

Appendix 13.3

Landscape Objectives

Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	General	1
1.2	Fitting Landscapes	1
2	Landscape Character Objectives	2
2.1	General	2
2.2	Drumochter Pass LCA	2
2.3	Glen Truim: Upper Glen and Dalwhinnie LCA	5
3	Landscape Objectives for Project 7	7
3.1	Landscape Character Objectives	7
4	Application of Landscape Objectives for Project 7	8
4.1	General	8

Tables

Table 2-1:	Potential effects upon Drumochter Pass LCA key characteristics	3
Table 2-2:	Potential effects upon Glen Truim Upper Glen and Dalwhinnie LCA key characteristics	6

1 Introduction

1.1 General

1.1.1 The Proposed Scheme presents landscape opportunities to contribute to the environmental value of the existing A9 road corridor in order to deliver a high quality integrated, biodiverse, adaptable and sustainable transport corridor.

1.2 Fitting Landscapes

1.2.1 At the broadest level, these landscape opportunities have been identified with a view to meeting the four key aims of Fitting Landscapes: Securing more Sustainable Landscapes policy (Transport Scotland, 2014), which are to:

- ensure high quality of design and place
- enhance and protect natural heritage
- use resources wisely
- build in adaptability to change

1.2.2 The vision of the Fitting Landscapes policy is to:
“promote the more sustainable design, implementation, maintenance and management of the transport estate and ensure that the landscapes that are created and managed are of a high quality, well integrated, biodiverse and adaptable, and deliver a meaningful contribution to national sustainability targets”.

1.2.3 In addition to meeting the above four key aims, the policy requires Landscape Objectives to be set to inform the planning, design, implementation and management of new transport infrastructure.

1.2.4 Project-specific Landscape Objectives have been developed in accordance with the policy to help achieve the above four key aims. The process of setting the objectives has been informed through engagement with statutory consultees; review of findings from the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process including the Strategic Environmental Design Principles, and collaborative design working of the landscape architects with engineers and other technical and design disciplines such as ecology, cultural heritage, noise, hydrology, land use, community and private assets and architecture.

1.2.5 The A9 Dualling Programme Environmental Design Guide - Landscape Character Area Guidance (CH2MHill for Transport Scotland, 2015) is an internal document developed to support consistency across the various A9 dualling projects. The Design Guide includes ‘key landscape objectives’ for each of the Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) within which the Proposed Scheme is located. Along with the A9 Dualling Programme SEA Strategic Environmental Design Principles, these have been used to inform the project-specific Landscape Objectives.

2 Landscape Character Objectives

2.1 General

2.1.1 A Strategic Landscape Review was undertaken, and through this process, objectives were identified for each of the CNPA Landscape Character Areas. These objectives were assessed against the scheme options at DMRB Stage 2. Within this appendix these objectives are assessed against the DMRB Stage 3 Proposed Scheme.

2.1.2 The scale of the landscape is vast, and the Proposed Scheme is small in comparison. Although all effects will be contained within the existing infrastructure corridor, they will be direct effects, but due to the open nature of the study area, wider indirect impacts are likely to affect local landscape character area and visual amenity. The assessment below reviews the potential effects on the key features of this character area and how the Proposed Scheme responds to the key objectives established for this area.

2.2 Drumochter Pass LCA

2.2.1 The 'A9 Dualling SEA Strategic Landscape Review' 2014, has set out guidance for each LCA. That for Drumochter Pass LCA is described below:

“Minimise the infrastructure associated with the road. Due to the landscape being very open any additional infrastructure would be very evident. Roadside tree planting is unlikely to be appropriate and the palette of materials used for the new road should be very restricted to match the simplicity of the surroundings.

The relationship of the road alignment to the adjoining landform will be very important as the form of the earthworks will not soften over time and vegetation will take many years to establish.

The railway and cycle way are close to the road, have clear views of it and visual impacts of the dualling could be hard to mitigate.”

Strategic Landscape Review – LCA Key landscape objectives

1. *“Ensure any new alignment fits with the dramatic local landscape form*
2. *The minimising of infrastructure here should be a key design objective and must form a key aspect of the design approach for all disciplines*
3. *Integrate any new tree planting with the existing tree belts, the modification and enhancement of the existing tree belts with broadleaf planting should be considered*
4. *The enjoyment of the spectacular views here should be facilitated*
5. *The design of road and lay-bys should facilitate access to and appreciation of this landscape. This location offers significant opportunity to create an exciting lay-by, but needs sensitive design to enhance the visitor experience whilst leaving a minimal impression on the landscape (also needs to be considered within the context of nature conservation designation restrictions)”.*

Assessment of Key Characteristics

Table 2-1: Potential effects upon Drumochter Pass LCA key characteristics

Key Characteristic	Potential effects
Dramatic and sublime character	Some slight reduction during construction but less on completion.
Hummocky moraines	None
Braided watercourses in valley floor	None
Little tree cover	Minimal
Heather and scree slopes	Minimal

Assessment of Key Objectives

Alignment fits with the dramatic local landscape

- 2.2.2 The Proposed Scheme involves online widening of the existing A9; there is a gentle curve to the road that matches the long sweeps of the moorland slopes to the east and the Proposed Scheme responds to this, which will aid the Proposed Scheme fit with this LCA. The earthworks have been designed to integrate with the adjoining landscape and take into consideration other designations within the area, such as the flood plain.
- 2.2.3 The arrangement at the proposed Dalnaspidal underbridge access has been iteratively designed with input from Landscape Architects to minimise the impact to existing features. The existing underbridge for the Allt Coire Mhic-sith stream remains in its current location; the extension of the underbridge due to the new carriageway will appear to have been integrated into the existing structure. However, the new alignment of the slip road, underbridge and access road to both Dalnaspidal Lodge and the station buildings involves realignment of the existing local access road and National Cycle Network (NCN) 7 and removal of existing coniferous woodland to both sides of the A9. Therefore, the underbridge access arrangement is incongruous within this LCA and is a very obvious, large infrastructure feature with extensive earthworks.
- 2.2.4 Likewise, the underbridge access to Drumochter/ Balsporran has been iteratively designed to minimise impacts, but the new alignment of the slip roads, underbridge and access road to both Drumochter Lodge and Balsporran Cottages involves realignment of the existing NCN7 and removal of existing coniferous woodland to both sides of the A9. Therefore, the underbridge access arrangement has been developed to respond to existing landform context with additional mitigation.

Minimising of Infrastructure

- 2.2.5 The Proposed Scheme introduces new dual carriageway infrastructure including junctions, access tracks, underbridges, lay-bys and retaining walls. Within this LCA there will be SuDS features, watercourse diversions and extended or new culverts. Landscape Architects have had significant input to the design of SuDS features and earthwork slopes to integrate the landform surrounding the road into the adjoining land as naturally as possible, resulting in the embedded mitigation proposals that have become part of the Proposed Scheme.
- 2.2.6 Between approximate ch. 5,100 to 5,800 the existing northbound carriageway comes close to the Highland Mainline (HML) railway; the southbound carriageway will be cut into the hillside for a length of approximately 700m. However, to avoid a risk to the footings of the Beauly to Denny powerline (BDL) pylons to the east, both carriageways will need to be at a higher vertical

alignment than the existing carriageway. Raising both will reduce cutting into rock and the gradient and width of embankments. This arrangement will require a 700m (approx.) retaining wall with safety parapet and barrier between the mainline and NCN7 at Drumochter Pass.

- 2.2.7 Although all changes will remain concentrated within the context of a narrow corridor of existing infrastructure at this unavoidable pinch-point; the proposed slopes, safety parapet and barrier will potentially be an incongruous fit within the landscape, and their aesthetics need to be appropriately considered as part of the additional mitigation proposals.
- 2.2.8 Although kept to a minimum, there will be route signage, barriers and fencing which will increase the roadscape presence within the wider area; these elements will however replace existing road furniture, so the overall effects will be limited.

New tree planting

- 2.2.9 The existing tree belt to the east of the road will be impacted by the proposals between approximate southbound ch. 400 and ch. 2,600 and between approximate southbound ch. 7,200 to ch. 9,600. The woodland at Drumochter Lodge, northbound ch. 7,200 to 7,600 will also be impacted.
- 2.2.10 In relation to the proposed Dalnaspidal access, given the generally enclosed character of the landscape in this location, extension of existing woodland planting is appropriate; this would in general be of mixed native species of local provenance rather than non-native coniferous trees. Where appropriate, the latter would be replaced with a range of heathland scrub, shrub and tree species found typically in relic Caledonian forest and woodland, integrating the wooded areas into the new earthworks.
- 2.2.11 Similarly, extension of existing woodland planting in relation to parts of the proposed Balsporran/ Drumochter access would in general be of mixed native species of local provenance rather than non-native coniferous trees. Where appropriate, the latter would be replaced with native mixed tree and shrub planting, integrating the wooded areas into the new earthworks. Where tree planting is not appropriate or possible, grading to marry-in the new earthworks with the existing landform and planting the exposed earthworks with moorland vegetation of local provenance will be the most appropriate means of integrating the proposed works into the existing landscape in this location.
- 2.2.12 Existing areas with tree planting that are to be removed as part of the Proposed Scheme will be mitigated through replacement planting. Replacement planting will be of a mixed native woodland type to look to reinforce the natural characteristics of the area, rather than the historical shelterbelt planting.

Enjoyment of the spectacular views

- 2.2.13 The views from the road that enable appreciation of the surrounding landscape will remain similar to the existing.
- 2.2.14 There is no northbound or southbound lay-by that can offer opportunities to take advantage of the full stunning views of Loch Garry to the southwest of Dalnaspidal, but the realigned NCN7 allows access to the viewing vantage points.
- 2.2.15 A northbound Type A lay-by is proposed to take advantage of the view of the Allt Dubhaig alluvial fan (braided channels) and Sow of Atholl at ch. 800, with an 'Access for All' compliant footpath link to NCN7 at Dalnaspidal in the Proposed Scheme, but no corresponding southbound lay-by.

The proposed associated viewpoint will have a view of Loch Garry albeit less dramatic than the existing northbound narrow Type B lay-by (which will be removed by the Scheme).

- 2.2.16 The existing northbound Type A lay-by at Drumochter Pass, which has extensive views of the strath to the west at ch. 3,600, will be replaced in its current location with linking paths to NCN7. Subject to Transport Scotland approval, further facilities will include seating, steps and the potential for a new viewing platform and ‘Access for All’ compliant ramps and a circular walkway.
- 2.2.17 There is a southbound Type A lay-by with views to the west over the dual carriageway proposed at ch. 3,900, which will be replaced approx. 4m to the west of the existing location. Like the northbound proposals, subject to Transport Scotland approval, the new facilities will include walkways, seating, steps and ‘Access for All’ compliant ramps, with the potential for a new viewing platform and circular walkway, and a link to NCN7 via a combined watercourse and pedestrian underbridge at ch. 3,000.
- 2.2.18 There is an existing car park at ch. 6,800 at Balsporran Cottages which will not remain open to access from the northbound carriageway at the current location; it will instead be accessed from the proposed Balsporran/ Drumochter Junction to the north of Balsporran Cottages. The car park will be reinstated with a revised layout designed to fit with the existing landform and sit within scrub, shrub and small upland tree planting. There are extensive views of the strath and enclosing hills from the existing car park.

Access to and appreciation of this landscape

- 2.2.19 There is access to NCN7 from the proposed Dalnaspidal north bound carriageway lay-by proposed at approximate ch. 800. Similarly, access to NCN7 can be obtained from the existing Drumochter Pass lay-by on the northbound carriageway. There is a potential link via a pedestrian underbridge at ch. 3,000 from the Drumochter Pass lay-by on the southbound carriageway. This allows safe access to the immediate and wider landscape, therefore increasing appreciation for the LCA.
- 2.2.20 The existing locations for car parking for hillwalkers at Dalnaspidal and Balsporran will remain.

2.3 Glen Truim: Upper Glen and Dalwhinnie LCA

- 2.3.1 The ‘A9 Dualling SEA Strategic Landscape Review’ 2014, has set out guidance for this LCA:

“Retain the exposure of the road and the open landscape with limited vegetation.

Road alignment should reflect and respect the local landform.

The relationship of the railway with the road should be carefully managed to minimise inter visibility”

Strategic Landscape Review – Key landscape objectives:

1. *“Ensure any new alignment fits with the dramatic local landscape form*
2. *Reinforce the existing open character*
3. *The minimising of infrastructure here should be a key design objective and must form a key aspect of the design approach for all disciplines*
4. *The enjoyment of the spectacular views of the distillery and the views towards the Drumochter hills from the north should be facilitated”.*

Assessment of Key Characteristics

Table 2-2: Potential effects upon Glen Truim Upper Glen and Dalwhinnie LCA key characteristics

Key Characteristics	Potential Effects
Very open character	Some slight reduction during construction but less on completion.
Wide floodplain / strath	None
Sweeping curves	None
Simple topography	Minimal
Tree cover	Minimal

Assessment against Key Objectives

- 2.3.2 The Proposed Scheme has been assessed against LCA objectives established via the A9 Dualling Programme Strategic Landscape Review, as set out below.

Alignment fits with the dramatic local landscape form

- 2.3.3 The Proposed Scheme fits reasonably well with the LCA. The proposed earthworks have been designed to integrate with the adjoining landscape and take into consideration other designations within the area, such as flood plain. The Proposed Scheme follows the gentle sweeping curve of the existing road.

Reinforce the existing open character

- 2.3.4 The Proposed Scheme does not include additional woodland planting or screening that will compromise the predominantly open character of the Glen Truim: Upper Glen and Dalwhinnie LCA to the west. Scrub planting will be proposed to slopes to help blend new exposed embankments into the adjacent landscape, where appropriate, mitigating adverse impacts.

Minimising of infrastructure

- 2.3.5 As the Proposed Scheme does not extend into the Glen Truim: Upper Glen and Dalwhinnie LCA, there are unlikely to be any significant issues regarding infrastructure. The Proposed Scheme alignment corresponds to earthwork slopes in the Project 8, Dalwhinnie to Crubenmore extent that fit with the adjoining landform. The footprint of the Proposed Scheme has been designed to occupy no more land than necessary; directional road signs, furniture and barriers have also been reduced where possible to a necessary minimum.

The enjoyment of the spectacular views

- 2.3.6 Lay-by 87 straddles the boundary between the Proposed Scheme and the Project 8, Dalwhinnie to Crubenmore extent, falling partially within the LCA; it provides spectacular views to the south of Drumochter Pass, including the Boar of Badenoch and Sow of Atholl. Views to the north across the LCA are less spectacular, although the Monadhliath Mountains can be seen on the horizon in the distance.

3 Landscape Objectives for Project 7

3.1 Landscape Character Objectives

3.1.1 Based on the above assessment, the Landscape Objectives for the Proposed Scheme are as follows. Reference to specific LLCAs is made where relevant.

Design the alignment to fit the dramatic landscape

- design earthworks with appropriate screening and planting to merge with the landscape
- integrate earthworks throughout the Proposed Scheme to avoid intrusion of major infrastructure on the views from and of the A9 where possible
- respect the dramatic local character of Pass of Drumochter LLCA
- consider the aesthetic design of safety parapet barriers and retaining walls through Pass of Drumochter LLCA
- design SuDS features to merge into the surrounding landscape with consideration of unique natural shape of each
- integrate the proposed Dalnaspidal, Drumochter Lodge/ Balsporran underbridges and access roads to minimise effects on Dalnaspidal and Dail A'Chuirn LLCAs
- earthwork and embankment design to follow landform-sensitive principles project-wide, particularly Allt Dubhaig and Dail A'Chuirn LLCAs

Minimise infrastructure

- contain the Proposed Scheme within the existing narrow infrastructure corridor, minimising wider effects
- planting and embankments to screen and conceal views of BDL from A9; new earthworks will also reduce intervisibility of A9 with HML railway
- use sensitive design for replacement of Type A lay-bys at Drumochter Pass LLCA
- rationalise road signs and street furniture to avoid clutter on the road side

Introduce new tree planting

- reinstate tree belts to the east of the A9 that fall within the Proposed Scheme construction footprint to maintain the functional shelter and visual containment, particularly to Dalnaspidal and Dail A'Chuirn LLCAs
- diversify species, including native broadleaf trees
- use additional mitigation planting to replace that lost to the earthworks
- use new screen planting to mitigate the impact of infrastructure throughout the Proposed Scheme particularly on the east (southbound) side

Encourage enjoyment of the spectacular views

- minimise landscape and visual impacts and mitigate the Proposed Scheme impacts wherever practicable
- maintain existing open views at Pass of Drumochter LLCA (with key views toward the Sow of Atholl and Boar of Badenoch as a gateway to the Highlands)
- enable enjoyment of the landscape and views toward Loch Garry, the Allt Coire Mhic-sith braided watercourse channel, the hills of the Dalnaspidal Forest and wider strath

Access to and appreciation of this landscape

- improve safety for NMUs and retain access from the A9 to NMU routes within the surrounding area
- respect and, where possible, refer to cultural heritage assets and their setting in the landscape

4 Application of Landscape Objectives for Project 7

4.1 General

4.1.1 The Landscape Objectives are intended to guide the planning, design, implementation and management of the Proposed Scheme. It is recognised that they will not always be fully achievable. A range of factors need to be taken into account, including engineering feasibility; road safety; effects on landowners; and constrained locations where effects on multiple environmental sensitivities need to be balanced and the optimum solution may be a compromise.

4.1.2 Details on how the Landscape Objectives set out in Section 3 above would be tailored to the receiving landscape, focussing on the Drumochter Pass LCA and only on the overlapping characteristics of Glen Truim: Upper Glen and Dalwhinnie LCA are outlined below:

Design the alignment to fit the dramatic landscape

- project-wide, through tracking the horizontal and vertical alignment close to the existing route that successfully fits with the landscape
- project-wide, through profiling slopes to avoid uniform and excessively steep gradients where possible, and to grade the tops and toes of slopes to integrate with adjacent ground by rounding/ slackening of cutting slopes to 'feather' into the adjoining landform, whilst taking advantage of the screening they provide
- through enhancing dramatic local character of Pass of Drumochter LLCA through areas of cut, planting wet/dry heath to retain characteristic areas of exposure; allow additional natural regeneration of plants among areas of cut
- through considering the aesthetic design of the safety parapet, barrier and retaining walls at Pass of Drumochter LLCA and throughout the Proposed Scheme, by use of natural stone facing and textured concrete finish, subject Transport Scotland (TRBO) approval and appropriate placement of native planting

- through designing SuDS features to merge into the surrounding landform with shapes that reflect local natural landscape characteristics, such as ox-bow lakes; profiling slopes to be non-uniform and with slackened gradients; incorporating natural rockwork into outfall design; and planting to mimic adjacent bog or heath
- through following landform-sensitive earthwork and embankment design principles project-wide, merging new slopes with existing landform and infrastructure with gentle, non-angular gradients in all LLCA's, but particularly Allt Dubhaig and Dail A'Chuirn LLCAs
- through modelling earthworks around the Drumochter Lodge/ Balsporran underbridge and access roads to appear as natural and fitting in Dail A'Chuirn LLCA

Minimise Infrastructure

- through keeping the dualling of the A9 on-line and within a narrow corridor that contains other existing infrastructure including the BDL and HML railway, thus minimising wider cumulative effects
- through avoidance of over bridges and junctions' use of underbridges
- through constraining the footprint of the Proposed Scheme restricting extent of infrastructure
- through the rationalisation of road signs to a necessary minimum and removal of street furniture clutter
- through planting embankments to screen views of BDL from A9, or of A9 from core paths, whilst maintaining the open aspect to the west
- through minimising the effects on the HML railway with planting to new earthworks to respond to each LLCA as appropriate
- through sensitive design of a Type A lay-by at Dalnaspidal and replacement northbound and southbound Type A extended lay-bys at Drumochter Pass, using a palette of materials consistent and complementary to the highland scenery, without 'hiding' new structures and features, allowing viewing and access to the countryside on safe, 'Access for All' compliant paths and other facilities and features that will be subject to Transport Scotland (TRBO) approval
- through reinforcing open character by appropriate consideration of placement of proposed native planting in relation to views from the road and LLCA characteristics

Introduce new tree planting

- through additional mitigation planting to replace that lost to the earthworks and integration of them into the landscape, including native seeding, scrub and trees
- through reinstating tree belts to the east of the A9 that fall within the Proposed Scheme construction footprint where possible, to maintain functional shelter and visual containment, particularly to LLCAs Dalnaspidal and Dail A'Chuirn, with diversified species, including native trees to reinstate or protect these landscape features
- through use of new screening planting, particularly on the east (southbound) side, to screen the existing BDL and minimise views of telecom masts

- through augmenting existing planted barrier/ woodland edge with native woodland species and shrubs where edge planting is removed, exposing unsightly lower bare branches of the inner trees to re-establish the natural woodland edge and minimise risk of wind throw
- through retaining existing non-native conifer planting for screening and to provide shelter for the establishment of new mixed native planting

Encourage enjoyment of the spectacular views

- by providing opportunities to facilitate access to scenic views where practicable project-wide, such as at Type A lay-bys, Balsporran car park and access to parking areas and paths via Dalnaspidal underbridge
- by protecting existing open views by ensuring the Proposed Design does not introduce obstructions or tree planting in locations that are currently open (e.g. toward the Sow of Atholl and Boar of Badenoch)
- through maintaining existing open views from the road, lay-bys and footpaths to retain the characteristics of Dalnaspidal LLCA, for example by avoiding obstruction of views, and improving NMU connections through the Dalnaspidal junction
- through sensitive design of replacement lay-bys at Drumochter Pass, and subject to TS approval, using a palette of materials at consistent and complementary to the highland scenery, without necessarily ‘hiding’ new structures and features, allowing viewing and access to the countryside on safe, ‘Access for All’ compliant paths and platforms
- through reinforcing open character through appropriate consideration of placement of proposed native planting

Access to and appreciation of this landscape

- through access via links to the NCN7 from suitable lay-by locations to enable better enjoyment of the spectacular views (toward Glen Garry, the Allt Coire Mhic-sith plaited watercourse channel, the hills of the Dalnaspidal Forest and wider strath), and by improved NMU connections through the junction at Dalnaspidal supporting recreational access into the wider area
- through areas of existing NMU provision that are to be reinstated or upgraded through rationalised underpass crossings, increasing safety for NMUs and retaining access from the A9 into the surrounding area, through Drumochter LLCA
- through retaining cultural heritage assets and their setting in the landscape, where possible, through carefully considered design, including for effects on the non-designated designed landscape gardens of Drumochter Lodge (ref **HLT5 Chapter 15 Cultural Heritage, Volume 1**); including integration of new access and a visual screening bund into the existing landscape