, roads etc., due to its high visibility.

Summary of Sensitivity to Landscape Change:-
This is a highly visible area of distinctive seafront character which would be sensitive to new built development.

Landscape Guidelines

Conserve / Manage
- Retain distinctive seafront features / architecture;
- Maintain the open character, in particular the large expanse of open space south of Dornmouth;
- Manage coastal erosion;
- Manage recreational pressure.

Enhance
- Some tree and shrub planting on the inland edge could be accommodated without losing the characteristic open-ness of most of the area, and should help to “soften” the urban edge;
- Varying the mowing regimes of the open grassed areas could introduce visual variety and increase the wildlife potential of the area.
EAST ELRICK

This area has a plateau-like landform. Predominantly flat at its lower, eastern end, it rises gradually to the lower slopes of Brimmond Hill to the west. The variation in height is from 140 to 190 metres, approximately.

Agriculture is the major landuse, with improved pasture being the dominant vegetation type. Part of the area is used as experimental ground by the nearby agricultural college at Craibstone. The fields are divided by fences, or by stone dykes. Many of the dykes are overgrown, and occasional lines of scrubbier vegetation follow old field boundaries. Small boundary trees are infrequently dotted along some fence lines.

The minor roads - some single track with passing places - which cross the area are the main man-made feature within the area itself. However, there are views to the masts on Brimmond Hill, and the industrial estate and airport at Dyce. Extensive views are possible to the north to Tyrebagger Hill, Dyce, and beyond to the Gordon countryside. Brimmond Hill immediately to the west blocks any more distant views in that direction, and extensive coniferous plantations immediately east of the area limit eastward views. Southwards, the landform itself prevents long views, as it forms a wide shoulder at Kepplestone / Kirkhill.

Summary of Distinctive Landscape Features:-

• The plateau landform, forming a foreground to Brimmond Hill;
• The open character with very few trees;
• Predominantly agricultural land use;
• Extensive views.

Sensitivity to Landscape Change

Visibility
The visibility of this flat, open area is low to medium. Apart from the minor roads that cross it the area can be seen only from some distance away, for example from Dyce, as part of the setting for Brimmond Hill.

Built Development
The area is largely undeveloped and its altitude makes it visible from, and closely associated with, the adjacent hills. It is therefore sensitive to further development.

Transportation
Other than widening the existing minor roads, there is little opportunity for new transport infrastructure, given the terrain and location of the area. New routes would have a major impact in this character area.

Extraction / Landfill
There is some small-scale existing tipping, but there is no tree cover or landform variation to screen further development of this sort.
Agriculture and Forestry
Most of the area is managed as agricultural land by Craibstone College. The field pattern is not as distinct as elsewhere in the district, where stone dykes are more frequently used as field boundaries. However, there are occasional individual trees along boundaries which are distinctive, because the altitude of the area means that they are frequently seen silhouetted against the sky. There is limited scope for increasing the amount of woodland in the area without compromising the current characteristically open nature of the area.

Recreation
There is some potential for cycling routes along the minor roads, and linking the Four Hills project with housing areas on the edge of the city. There are few opportunities for formal recreation. Although a golf course is being constructed just beyond the north-western edge of the area, it is unlikely to be highly visible from the area.

Summary of Sensitivity to Landscape Change:-

The area is predominantly rural in character, and it acts as a foreground to Brimmond Hill. It is open rather than wooded, and there is little existing development.

Landscape Guidelines

Conserve / Manage
- Manage existing hedgerow trees;
- Restore stone dykes.

Enhance
- Consider limited expansion to the numbers of boundary trees.
Extracts from SNH Landscape Character Assessment of South and Central Aberdeenshire (SCALCA)
5.9 FORMARTINE LOWLANDS

5.9.1 Landscape Description

The Formartine Lowlands (Area 11) comprise a tract of gently rolling farmland that forms a backdrop to The Coastal Farmland identified in the Banff and Buchan Assessment (Cobham Resource Consultants, 1997). Views of the sea are an aspect of its character but in most other ways it is similar to the other Agricultural Heartland areas identified in this assessment.

The land rises gradually to the west, and from vantage points east of Oldmeldrum views over much of the area are possible. It overlies a mixed lithology of schists, gabbrons and granite which has been eroded indiscriminately, possibly by the sea rather than by ice.

Much of the area was reclaimed from moorland to accommodate resettled crofters, but now provides a rich agricultural resource. Its land comprises open geometric fields of mixed farming divided by post and wire fences or derelict dry stone dykes. Woodland is scarce and that which occurs, often associated with estates policies, is prominent as a result. The area is liberally scattered with settlement. Most farms are unsheathed by trees. Silos and other tall structures such as pylons are prominent against the horizon.

The gently eastward falling relief allows long views across some areas and, when including the distant horizon of the North Sea, the landscape provides a tremendous sense of space which distract from the clutter of near views.

Post and wire field boundaries

Transmission lines

Large geometric fields

Prominent trees

Large farms
5.9.2 Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating lowland plateau.
- Low lying hollows of poorly drained, scrubby, rushy pasture supporting rough grazing for sheep.
- Extensive area of open farmland with large geometric fields with post and wire fencing.
- Drystone dykes are rare owing to absence of rocks.
- Prominent lines of trees and estates such as Pitmeddon and Auchmacoy with associated woodlands giving local variation in character.
- Relatively large, compact settlements such as Pitmeddon, Ellon, Newmachar and Oldmeldrum.
- Large farms with modern storage buildings and diverse building styles.
- Roads and transmission lines criss-cross area, the latter often very visible.
- Quite numerous archaeological remains, including carved stone balls and pictish monuments.
- Open character provides expansive views across landscape.

5.9.3 Pressures and Sensitivities

Pressures on the landscape are moderate and include new farm buildings, and built development; increased woodland cover from the Grampian Forest is envisaged. The landscape is large in scale and may therefore absorb some large developments, such as new settlements.

- Flat and open character of the landscape has extensive visibility making it susceptible to impact from high structures such as pylons and masts.
- Settings of estates are sensitive to intensive agriculture and loss of features such as woodlands.
- Reduced intensity of farming to compensate for nitrate leaching may result in increased habitat diversity.
- The Grampian Forest will result in increased levels of woodland east of the A96.
- The large scale landscape may accommodate large houses and farms, but the settlement patterns are distinctive and susceptible to extension and loss of identity.
- Golf courses are a pressure owing to the flat to rolling landform and proximity to Aberdeen.
A number of road improvements including bypasses are proposed in this landscape.

5.9.4 Specific Guidance

Aim: To promote a more coherent landscape structure

- Neglected field boundaries, clutter from discarded farm equipment and pockets of scrub can distract from the wide scene; good housekeeping and maintenance of agricultural features will provide a neater landscape with fewer distractions.

- Piecemeal development and prominent farm buildings can intrude into views; good design measures and use of simple forms and shapes reduces the prominence of such features.

- Small geometric woodland stands appear out of scale in the landscape; larger blocks of woodland would be a more appropriate scale in this expansive landscape.

- Clumped tree planting along existing and new roads can help to break up their line, where lineside planting can increase prominence.

- Creation of landscaped buffer zones will help to preserve and enhance archaeological remains.

Aim: To increase the diversity of landscape features.

- Management and replanting of policy woodlands and avenues will enhance landscape structure.

- Plantations which reflect the form of adjacent policy woods will extend the visual influence of woodland in the landscape.

- The Grampian Forest presents a particular opportunity to enhance the woodland structure of land east of the A96; opportunities to extend this scheme and link with existing woods will result in widespread landscape benefits.

- Reduced intensity of farming may result in succession of scrub and woodland; targeted grants for habitat creation and landscape restoration will encourage a more coherent approach to habitat creation.

Aim: To encourage a compact and traditional settlement pattern.

- Woodlands and shelterbelts may be used to screen and contain new built development, whilst improving the woodland structure of the landscape.
5.10 **CENTRAL WOODED ESTATES**  

5.10.1 **Landscape Description**

*Central Wooded Estates (Area 12)* occupies a substantial area east of Bennachie between the Don and Dee valleys, and extends up to the edge of Aberdeen, a strategic location that has encouraged the creation of well-wooded estates.

Its topography varies from broad sweeping valleys and hills to pockets of more confined, small-scale relief. There is a related change in landscape pattern, with large open arable fields in some areas and small fields of pasture enclosed by drystone dykes in others. Dense woodland is, however, a consistent feature, be it small coniferous plantations, thick clumps and shelterbelts of beech, large mixed broadleaf polices associated with estates, or meandering riverside glades along the Don and the Dee.

The woodland, particularly when combined with the relatively complex landform, provides numerous enclosed pockets of intimate landscape which contrast with sudden long distance views when one moves into more open areas. The effect of changing relief and farming patterns and a strong woodland structure creates an especially varied landscape at local level.

Settlement is widespread; the area's proximity to Aberdeen has encouraged scattered new housing of assorted styles and most towns in the area are fringed by modern residential development. Although the woods and estates dictate the landscape pattern, a network of roads and pylons randomly criss-cross the area and in some areas these have an important visual influence.
5.10.2 Key Characteristics

- Rolling landscape of low hills and wide valleys.
- Strong woodland structure associated with numerous estate policies, adding rich and diverse texture.
- Clumps of trees atop mounds and hillocks, often bounded by circular stone walls; mature shady beech avenues; conifer plantations distributed amongst broadleaves.
- Mixed farmland with varying size and pattern of fields.
- Mosses within lowland hollows where birch and Scots pine predominate.
- Numerous and varied archaeological features, including henges, carved stone balls, recumbent stone circles and pictish monuments.
- Numerous towns and villages, many subject to recent residential expansion.
- Frequent settlement with a variety of sizes and styles of architecture; local vernacular stone buildings with conversions and extensions, modern bungalows and houses.
- Long views across open farmland contrast with sudden enclosure by woodland as one passes through area.

5.10.3 Pressures and Sensitivities

This landscape is experiencing significant pressures for new built development owing to its proximity to Aberdeen. However, abundant woodland can provide local screening.

- Broadleaf policy woodlands are susceptible to neglect and decline.
- Other landscape features such as drystone dykes and copses are susceptible to damage from built development and road improvements; larger woods are susceptible to fragmentation.
- Numerous archaeological sites, particularly recumbent stone circles, are vulnerable to damage and loss of setting.
- Alterations and extensions to local vernacular building, will deplete local styles.

5.10.4 Specific Guidance

Aim: To conserve wooded character.

- Broadleaf woodlands which are managed to conserve a mix of species and resist conifer domination will help to maintain a well balanced woodland structure.
• Conifer plantations can enhance this woodland structure, but stark geometric shapes can conflict with the more natural shapes of the broadleaf woods; planting of diverse, rounded shapes and use of a broadleaf edge will reflect existing broadleaf woods and create a more natural character.

• Areas of lowland moss with birch and pine also enhance the landscape diversity and increase the sense of enclosure and small scale.

• Accommodation of landscape features in the early planning stages of road development will help to avoid loss and fragmentation of woods and may provide opportunities to improve woodland structure through landscape measures.

Aim: To conserve the setting of estates and archaeological features.

• Woods, shelterbelt and drystone dykes enhance the setting of estates and archaeological features; maintenance and enhancement of these will help create a more unified landscape structure.

• The immediate setting of archaeological features can be enhanced by providing a buffer which excludes farming and other development and incorporates landscaping measures, thereby maintaining the setting.

• Open views from and to stately homes and castles improves the setting of these buildings and establishes them as landmarks in the landscape.

Aim: To integrate new development in the landscape.

• Native broadleaf trees may be used to integrate and contain new housing estates and soften the edge of urban developments.

• In exposed locations, simple styles and forms of housing are more appropriate, especially where they may compete with views of more distinguished landmarks; development should avoid exposed locations especially where such visual conflict might occur.

• Use (or re-use) of local stones can help to integrate buildings in the landscape; conversion of old derelict buildings should also be encouraged.

• Sites for quarrying should maximise use of existing woodland and landform screening, and projects should employ appropriate site restoration subsequently.
4.2 **FORMARTINE LINKS**

4.2.1 **Landscape Description**

Advancing and receding ice sheets and rising and falling seas have been the principal agents of landscape formation in this area, creating a flat hinterland with occasional low raised beaches to the north.

The most recent marine transgression brought with it vast quantities of silt and sand which, with fluvo-glacial outwash, have been fashioned by the wind into the vast Forvie Dunes at the mouth of the River Ythan, and deposited as a long sandy tail along the shore to their south. The character area includes this sandy fringe, together with the narrow strip of scrubby gorse and grasses behind it, and the main coastal settlements. The area also includes some 8km of rocky coast in the vicinity of Collieston, hewn from the schists and quartzites that occur north of the dunes.

This is a landscape of windswept open character predominated by rough grazing and scrubby sand flats. Few shelterbelts or woods interrupt the horizon, and occasional solitary trees or buildings stand isolated within the expanse. The country park at Balmoral is the only wooded area on the coast.

To the west, the land rises into the fertile, gently undulating hinterland of the **Formartine Lowlands** (Area 1). North of Collieston, this agricultural belt extends to the edge of the rocky coastline, reflecting the coastal character south of Aberdeen and reducing the character area to a thin strip. The village of Collieston nestles at the base of a small cove north of the dunes contrasting with the more exposed settlements of Balmoral and Newburgh.

- **scrubby gorse and grasses**
- **Coastal huts**
- **Dunes of Forvie**
4.2.2 Key Characteristics

- Extensive sands and beaches, including dunes.
- Contrasting narrow rocky shoreline north of the dunes.
- Raised beaches in the Ythan Valley.
- Scarce woodland and sporadic tree cover.
- Predominant land cover of scrubby gorse and grasses behind the sands; dunes tufted with marram grass or bare of any vegetation.
- Encroachment of farmland into sandy coastal fringe.
- Settlement concentrated in towns such as Newburgh and Balmedie which are expanding with new housing.
- Experience highly dependent on weather and prevailing character of the sea, whether rough or calm.
- Exposed to long expansive views along the beach and across the sea.

4.2.3 Pressures and Sensitivities

Pressures from new housing, golf courses and visitor facilities, due its accessibility from Aberdeen and scenic merits; sensitivity of the dunes is high due to their mature conservation value and structure which is susceptible to erosion.

- The massive sand dunes at Forvie are especially sensitive to built development and visitor pressure; their physical structure and lack of vegetation cover leaves them open to erosion.
- Golf courses are a moderate force for change; club buildings, car parks and visitor pressure contribute to the impact on the landscape.
- Built development on the edges of existing settlements such as Newburgh and Balmedie will have a visual impact due to the lack of tree cover.
- Open, exposed landscape with long views renders it sensitive to vertical elements which will have a significant impact on visual amenity.
- Uncontrolled pressures could result in erosion of the dunes, changes in vegetation structure, including ornamental planting, and new built development which would alter the wild and exposed character of the coastline.
4.2.4 Specific Guidance

Aim: To conserve the physical structure of the dune system.

- Designed picnic areas, boardwalks and information boards will help to keep people to paths and restrict access to sensitive areas of the dunes.

- Landform screening of car parks will help to restrict visual impact and prevent access onto vulnerable areas; car parks which are set back from the dunes and roughly surfaced conform with the surrounding character.

Aim: To retain the vegetation structure and distinction in landuse between the dunes and farmed fringe.

- Developing recreational and visitor facilities away from the dunes may concentrate visitors and recreational users in the more structurally and ecologically robust areas such as the rocky shoreline or farmland fringe.

- Built development along the coastline and expansion of settlements which is set back from the coastal edge will help to conserve the dune character; the use of landform rather than vegetation to screen new areas of built development is most appropriate.

Aim: To retain long, open views and the exposed and wild character of the coast.

- Behind the links and dunes, car parks, roads and services may blend with the landscape by limiting the use of urbanising elements such as metalled surfacing, road lines, kerbs, signage and street lights.

- Vertical elements are particularly intrusive in the open landscape; their impact may be reduced by positioning them against a backdrop of landform or vegetation.