

Appendix 13.4

Cairngorms National Park Special Landscape Qualities Assessment

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1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This appendix provides an assessment of the effects of the Proposed Scheme upon the Special Landscape Qualities (SLQs) of the Cairngorms National Park (CNP) and has informed the development of appropriate mitigation proposals during Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment at DMRB Stage 3.
- 1.1.2 The SLQs are set out in Cairngorms National Park Commissioned Report No. 375 'The Special Qualities of the Cairngorms National Park' (Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), 2010) and are presented as a list of *'the characteristics that, individually or combined, give rise to an area's outstanding scenery'*. Specifically, the SLQs are about the experience of the landscape and the response that a landscape tends to evoke in people.
- 1.1.3 The assessment has been informed by the *'Cairngorms Landscape Toolkit'* (Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA), 2015), which is a resource to help developers assess the sensitivity of landscape character to development, and contains guidance, descriptions and maps of the characteristics and sensitivity of each of the SLQs within defined CNP Landscape Character Areas (LCAs).
- 1.1.4 The assessment has focused principally on the SLQs relevant to each Local Landscape Character Area (LLCA) that would be directly impacted upon by the proposed scheme. The LLCAs largely correspond with the LCAs identified in the Cairngorms Landscape Character Assessment and comprise:
- Dalnaspidal
 - Allt Dubhaig
 - Pass of Drumochter
 - Dail a Chuirn
 - Dalnaspidal Forest
 - Southern Hill Slopes
 - Loch Garry
 - Upper Glen Garry
- 1.1.5 The Proposed Scheme lies entirely within the CNP. The SLQs that may be affected by the Proposed Scheme are highlighted in **bold** below.

General Qualities

- **Magnificent mountains towering over moorland, forest and strath**
- **Vastness of space, scale and height**
- Strong juxtaposition of contrasting landscapes
- **A landscape of layers, from inhabited strath to remote, uninhabited upland**
- **'The harmony of complicated curves'**
- **Landscapes both cultural and natural**

The Mountains and Plateaux

- The unifying presence of the central mountains
- An imposing massif of strong dramatic character
- The unique plateaux of vast scale, distinctive landforms and exposed, boulder strewn high ground
- **The surrounding hills**
- The drama of deep corries
- **Exceptional glacial landforms**
- **Snowscapes**

Visual and Sensory Qualities

- **Layers of receding ridge lines**
- **Grand panoramas and framed views**
- **A landscape of many colours**
- **Dark skies**
- **Attractive and contrasting textures**
- The dominance of natural sounds

Trees, Woods and Forests

- Dark and venerable pine forest
- **Light and airy birch woods**
- Parkland and policy woodlands
- Long association with forestry

Moorlands

- **Extensive moorland, linking the farmland, woodland and the high tops**
- **A patchwork of muirburn**

Wildlife and Nature

- **Dominance of natural landforms**
- **Extensive tracts of natural vegetation**
- **Association with iconic animals**
- **Wild land**
- **Wildness**

Glens and Straths

- **Steep glens and high passes**
- **Broad, farmed straths**
- **Renowned rivers**
- **Beautiful lochs**

Culture and History

- **Vernacular stone buildings**
- **Dramatic, historical routes**
- The wistfulness of abandoned settlements

Recreation

- **A landscape of opportunities**
- **Spirituality**

1.1.6 It is rarely the case that only one SLQ is experienced or that one SLQ dominates all others, and so relevant SLQs that tend to be experienced together have been grouped together, for the purposes of the assessment.

1.1.7 Within those LLCAs that would not be directly impacted by the Proposed Scheme, relevant SLQs still form a part in its experience and perception. For example, the “*Magnificent mountains towering over forest and strath*”; despite the mountain ridges being some distance from the Proposed Scheme, they may still ‘dominate’ distant views, and accordingly these SLQs have also been considered.

2 Assessment of Impacts on the Special Landscape Qualities of the Cairngorms National Park

2.1.1 For the assessment, the SLQs identified above (in bold) have been assessed in **Table 2.1** against the Proposed Scheme. Within each SLQs item, the LCAs and LLCAs that demonstrate these qualities have been identified. Locations where the landscape characteristics underpinning these SLQs have been identified and assessed, mitigation measures which are proposed are outlined, and an assessment has been made as to whether these effects would present a risk to the defining qualities of the SLQs.

Table 2-1: CNPA SLQ Assessment for Project 7

Relevant and related SLQs	SLQ narrative – locations, underpinning landscape characteristics and their experience	Effects of the new A9 on these SLQs and potential to mitigate	Is there a risk of loss or damage to SLQs?
General Qualities			
Magnificent mountains towering over moorland, forest and strath	The southbound approach to the “Boar of Badenoch” (An Torc) is an impressive experience. The view of the distant Monadhliaths to the north from the edge of the LCA, creating an outstanding skyline is similarly dramatic. This is of relevance to LCA’s Drumochter Pass and all LLCA’s within the study area	The views of the hills and mountains towering over the landscape will not be affected by the proposals.	No –the proposals are very small compared the scale of the landscape
Vastness of space, scale and height	The slopes of Creagan Mor to the west and Cam na Caim to the east are extensive open rolling heather moorland. This is of particular relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA and LLCA’s Pass of Drumochter and Dail a Chuirn	The experience of the scale and grandeur of the hills will not be affected by the proposals.	no
Strong juxtaposition of contrasting landscapes	The landscape immediately north of Drumochter pass is relatively uniform although the contrast of rough grazing in the strath floor with heather moorland of the adjoining slopes is striking. This is of particular relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA and LLCA’s Pass of Drumochter and Dail a Chuirn	The line of the road on the junction of these currently emphasises the juxtaposition. The dualling may dilute the transition slightly. However careful design of the roadside planting should enable the juxtaposition to be reinforced.	no
A landscape of layers, from inhabited strath to remote, uninhabited upland	Drumochter Pass is remote almost uninhabited upland so the experience of variation of landscape layers is limited. The “time-depth” layers are stronger with the continuing use of this route back to prehistory. This is of relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA and all LLCAs	The dualling will not impact on the perception of the landscape layers. Interpretation could increase awareness of the continuous use of this route through time.	no
‘The harmony of complicated curves’	The rolling moorland and smooth undulating ridge lines here are echoed on a smaller scale with the hummocky moraines and meandering river. This is of particular relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA and LLCA’s Allt Dubhaig, Pass of Drumochter, Dail a Chuirn and Dalnaspidal Forest	The existing road curves gently this section – following the bends of the pass. The dualling will mirror these curves which fit well with the landscape.	no
Landscapes both cultural and natural	This section is mostly uninhabited with evidence of culture limited to land use patterns and infrastructure. The parallel road rail and powerlines reinforce the cultural use of this landscape as a route rather than a place. This is of relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA and all LLCAs	The dualling will reinforce the cultural element due to greater presence of infrastructure, but this will be minimal in comparison the domination of natural wild landscapes.	no
The Mountains and Plateaux			
Exceptional glacial landform	Moraines, corries, screes and u-shaped valleys are all present in this area This is of particular relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA, the Southern Hill Slopes and Dalnaspidal Forest LLCAs	The glacial features will not be directly affected by the dualling. It is likely that new views of the glacial features will be opened up.	no
Snowscapes	There is often snow lying on the Drumochter Hills. It accentuates the harsh wildness of the landscape. This is of particular relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA, the Southern Hill Slopes and Dalnaspidal Forest LLCAs	The snowscapes will not be affected by the proposals.	no

Relevant and related SLQs	SLQ narrative – locations, underpinning landscape characteristics and their experience	Effects of the new A9 on these SLQs and potential to mitigate	Is there a risk of loss or damage to SLQs?
Moorlands			
Extensive moorland, linking the farmland, woodland and the high tops	The Drumochter Pass LCA is almost entirely moorland. The wide areas of heather and distant views of hill tops are characteristic of this landscape. This is of relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA	The loss of land to the dualling is almost infinitely small compared to the vastness of the extensive surrounding moorland. The line of the road will reinforce the separation of the moorland from the rough grazing in the strath floor.	no
A patchwork of muirburn	There is extensive muirburn on the hill slopes facing the A9 This is of particular relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA, the Southern Hill Slopes and Dalnaspidal Forest LLCAs	The visibility of muirburn on the hill slopes will not be affected by the dualling.	no
Glens and Straths			
Steep glens and high passes	The Drumochter Pass is specifically identified in the special qualities. Travelling the pass is a powerful landscape experience – with the hills closing in and the route unfolding ahead through the pass. This is of relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA and all LLCAs in the study area	The relationship of the road to the landscape and specifically to Drumochter Pass itself will not be affected by this section of dualling.	no
Beautiful lochs	Loch Garry is the only loch visible in this project. The sheer slopes and lack of trees give it a bleak austere beauty. The way it curves south and disappears into the hills is attractive and enticing despite the inhospitable surroundings. This is of particular relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA and the Dalnaspidal and Loch Garry LLCAs	The dualling will not affect the loch directly, however ensuring that travellers can admire the view is complicated by the proposal to create a junction in this location. It is proposed that a viewing area is constructed as part of the northbound layby immediately to the north of the junction	no
Wildlife and Nature			
Dominance of natural forms	This area typifies this special quality – where “natural landforms dominate the scene with any human modification incidental...” The rolling moorland and rounded hills are the key features of this landscape. This is of particular relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA, the Southern Hill Slopes and Dalnaspidal Forest LLCAs	The dualling is “incidental” to the existing landscape character There is, however, a risk of introducing, on a small scale, un-natural landforms through the creation of crude engineered embankments and cuttings. It is important that the earthworks associated with the road are naturalistic in form and blend into the landscape wherever possible.	no

Relevant and related SLQs	SLQ narrative – locations, underpinning landscape characteristics and their experience	Effects of the new A9 on these SLQs and potential to mitigate	Is there a risk of loss or damage to SLQs?
Extensive tracts of natural vegetation	<p>The extensive heather and Molinia in this area is maintained by grazing and burning and there is an argument that that the landscape character should evolve to be more natural and diverse with increased woodland.</p> <p>This is of particular relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA, the Southern Hill Slopes and Dalnaspidal Forest LLCAs</p>	<p>The vegetation loss associated with the dualling will be very limited.</p> <p>The design of the new road-side vegetation has not yet been completed however it is currently proposed to replace the existing vegetation on a like for like basis.</p> <p>An opportunity does exist to enhance the existing character and increase the area of scrub/ woodland in selective locations.</p>	no
Association with iconic animals	<p>Golden eagle, osprey, red grouse, wildcat, red deer and salmon are potentially present in this section.</p> <p>This is of particular relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA, the Southern Hill Slopes and Dalnaspidal Forest LLCAs</p>	<p>Limited impact on the key species.</p> <p><i>golden eagle</i>, this is a qualifying species of Cairngorms SPA/ Cairngorms Massif SPA, but not in in this area, so no direct disturbance and unlikely to affect feeding behaviour/ prey species.</p> <p><i>osprey</i>, as above, not likely to cause direct disturbance or affect feeding behaviour/ prey species.</p> <p><i>red grouse</i>, area around Project 7 contains numerous grouse butts, so A9 construction could cause minor local disturbance.</p> <p><i>wildcat</i>, unlikely to cause significant disturbance/ loss of habitat as suitable habitat is limited in this section.</p> <p><i>red deer</i>, possibility of minor impact on deer, if not provided for, the works could simply increase barriers to migration across the route – however, with suitable design mitigation, there could be improved permeability.</p> <p><i>salmon</i>, likely to be limited impact overall, key issues are protection of spawning/ juvenile habitats, noise control during up/ downstream migration periods, and construction/ operational water quality controls</p>	no
Wild land and wildness	<p>The dualling is outwith the formally designated areas of Wild Land however it will be seen from both the Rannoch - Nevis - Mamores – Alder area and the Cairngorms area.</p> <p>A brief assessment of the impact on the designated areas of Wild Land is undertaken below.</p> <p>There is a more general quality of wildness that is particularly appropriate to this location.</p> <p>Despite being an infrastructure corridor this area has a wild and remote atmosphere.</p> <p>The absence of habitation and shelter, few trees and bleak terrain can instill a sense of awe and fearfulness.</p> <p>This is of particular relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA, the Southern Hill Slopes and Dalnaspidal Forest LLCAs</p>	<p>Whilst the construction of the widened A9 will introduce human activity and disruption into this empty landscape, the activity will be relatively short and the wild atmosphere will not be affected greatly.</p> <p>As the road works will be limited to a narrow corridor close to the existing road the wider landscape leading off into the hills will not be impacted.</p>	Limited disruption during construction

Relevant and related SLQs	SLQ narrative – locations, underpinning landscape characteristics and their experience	Effects of the new A9 on these SLQs and potential to mitigate	Is there a risk of loss or damage to SLQs?
Visual and Sensory Qualities			
Layers of receding ridge lines	<p>The landscape experience of travelling along this section of the A9 is underpinned by the changing visual relationship of the various passing hills and ridges. This is particularly striking when travelling south towards Drumochter. For the northbound traveller the Monadhliaths form the distant horizon ahead. In varying light conditions and times of day the relationship of the receding ridge lines can appear very different.</p> <p>This is of particular relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA, the Southern Hill Slopes and Dalnaspidal Forest LLCAs</p>	<p>The proposed dualling should not skyline and should not impact on the natural ridgelines. The design aim is to minimise interruptions to the visual panoramas experienced from the road so as to allow appreciation of this quality.</p>	no
Grand panoramas and framed views	<p>The main views from the road in this section are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drumochter Pass and adjoining hills • Loch Garry <p>This is of particular relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA and the Dalnaspidal and Loch Garry LLCAs</p>	<p>These views will not be negatively affected by the dualling proposals. It is intended that enjoyment of the scenery should be facilitated and the views protected wherever possible.</p>	no
A landscape of many colours	<p>The seasonal variation and diversity of colours is a key feature that should be celebrated and enhanced. This is of relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA and all LLCAs</p>	<p>The local palette of colours should not be affected by the dualling. It is suggested that the roadside vegetation will match that of the wider landscape. Whilst some high visibility safety features will be installed as part of the dualling – these will replace those that are part of the existing road.</p>	no
Dark skies	<p>The absence of habitation and street lights in this section allows the pitch black sky to be appreciated. This is of particular relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA and all LLCAs except perhaps Dalnaspidal</p>	<p>None of the mainline options for this section include any lighting which might detract from the dark skies of the park.</p>	no
Attractive and contrasting textures	<p>The “rolling hills of soft heather” are the dominant texture in this section. This is of particular relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA, the Southern Hill Slopes and Dalnaspidal Forest LLCAs</p>	<p>It is not anticipated that the dualling here will affect the range of landscape textures.</p>	no
The dominance of natural sounds	<p>The traffic noise from A9 is in direct contrast to the natural sounds described in this Special Quality. Whilst there can be an excitement and exhilaration to the roar of traffic in some locations, it is very much in contrast to attractive and subtle natural sounds. This is of particular relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA, the Southern Hill Slopes and Dalnaspidal Forest LLCAs, where natural sounds dominate</p>	<p>It is unlikely that areas where natural sounds dominate are in close proximity to the A9, as traffic noise distracts from the sounds of nature. However, there is also unlikely to be any dramatic change in noise levels from the dualled A9, and it is possible that improved road surfaces may help limit any additional noise.</p>	no

Relevant and related SLQs	SLQ narrative – locations, underpinning landscape characteristics and their experience	Effects of the new A9 on these SLQs and potential to mitigate	Is there a risk of loss or damage to SLQs?
Culture and History			
Dramatic, historical routes	<p>The A9 corridor follows the line of the historic routes through Drumochter. The railway is on the opposite side of the strath. The sight of trains across the strath from A9 of using the same corridor is diverting. There can be sense of shared endeavour – travelling to a common goal. This is of particular relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA and the Dalnaspidal, Allt Dubhaig, Pass of Drumochter, Dail a Chuirn and Upper Glen Garry LLCAs</p>	<p>The visual relationship of the A9 and the railway is important and will be carefully managed wherever possible to create a variation in intervisibility so that the railway “comes and goes.”</p>	no
The wistfulness of abandoned settlements	<p>There are no apparent lost settlements within the road corridor. There are old shieling sites close to the road at Dail a Chuirn but these are screened from the road by the existing tree belt. This is of particular relevance to, Dail a Chuirn LLCA</p>	<p>The shielings will not be affected by the dualling. There is a wistfulness to the view of old hill tracks winding into the mountains away from A9 - the sight of ‘paths less travelled’.</p>	no
Recreation			
A landscape of opportunities	<p>The Drumochter Hills are an attractive hill walking destination and provide opportunities for the traditional sporting pursuits of deer-stalking and grouse shooting. This is of particular relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA and Dalnaspidal Forest LLCAs</p>	<p>The road widening will have little direct impact on recreational opportunities. There may be some alteration of access for grouse shooting. It is proposed that stopping places will be positioned to facilitate access to key hill walking routes and link to NMU routes generally. The “simple enjoyment of scenery” will be facilitated by the creation of new safe stopping places.</p>	no
Spirituality	<p>This Special Quality associates spirituality with peace, escape and solitude. It is clear that this landscape can elicit strong emotional responses. The expansive open views can create feelings of exposure and vulnerability. The wildness and inhospitable terrain can induce a sense of unease. On the other hand the landscape can provide and escape from the trivulations of day to day life and a profound link to the natural world. This is of particular relevance to Drumochter Pass LCA the Southern Hill Slopes and Dalnaspidal Forest LLCAs, where such feelings dominate</p>	<p>The road allows access to and escape from this dramatic sublime landscape and permits an engagement with the landscape that otherwise would be the preserve of few. The dualling is very unlikely to impact on those areas of the Park that currently facilitate peace, escape and solitude. The dualling, whilst disruptive in the short term, will facilitate easier travelling. By taking away the worries and tensions associated with travelling the current road with limited overtaking opportunities, the dualling will allow a greater receptiveness to the qualities of the landscape and so potentially produce an increased emotional response. However it is uncertain whether this would have a direct relevance to an individuals’ spiritual experience.</p>	no

