



Appendix 2: Landscape and Visual

The two forest areas that make up the Strathdon Long Term Plan (LTP), Bunzeach and Auchernoch, are in the upper part of Strathdon on the eastern edge of the Cairngorms. This area falls within the Cairngorm National Park (CNP) in part due to the quality and value of the landscape. Given the woodlands' location and visibility, landscape is of high priority in the plan objectives and proposals.



Above: View south from minor road towards Bellabeg with the Bunzeach forest in the middle distance in front of higher open moors

There are several aspects of CNP's landscape, special qualities relevant to the plan area. The table below lists these alongside examples of where each apply and how the plan's proposals should support and further strengthen these important National Park characteristics.

CNP Special Quality	Extracts from CNP summary of SQ description relevant to Strathdon area	Examples	Design response in LTP
Magnificent mountains tower over moorland, forest and strath.	The dramatic, glacial topography of mountain, corrie and glen, the swathes of open heather moorland, the great forests of pine and birch, and the broad straths of farmland and settlement a landscape of great variety, with distinctive landforms, wildlife, colours and textures.	Both Bunzeach and Auchernoch areas are located on the edge of the moorland, on the side slopes of iconic strath.	- Native Scots pine favoured on western slopes of Auchernoch where it bounds the adjacent moorland. - Increase riparian woodland on lower slopes bordering rivers and burns alongside Water of Nocty. - Establish a buffer of open ground above the planted commercial forest and open moorland. The expectation is for SP to naturally spread into it.
Vastness of space, scale and height.	Open, rolling heather moorland covers great tracts of land. Woodlands are extensive and the straths are on a grand scale, hosting majestic rivers.	Upper margins of Bunzeach- forest gives way to sweeping moorland which extends across high ground to the south of Strathdon.	Native species buffers around exposed upper boundaries of forest are planned to limit spread of non-native trees onto designated open habitats adjacent to forest.
Strong juxtaposition of contrasting landscapes.	A designed, ordered landscape set amongst wild hills; green pastures adjacent to heather moorland; heather intimately mixed with beautiful, ancient pines, or cladding the open hills in large swathes; rolling hills a short distance from enclosed glens.	Strathdon abuts open hills forming a good example of this quality.	Reinforced through renewing the 'Policy' type qualities of the forests in the north of Bunzeach and centre of Auchernoch by favouring a variety of less common conifers and

CNP Special Quality	Extracts from CNP summary of SQ description relevant to Strathdon area	Examples	Design response in LTP
			broadleaves with autumn colour, such as <i>Prunus avium</i> as well as birch.
A landscape of layers, from inhabited straths to remote, uninhabited upland.	‘... horizontally stratified...from a meandering river, through a strath of settlement and farmland, through rough pasture, wood pasture, wood and forestry, to moorland with its patchwork of muirburn’.	Strathdon to the uplands above Bunzeach- are exemplary of this quality.	Reinforced through managing the forest sustainably as a part of the wider landscape, applying forest design principles to inform felling and planting layout.
‘The harmony of complicated curves’.	A landscape of curves. The hills and peaks are rounded with long, undulating, smooth ridges, and the plateaux are gently convex. The moorland is rolling. Corries and glens, scooped out by past glaciers, are concave. At lower levels glacial moraines create hummocky, rounded landforms. The straths are gently profiled, and the rivers along the floors are wide, meandering and sinuous.	Topography of the hills and spurs that rise around River Don near Bellabeg are characteristically rounded.	Felling is designed to accentuate the rounded nature of the hillsides in the immediate visual envelope of Strathdon near Bellabeg and from the A944 road.
Landscapes, both cultural and natural.	At the lower altitudes the land has been long-inhabited, with patterns of land use, settlement and transport derived from the primary industries of farming, forestry and field sports. with a rich history of human occupation, and natural, wild landscapes under the dominion of nature.	Bunzeach forest beside Strathdon exemplifies this quality.	LTP and forest management at Auchernoch and Bunzeach perpetuate the forest, considering its place in both the natural and cultural landscape. The plan aims to maintain this unique balance to create an

CNP Special Quality	Extracts from CNP summary of SQ description relevant to Strathdon area	Examples	Design response in LTP
			almost seamless transition from one to the other.

The Strathdon Landscape and Visual Map shows the spatial arrangement of landscape character and designations and picks out important landscape issues and challenges.

Viewpoints used in this LTP are positioned at vantage points along the public road network. They are representative and serve to check whether the future forest will sit harmoniously in the landscape and complement the qualities of the CNP. The location of viewpoints can be seen on **Map 1 - Location and Viewpoints**.

The most prominent part of the plan area is the valley floor and side slopes of Strathdon. Nature Scot (1999 & 2019) have defined this area's landscape character as Broad Glen with Estates Landscape Character Type (LCT). This gives way to Upland Glen LCT, on the surrounding hillslopes and upland, within which most of the plan area is located. More details on LCTs are covered below.

Broad Glen with Estates

The area around Strathdon and Bellabeg is a good example of this landscape type. The flat-bottomed glen containing the meandering River Don broadens to create space for pasture interspersed with policy tree planting and stretches of riparian woodland. The hill sides are predominantly forested with conifer plantations, including Scots pine and larch. It is a colourful scene, particularly aesthetic in the autumn, when the deciduous larch and birch gold and yellows contrast with the dark greens of the evergreens and pastures, with some heather moorland on open hills beyond. The valley floor is divided into fields of improved pasture and some arable.

The glen is comparatively well-populated. The village of Bellabeg is associated with the conjunction of glens and river crossing points of the A944 road which follows the glen and links with minor roads and tracks. It is a village of predominantly traditional buildings.

Human influences are most evident within the glen where the distinct pattern of fields, enclosed by policy woodlands and forest plantations, are punctuated by buildings. The glen is a communication corridor with the east-west A-road taking advantage of relatively easy topography. These are complemented by a network of small roads and tracks. It is easily appreciated by the roads that follow the glen. The roads' sinuous alignment, and the high proportion of woodland, provides a sense of intrigue as the landscape is revealed only gradually. The sequence of woodland and open farmland can form a rhythmic pattern as well as having a visual balance.

Rivers and bright green meadows contrast with the hillsides and dark woodlands. Any view of the upland landscape beyond the glen itself adds to the variety of the valley landform and range of woodland and designed landscape features.

Bunzeach's forests strongly contribute to the landscape character of the glen being the dominant land use on its northern slopes near Bellabeg. Over the past 20 years sensitively shaped felling operations have perpetuated the attractiveness of the forested side slopes of the glen. The intimate scale of the lower elevations has been reflected in the felling, where smaller interlocking coupes have been adopted. The scale increases on the higher ground where the coupes extend over hill tops. Larch has been retained for its autumn colour and diversity whilst it remains healthy.



Above: Internal view of the diversity which exists on the lower slopes of Bunzeach within Strathdon, close to Bluefold, south of Waterside.

The wooded north facing slopes between Tom a' Charraigh and White Hill contribute significantly to the attractive qualities of Strathdon. The current mix of conifers including mature larch is particularly aesthetic during the autumn. A key challenge for this plan is to retain this quality. With the long term of larch under threat from disease and windblow it may be difficult to achieve, however. To counter its potential loss, species such as birch will be planted on the visible side slopes along with the more traditional forestry conifer species.

Plans continue to favour smaller, interlocking coupes that respond to the landform of rounded hill tops and rolling side slopes on the side slopes within this landscape character area.

Upland Glen – Cairngorms

Upland Glen – Cairngorms LCT is characteristic of much of the foothills of the Cairngorms. The landscape is characterised by strong evidence of glacial processes, including steepened sides and level floors. Glen Nochtly is an example of a narrower, more secluded glen whilst Bunzeach is of a larger scale and open.

The glens often have stretches of riparian woodland. Stands, usually of birch, occur on the steepest side slopes or near crags. Conifer woodland is often on the side slopes where it can reinforce a sense of enclosure. Policy woodlands are a feature of some areas, as in Auchernoch. Heather moorland and upland grassland are also found on higher slopes of some glens.



Above: Internal channeled view of Auchernoch, looking east down Glen Nocht towards neighbouring fields, shelter belts, and moor, demonstrating the rounded quality of the landscape.

Residential settlement is sparse, particularly in comparison to neighbouring Strathdon.

The variety of the landform, combined with the mix of trees and open ground, together with the range of settlement, results in a series of changing views and experience when travelling through these glens. The enclosing glen sides channel views along their length, but views to the hills and mountains beyond are frequent and emphasize the contrast provided by the combination of valleys and uplands.

Other characteristics include:

- Land-use frequently differing on one side of the glen to the other, linked to aspect.
- Improved, grazed fields on glen floors and floodplains.
- Sparsely settled glens today but evidence of past settlements are evident.
- Some landmark historic buildings remain associated with policy woodland, as in Auchernoch.
- Access varies from narrow roads, estate, and forestry tracks to more main routes.

- Varied experience when passing through glens from open and expansive to sheltered and secluded.
- Views to adjacent uplands provide contrast.



Above photo shows mature Sitka spruce on the above the River Nochtly. The plan aims to fell and replace it with more appropriate native species to create a riparian woodland. This will correspond better with the landscape character, giving way more sensitively to the open hill beyond Auchernoch.

To correspond with and enhance the area's landscape character the management plan seeks to:

- Use the forest design principles to inform the unity, diversity, shape, and scale of forest elements to ensure they are appropriate to the setting.
- Better integrate with the surrounding areas through buffering commercial crops where they risk seeding into designated habitats, introducing and expanding riparian woodland alongside watercourses including the Nochtly, increasing the proportion of native Scots pine to the upper slopes of the forest area
- Perpetuate the Policy Woodland feel associated with the central part of Auchernoch.
- Soften geometric internal and external boundaries and edges where possible.

- Ensure that future expansion of infrastructure such as quarries are appropriate in scale and setting with agreed restoration plans.

Visibility

The wooded slopes on the southern side of Strathdon between Strathdon and Bellabeg hamlets and the A944 / A97 junction comprise the most visible parts of the LTP area. The forests actively contribute to the celebrated character of the area as mentioned above. Key receptors are the scattered properties, hotel, and A944 public road. Visualisations from viewpoint 1 located on the roadside by Colquhonnies hotel GR NJ 365125 illustrate how the hillside will change through the plan period.

Other viewpoints are located at vantage points on local roads. Their location is shown on **Map 1: Location and Viewpoints**. Although less frequented these are used to assess how the management proposals will appear on the visible slopes to ensure they reinforce the local and National Park's special qualities. Visualisations are available in **Appendix 7**.

Viewpoint 2 Farm (Roughpark) NJ 344121 on the A944, view looks east and southeast.

Considering the layout of forestry on the hills of Coulick Hill and western slopes of the Bunzeach forest area. As a public road this view will be glimpsed by many as they pass and the residents will have it as their backdrop. The forest sits comfortably on the foothills as they gradually increase in height to the south. The forest upper margins blending into the moorland avoiding significant geometric and straight edges.

Viewpoint 3 Facing SW (White Hill) NJ 406113

The wooded north facing slopes between Tom a' Charraigh and White Hill contribute significantly to the attractive qualities of Strathdon. The current mix of conifers including mature larch is particularly aesthetic during the autumn. Efforts to sensitively manage this face as the existing forest matures are ongoing. Former plans to retain the larch are no longer feasible due to the threat to tree health and impacts of catastrophic windblow. Plans continue to favour smaller, interlocking coupes that respond to the landform of rounded hill tops and rolling side slopes. Restocking will aim to perpetuate autumn colour through restocking with a diverse mix of species including those with autumnal colour, such as birch.

Viewpoint 4 Campsite (Above Water of Carvie) NJ 348107

This was selected for its location on a public road beside a campsite. Views south towards the upper forests where it passes over the summits of Craig of Bunzeach and Cnoc na h-lolaire and to the high moorland ground. The transition from forest to open hill is of particular interest- the aim being that the shift from commercial forest to native buffers to open hill appears natural. It is also used to check visibility of the proposed quarry extension.

Viewpoint 5 Auchernoch (Tornagorn) NJ 342153

Looks north-west towards the forested slopes of Auchernoch. It is used to demonstrate how the forest will change over the plan period in ways to complement the landscape character of the area.

Photo from A944

Photo showing north facing slopes dipping into Strathdon seen from A944 near Colquhonnies Hotel.

