

# Appendix 5: Landscape

## Landscape and visual appraisal

See **Map 7** for context.

All three woodlands are part of the forested belt that runs between the coastal agricultural lands to the south of the Moray Firth and the more hostile uplands and foothills to the Cairngorms.

The area is split into a number of Landscape Character Types (LCTs) as defined by Nature Scot, 2019 which reflect the changes in topography:

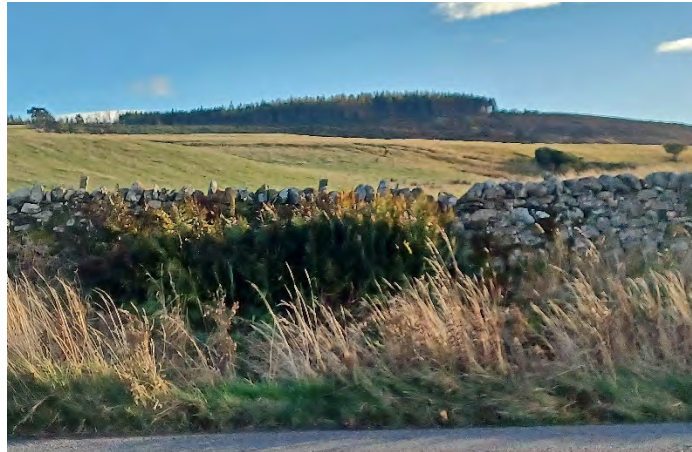
Coastal Farmland, Rolling Farmland and forests, Narrow Wooded Valley and Open Rolling Upland

### Assich:

Located on north facing, gentle slopes to the south of Strath Nairn, east of Inverness. The landscape is one of transition from the more fertile strath-side slopes to moorland above. Its characteristics reflect the gradual rise in elevation and merging patterns of landcover. It follows the top of a ridge of hills on the edge of LCT 291 Open Rolling Upland. Although mostly within this LCT, the area's characteristics have more in common with the neighbouring Rolling Farmland and Woodland Landscape Character Type (LCT 285) within which the northern parts of Assich fall.

Key characteristics are:

- Mid elevation, undulating landform with rolling gently rounded hills.
- Mix of moorland edge, plantation forest, pasture and arable irregular shaped fields often edged with banks, stone dykes, gorse and remnant trees
- Frequent presence of gorse and broom providing seasonal interest and localised screening from local roads.
- Straight upper edge of forest plantations with farmland abutting their lower slopes.
- Small scale local landscape associated with surrounding crofts and small landholdings, scattered settlement along the upper slopes of Strathnairn.



Above: Assich forest runs along the skyline when seen from unclassified road between Dalroy and Cantraybruich. Inappropriate alignment of forest edge relative to ridge landform is clearly visible from road.

## Forest design guidance:

Forest margin follows the field pattern along its northern boundary. Relates well with the landscape character and scale of the setting.

The eastern edge (pictured above) forms a geometric straight edge which crosses the top of a local summit (see map) which appears discordant with the landform. The contrasting colour of the open ground and dark forest make this more prominent. Shape of planted edge would benefit from being realigned before planting next rotation.

Southern boundaries are largely hidden as they abut neighbouring forests and woodlands. Where possible the character and felling regimes should correspond with the neighbouring woodland. The landscape would benefit from a gradual transition to the open Scots pine planting on the moor to the south west.

- Felling should reflect the small scale of the woodland and the surrounding setting. Clear fells should be small or interlocking and irregular to break down their apparent scale.
- The landscape character would be enhanced by an increase in species and age diversity with a shift to more continuous cover management where appropriate to fit better with the small-scale nature of the surrounding land use and neighbouring forests.
- To increase unity with its surroundings the prominent western edge should be redesigned and the link with the neighbouring native woodland Scots pine enhanced.
- To help strengthen the general feel of the area, special attention should be given to preserving and developing the character along the forest roads and around

neighbouring homesteads and maintain the open forest qualities that exist in the larch and the neighbouring birch woodland.

## Visibility:

From afar Assich is seen as part of a much larger area of forest along this southern edge of the Moray Firth coastal strip. These forests form the backdrop to the lands to the north, seen as a narrow dark band of forest, back lit, making it less prominent in the landscape. The topography serves to foreshorten its scale. It is largely unobtrusive in the wider landscape. Assich from Sunnyside and the B9006 is seen as a narrow strip along the horizon above fields and other woodlands and gives way to moorland to the west.

From local roads / national cycle route and a small number of isolated dwellings on the road it is seen as a narrow band on the skyline - tree shapes silhouetted against the sky-with the forest edge above pasture to the north of the forest. Cyclists, with their higher position above the road and longer dwell time will see more of it than motorists.



There are a number of dwellings located within or right next to the forest. Naturally, the forest dominates their view and forms the backdrop to their residents' lives.

## Laiken:

Laiken is a small forest that is part of a wider patchwork of farmland and forests located on the margin between the Coastal Farmland LCT and Rolling Farmland and Forest LCT to the south of Nairn. It is divided by the A939 public road which follows a natural dip through a rolling hillside ridge aligned south west to north east. The eastern side is on a shallow ridge and comprises a narrow band of forest protruding into surrounding farmland. To the south west it adjoins a more extensive band of forest and woodland on higher ground of the Hill of Urchany and the Ord.

Forest boundaries are straight abutting the field boundaries. Its character is mostly in keeping with the SNH National Landscape Character Type Type 285 - Rolling Farmland and Forests Moray and Nairn.



Above: South west part of Laiken woodland is on the higher round topped ridge enclosing rectangular pastoral fields.

Relevant key characteristics of the LCT 285 are:

- Low to mid elevation, undulating landform with rolling gently dipping rounded sometimes steep sided hills and broad and narrow valleys containing natural meandering courses of rivers and burns and associated ribbons of broadleaved woodland.
- Prominent hills and their forested tops and slopes and occasionally steep sides, combined with farmed, wooded and intimate valleys.
- A rich and varied texture of the landscape gained from the rolling landform, mosaic of farmland and tree cover (mixed with historic buildings and ruins, vernacular estate and farm buildings).
- Winding rural roads that respond to the landform and winding river valleys and numerous tributaries.
- High proportion of connected tree cover consisting of mixed conifers and broadleaves in small plantations, woodlands, roadside trees and tree belts.
- Mix of pasture and arable fields often edged with banks and stonewalls, gorse and remnant trees.
- Frequent presence of gorse and broom providing seasonal interest.





Above: Differences in tree height are noticeable from nearby road. The central part of Laiken is on a gentle ridge above pastoral farmland. It brings colour and enclosure to neighbouring properties.

The well-connected network of woods and forest woodlands enclose and unify the landscape. It is a small-scale landscape of intimate views within a mosaic of fields, hills, valleys and woodland.



Above: The north east of Laiken is on lower ground. It's planted edge follows the field pattern of the farmland that surrounds it.

## Forest management guidance:

In the lowland the forest margins follow the field pattern. This is largely in character with the landscape. However, on the higher ground where the field boundaries are particularly geometric and perpendicular to contours and high up the slope the forest edge appears unnatural. To soften and reduce their impact an area of open ground between the field boundary and the commercial forest area could be left and allowed to infill through natural regeneration of gorse and broom or planted with low density native broadleaves such as birch.

Where geometric ownership boundary abuts neighbouring forest- in particular on higher ground or across summits- it would be beneficial to design and coordinate felling to fit with the neighbour's plans. Equally, on visible hillsides and summits restocking should also relate favourably with woodland outwith the ownership boundary to avoid the creation of intrusive species boundaries.

The scale of clear fells should relate the small to moderate size of the surrounding fields and clearings and scale of the hillside to resemble the mosaic of enclosed and open areas that dominate this area's landscape character.

The wider landscape has a diverse range of species and woodland types. There are blocks of single species within the wider forest. To ensure the blocks remain of a size that matches the small scale of the landscape, consider increasing intimate mixes at restocking to increase diversity and reduce the size of single species blocks. This would change the skyline in the future and add more interest to the forest blocks.

The forest links well with the surrounding landscape. Amelioration of the most prominent forest edges mentioned earlier would help to unify the woodland with the surrounding open fields.

The current combination of mixed conifers and broadleaves found within the block reflects and contributes favourable to the genus loci of the area. Clear felling compromises this rich and diverse character. However, this is for a relatively short period as the area regenerates quickly. Recommend phasing felling to limit number and scale of fresh clear fells visible from main roads and paths to minimise impact the genus loci. Continuous cover management using single tree and small group selection would complement the genus loci of the area.

## Visibility:

Laiken Woodland is of limited visibility. The northern edge forms the backdrop to fields seen from local roads and isolated farm steads, in short distance views. Its southern edge seen from roads to the south east including the A939.

The forest is most visible from the open fields and roads which it encloses to the south. It is seen as a strip of woodland on the linear ridge. In the autumn this is particularly colourful as a result of the mature larch located along its edge.

The forest and the slopes on which it sits help to contain views of the quarry and local authority recycling compound located beside the A939.

It forms the backdrop to the surrounding regularly spaced isolated dwellings, plant nursery and holiday lets which are spread across the fields to Laiken forest's south.



Above: Laiken Forest forms the backdrop from A939 beside garden nursery.

## Furness:

Four small adjoining plantations located on the southern side of the River Findhorn adjacent to the Findhorn Valley and Wooded Estates Local Landscape Area which extends north-eastwards downstream of Furness. The forests fall within and relate most strongly with Nature Scot's LCT 286 Narrow Wooded Valley – Moray and Nairn. The south eastern part of the plan area is on the edge of LCT291 Open Rolling Upland where it forms a transition between the heavily wooded glen and open upland moor.

LCT 286 Narrow Wooded Valley – Moray and Nairn is described as containing 'the middle reaches of the River Findhorn, which flows north-east through a channel dissecting landscape types Open Upland, Upland Moorland and Forestry, and Rolling Farmlands and Forests – Moray & Nairn character types, before emerging on the coastal plain near Forres.' (Nature Scot, 2019). Most of the Furness block is located within this LCT.

Key Characteristics relevant to LMP are:

- Diversity of species and ages of woodland, forest cover and trees, mixed with pockets of pasture.
- Strong sense of history provided by the continuation of farming and forest management practices by estates, the presence of historic buildings and relicts, the many large, ancient trees, and the lack of major new developments or detracting structures.
- Winding, often narrow roads, following the land form, and crossing the river in enclosed niches over historic, small-scale stone bridges.



- Shelter and seclusion provided by intricate, enclosed landform, woodland cover and general lack of roads and river crossings.



Above: Images of Findhorn river in the heart of the Narrow Wooded Valley LCT with Ferness woodland in background



Above: Image looking across Narrow wooded valley from Ferness, Airdrie block, towards Coulmony House

Open Rolling Upland Landscape Character Type (LCT291) forms a relatively narrow band of broad rounded hills, interspersed with shallow valleys and low-lying moss. Key characteristics relevant to Furness are:

- Rolling moorland with gentle gradients and limited relief
- Simple, rolling landscape of heather moorland and grassland, with few plantations or structures, and the contrasting setting it provides for the occasional farmed valleys at the margins and close to roads.
- Elevated, open and expansive views across the landscape, and long-distance views from the edge of the plateau to the north and south.



The part of Furness which falls within this area differs from the majority of LCT 291 is more of a transition area - less remote, located close to settlement and public roads. The forests which extend out of the valley on to the upland margins create enclosure around the edge of the moor. The forest edges becoming more diffuse as widely spaced natural regen establishes on the drier knolls of the neighbouring moor. Their position on the moorland edge with deep peats, exposure and poorer soils, equally gives them a different character to those on the better soils and more shelter provided in the glen.



Above: Photo looking towards the Open Rolling Upland from B9007 between the Ferness blocks

Forest management guidance to enhance landscape character:

- Aim to improve the scenic quality of the forest areas to complement the adjacent LLA through enhancing the special qualities of the Narrow Wooded Valley LCT
- Reflect the smaller scale of the landscape within the glen and consider the visual impact of fellings from the nearby historic structures, buildings and roads.
- Retain/ increase diversity of species including mixes of broadleaves and conifers to compliment the woodlands which exist elsewhere within the Findhorn glen.
- On richer soils and more gentle slopes where access is good consider continuous cover forest management to reduce the visual impact of clear felling within the glen.
- Where clearfelling rotations are the only option minimise the size of fellings or use interlock and coalescence to reduce their perceived scale.
- On moorland edge aim to improve the link with the surrounding moorland. Where crops are in check, restoration to moorland would complement this transitional landscape.
- Reduce planting density and avoid straight forest edges where they abut open smooth moorland to make the edge appear more natural.

Below: Internal view of Ferness Forest

