

# Statement of Importance: Dee Valley Special Landscape Area

## Location and Boundaries

This SLA includes the valley of the River Dee from Dinnet in the west to Peterculter in the east. It includes the river and associated landscapes, taking in the adjoining hills, and covers the settings of riverside towns such as Aboyne and Banchory. The boundary has been drawn to include landscapes which help to frame the river and its setting. The River Dee continues east through the administrative area of Aberdeen City to reach the North Sea.

Designation identifies the strong identity of the Dee Valley, and its scenic qualities which are a combination of the river, with wooded valley sides rising to moorland hills, and occasional limestone outcrops. The importance of the Dee Valley for tourism, with its numerous visitor attractions and facilities including castles and estates that contribute to built heritage. The naturalness of the Dee Valley, with its river and broadleaf woodland is also recognised.



*The River Dee from the B974 at Banchory (Source: LUC)*

## Designation Statement

The Dee is one of Aberdeenshire's major rivers, and the Dee Valley has a strong sense of place. It comprises an intact farmed valley landscape, with wooded sides rising to moorland hills. The Mounth rises to the south and the Grampian Outliers to the north.

The valley has a strong sense of naturalness, created by the combination of river and broadleaf woodland. The ecological value of the river, its tributaries and its surroundings contributes to the landscape character, as well as being recognised as nationally and internationally important for nature conservation.

There are many opportunities for recreation in the Dee Valley, including canoeing, walking and cycling. The area is a hub for tourists, with visitor attractions and tourist facilities,

particularly in Banchory. These attractions include the Falls of Feugh near Banchory, comprising waterfalls with a stone footbridge and opportunities to view leaping salmon. Scolty Hill near Banchory is a popular location for its woodland walks and has panoramic views from the summit.

Despite being farmed and settled the Dee provides opportunities to experience tranquillity and enjoy the area's wildlife.

The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:

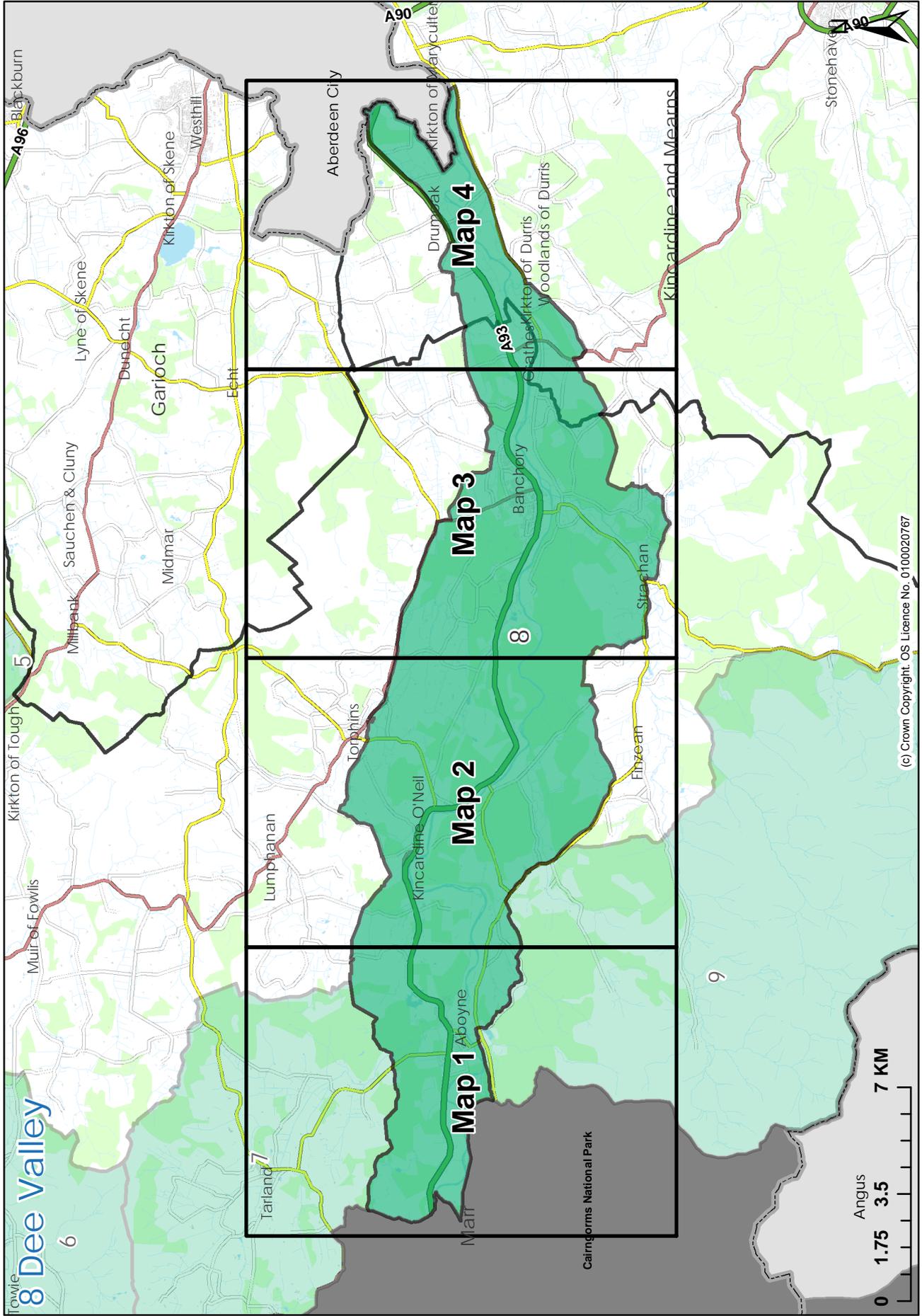
- Broad, meandering river, with wooded banks rising to moorland hills and occasional limestone outcrops.
- Broadleaf woodland contributes to visual diversity and habitat value all along the valley, and reflect long history of estate development.
- The woodland along the Dee forms part of an intact habitat network, including policy woodland, plantations and riparian woodland, providing connectivity between the lowlands and uplands of Aberdeenshire. Mature woodland also provides diversity and richness of landscape character.
- Key routes through the valley include the Royal Deeside Railway, the Deeside Tourist Route and long distance walking, cycling and horse riding trails. The valley is seen by large numbers of people using these routes.
- A wealth of distinctive built heritage, including well known castles and mansion houses such as Crathes, Drum and Inchmarlo, and the relatively untouched granite architecture of Deeside settlements such as Kincardine O'Neil.
- The granite architecture of Deeside settlements is an essential part of the character of Aboyne and Banchory, as well as smaller villages.
- Deeside is representative of Aberdeenshire's identity, with its Royal connections and is a popular tourist destination, both in itself and as a link between Aberdeen and the National Park.
- At its western end, increasing glimpses to the higher hills mark the approach to the National Park.
- Locations along the River Dee are host to some of the most photographed places in Aberdeenshire.
- The pattern of historic routeways running north to south across the Dee at strategic crossing points highlights more than anywhere else the connection between the highlands and the lowlands.

### **Forces for Change**

- Pressure of residential development in towns and villages along course of the River Dee.
- Effect of light pollution in and around settlements.
- Changes to landscape as a result of forest management and changes to agricultural practices in this area.
- Increased recreation along access tracks may lead to erosion.
- Impact of proposals which effect the integrity of natural and historic features within the SLA.
- Development of renewable energy technologies on enclosing slopes to the river (e.g. on-shore wind turbines, grid connection and associated infrastructure) and in direct views along the river (e.g. hydro) affect views to and from the SLA.

## Management Recommendations

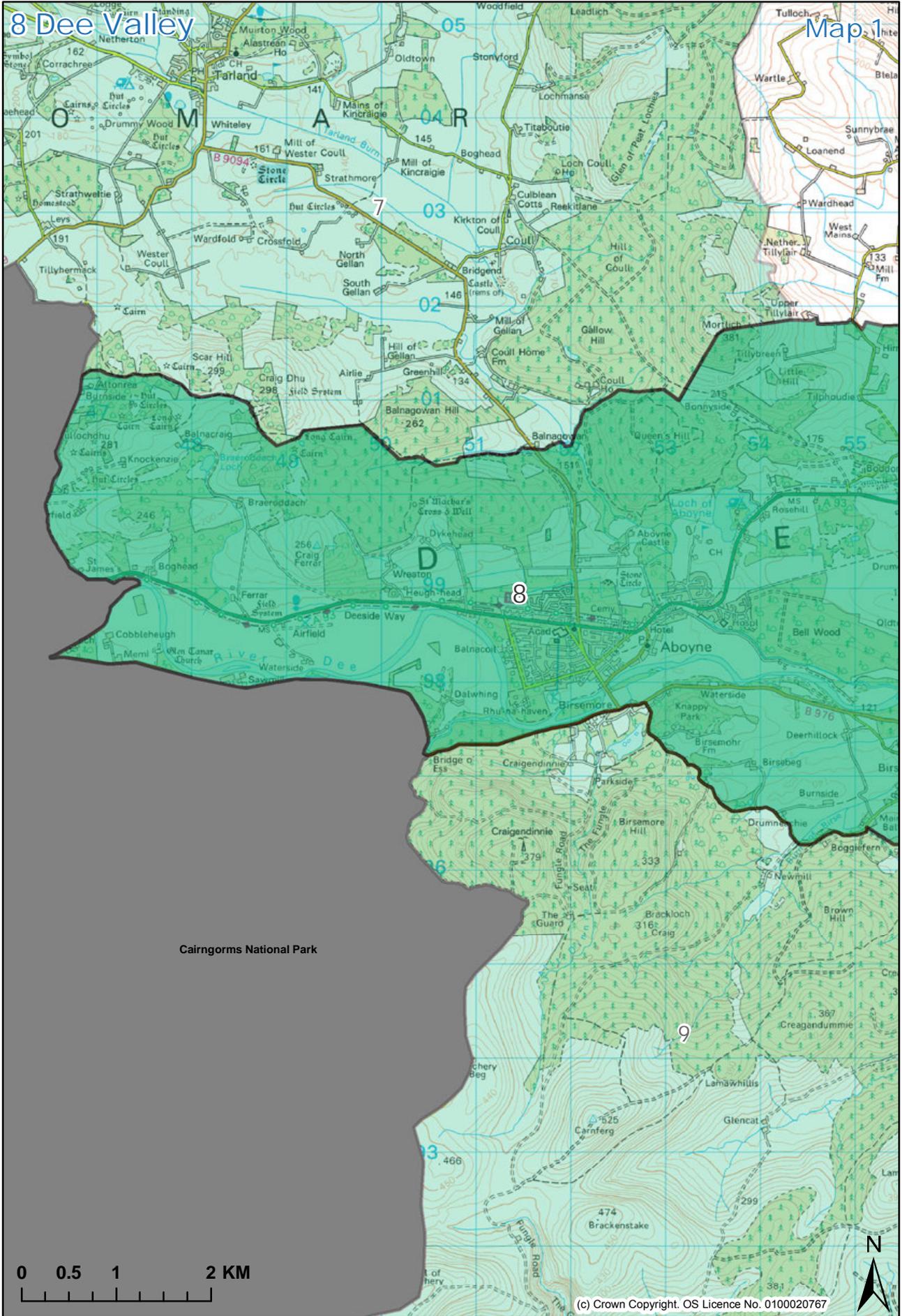
- The Dee Valley SLA is classed as a valley landscape type. As such emphasis should be on maintaining the current patterns of land use and settlement, with development focused within existing towns and villages. Elsewhere, development should be located on lower slopes or floor of the valley and carefully sited, designed and landscaped to integrate within the wider valley landscape. Development proposed in surrounding upland areas should be assessed to minimise the visual impact on the SLA, including views and vistas along the valley.
- Proposals should not impact on the sense of place provided by the river and wooded banks, rising to moorland hills.
- Development should contribute to the distinctive form of policy woodland plantations and riparian woodland in the area.
- Proposals are likely which seek to take advantage of the Dee valley landscape as a popular setting for a range of outdoor recreation including key routes through the valley. The valley is seen by large numbers of people using the Royal Deeside Railway, the Deeside Tourist Route and long distance walking, cycling and horse riding trails and proposals should be carefully assessed to maintain the landscape setting.
- The wealth of distinctive built heritage, should be maintained. Opportunities which attempt to sensitively develop/ convert traditional vernacular buildings are likely to be looked upon favourably.
- The granite architecture of Deeside settlements is an essential part of the character of Aboyne and Banchory, as well as smaller villages and this characteristic needs to be protected. Development within smaller villages should ensure that design respects the vernacular heritage and sense of place that they provide.
- Deeside is representative of Aberdeenshire's identity, and is a popular tourist destination, both in itself and as a link between Aberdeen and the National Park. It is important that development and management proposals reflect the identity and sense of place associated with the River Dee, particularly at its western end, increasing glimpses to the higher hills mark the approach to the National Park.
- Proposals should not impact on the setting, integrity or character of the valued natural and historic features within the valley including Scolty Hill and General Burnett's monument, and the Falls of Feugh, comprising waterfalls with a B-listed stone footbridge and tollhouse.



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# 8 Dee Valley

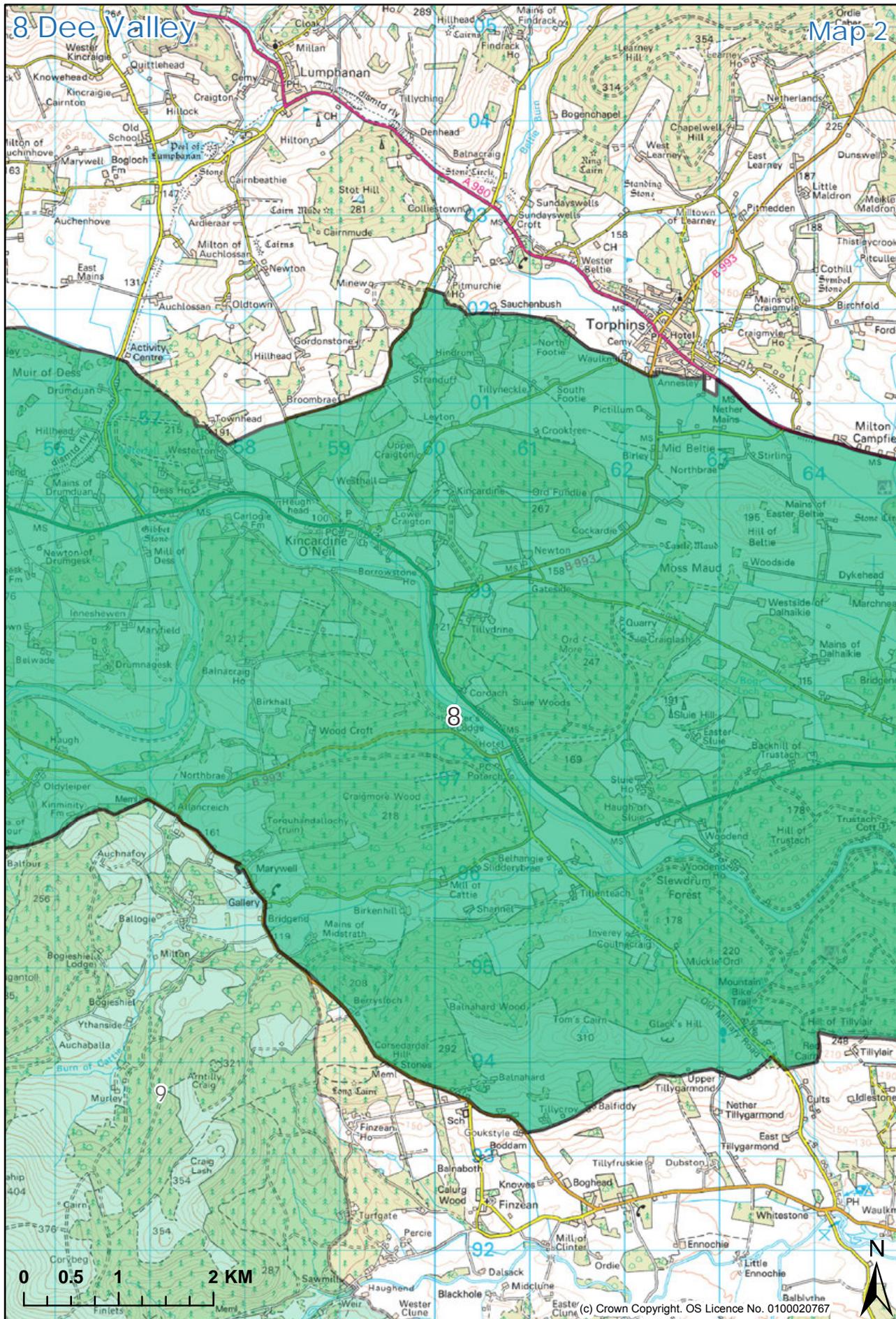
# Map 1



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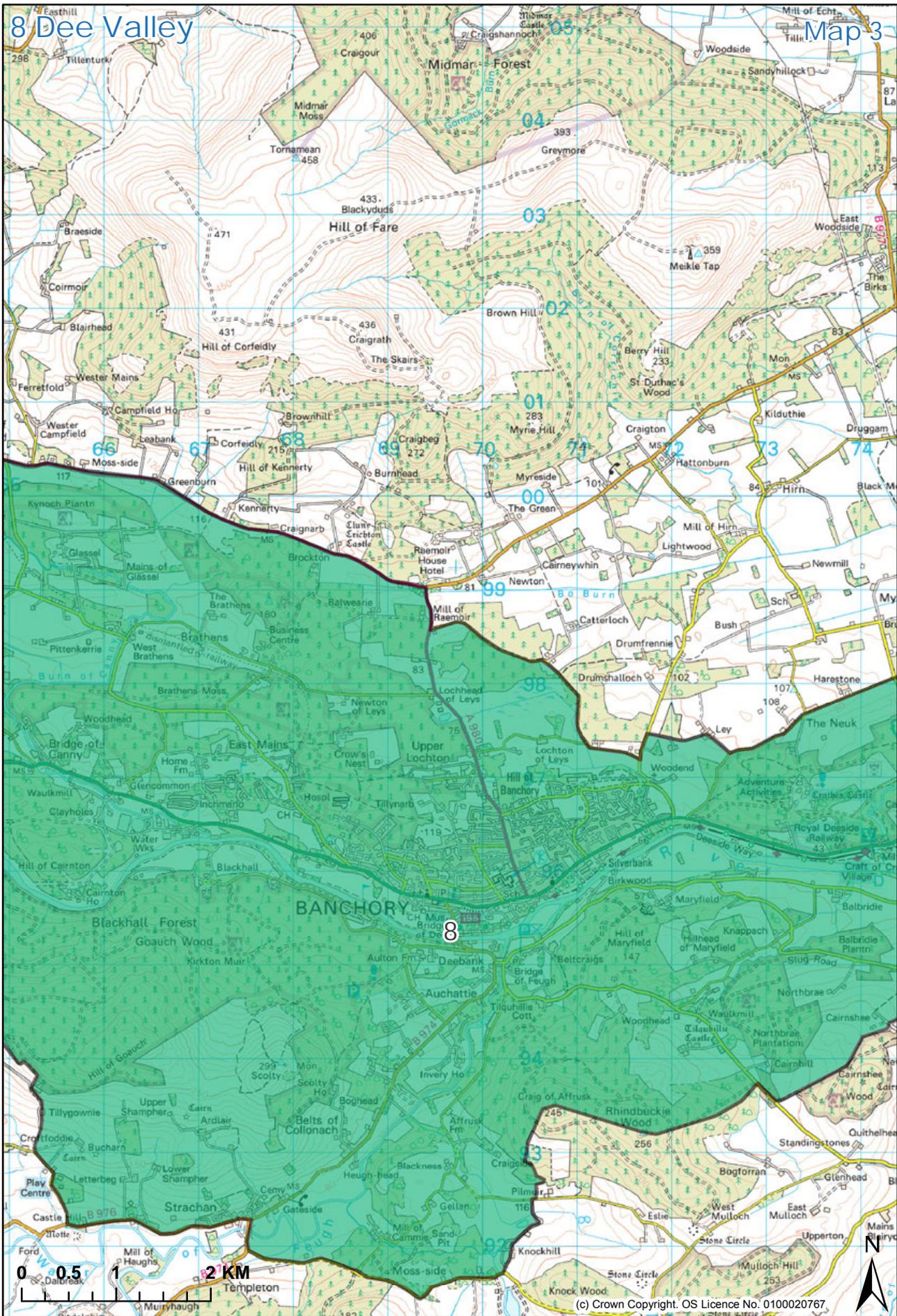
# 8 Dee Valley

# Map 2



# 8 Dee Valley

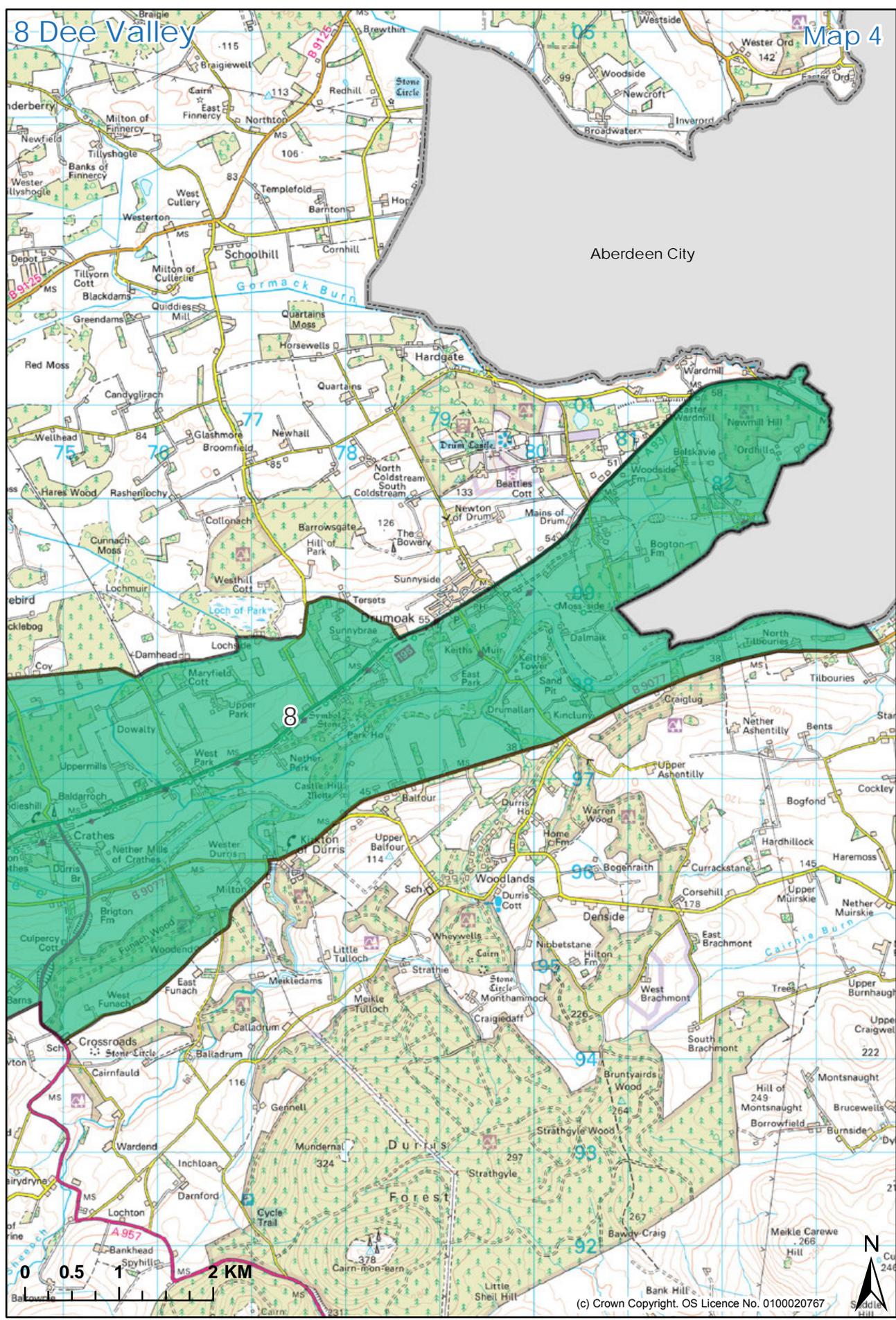
# Map 3



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# 8 Dee Valley

# Map 4



Aberdeen City

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## Statement of Importance: **Clachnaben and Forest of Birse Special Landscape Area**

### Location and Boundaries

This SLA is in the south west of Aberdeenshire, taking in part of the upland Mounth. The Forest of Birse is one of the wildest parts of Aberdeenshire outside the National Park, while **Clachnaben is a prominent landmark for miles around.**

The northern boundary follows the edge of the Dee valley to the north, and the more populated Water of Feugh valley to the north east. It travels via the B976 between Bridge of Ess and Birsemore, then follows a minor road and forestry edge before re-joining the B976 at Allanreich. East of Arntilly Craig the eastern boundary follows forestry tracks, open moorland and minor roads until joining the B974 south of Greendams, which it follows south until Cairn o' Mount. The southern boundary follows the Cairn o' Mount – Sturdy Hill ridge. The western boundary follows the administrative boundary with Angus and the Cairngorms National Park.

These boundaries have been selected to enclose the most undeveloped parts of The Mounth, which are among the least accessible and wildest parts of Aberdeenshire. The boundaries have been drawn to exclude all but minor roads, as well as the larger forest plantations east of the B974.

Designation of the western part of the Mounth recognises the scenic qualities created by the strong rolling relief and distinctive hill profiles. The relative lack of habitation and high wildness qualities, as well as the perception of naturalness resulting from extensive areas of heather moorland are also seen in this area. The relationship with the adjacent Cairngorms National Park supports designation of this SLA.



*The distinctive profile of Clachnaben from the B974 (Source: LUC)*

## Designation Statement

The Forest of Birse is an open expanse of rolling upland hills which extends west into the Cairngorms National Park. Clachnaben is a distinctive craggy peak on the north side of Glen Dye, a valley running east-west through the SLA.

The land cover is predominantly heather moorland, with some extensive areas of forestry on the fringes, particularly in the north above the Dee Valley. The pine forest on the northern slopes of the Birse valley have the largest remnants of nature pine woodland found in Aberdeenshire. Burns running along the sheltered glens are tributaries of the River Dee. The ecological value of the river, its tributaries and its surroundings contributes to the landscape character, as well as being recognised as nationally and internationally important for nature conservation.

The Mounth provides opportunities for hill walking, and Clachnaben is a popular summit, with panoramic views including towards Bennachie to the north. The area is visible from the elevated B974 which runs along the eastern boundary. The area forms the backdrop to the Dee Valley to the north and also to the Howe of the Mearns to the south.

There is little habitation in the SLA, and many areas are inaccessible except on foot. The area has a strong sense of wildness, and tranquillity can be experienced in both the upland moorland hills and sheltered glens.

The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:

- Strong, rolling relief of the upland landscape, including highly distinctive hill profiles the most recognisable of which is the crag of Clachnaben.
- Strong wildness qualities including a virtual absence of habitation, limited access and rugged terrain.
- Uninterrupted land cover of heather moorland across most of the area, with forestry on fringes.
- Forest of Birse includes a range of habitat types, including the community-owned Commonty Pinewoods, is an important habitat for bird life.
- A widely visible landscape, forming the backdrop to Deeside to the north, including views to Scolty Hill, and with the landmark of Clachnaben seen from miles around.
- The long minor road into Balloch an ends at the remote Forest of Birse Kirk, with historic links over The Fungle, an ancient way linking Deeside with Glen Tarf.
- Expansive area, the elevation, landform and land cover of which continues seamlessly westwards into the Glen Tanar Forest area in the Cairngorms National Park.
- Clachnaben is a popular hill summit, with views across the whole of this landscape and beyond. Remote Mount Battock is the most easterly of the Corbetts (hills over 2500 feet), and there are several hill ascents accessible from Balloch an.

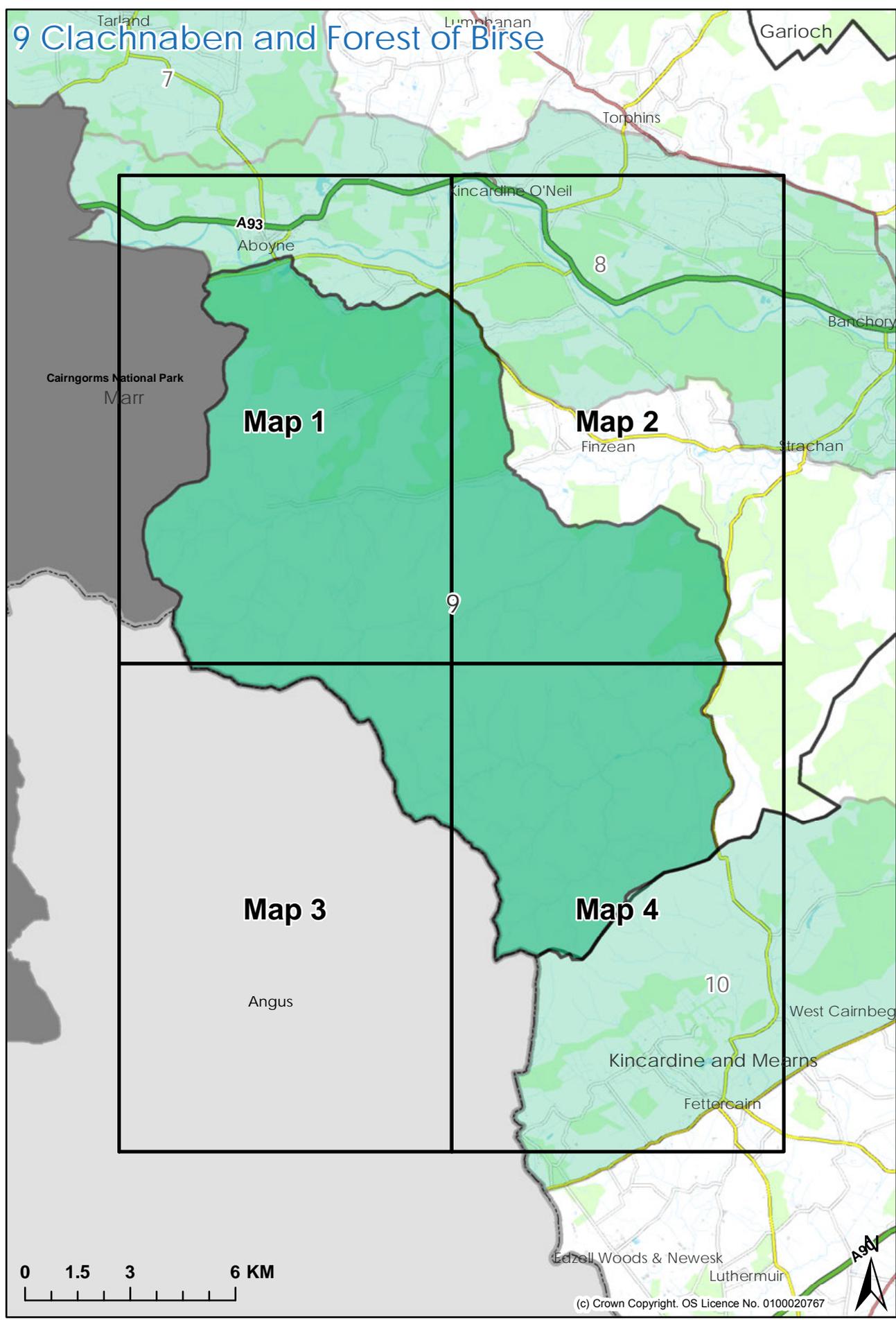
## Forces for Change

- Changes to landscape as a result of forest management and changes to agricultural practices in this area.
- Creation and maintenance of hill tracks associated with land management.
- Scattered and incremental development e.g. single houses cause negative impact on sense of place.
- Development of renewable energy technologies (e.g. on-shore wind turbines and associated infrastructure) affect views to and from the SLA.
- Changes in estate and moorland management practices.

## Management Recommendations

- The Clachnaben and Forest of Birse SLA is classed as an upland landscape type. As such emphasis should be on retaining their largely undeveloped and remote character. This means ensuring that any developments are located and designed to limit their wider visibility and protect open skylines and rugged summits.
- Development must respect the strong, rolling relief and sense of wildness of the upland landscape.
- Woodland management and further woodland creation in locations found to be suitable for such, is encouraged in this area.
- Development involving hill tracks should be undertaken in line with best practice guidance and should take account of landscape character and qualifying features of the SLA.
- Avoidance of development which erodes or interrupts the seamless relationship of this area to the Cairngorms.
- Use of good practice in forest design to maintain openness of upper plateau and hill summits and use of good practice track siting and design and footpath construction techniques.
- Avoidance of development which impacts upon the appreciations of Clachnaben and Mount Battock and their settings.

# 9 Clachnaben and Forest of Birse





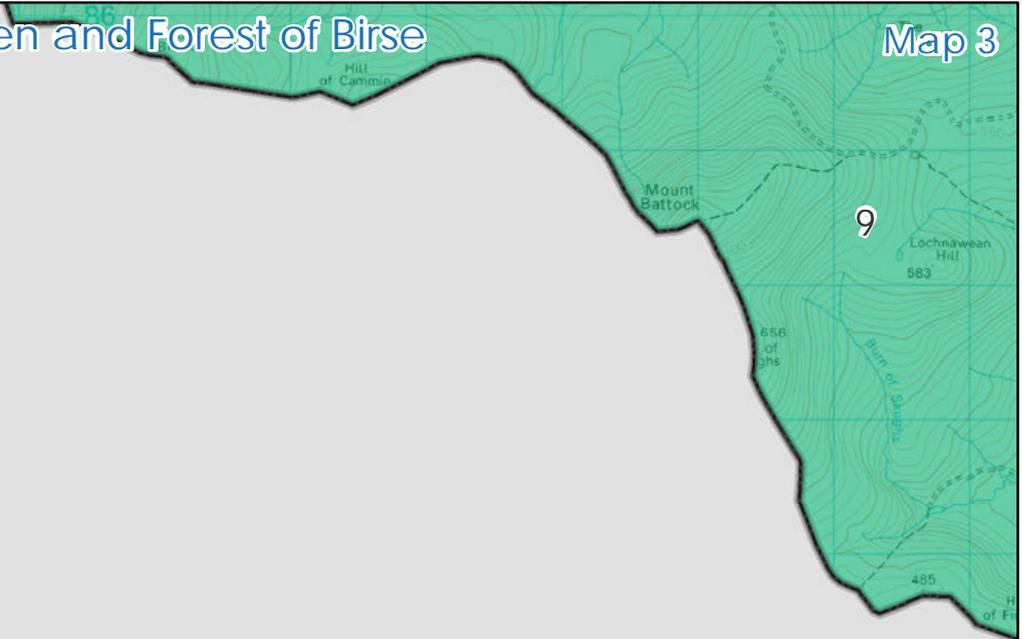
# 9 Clachnaben and Forest of Birse

Map 2



# 9 Clachnaben and Forest of Birse

Map 3



Angus



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# Statement of Importance: The Braes of the Mearns Special Landscape Area

## Location and Boundaries

This SLA includes the south-facing slopes of the Mounth and the northern part of the Howe of the Mearns, where these two distinct landscapes come together.

The northern boundary follows the ridgeline from Sturdy Hill in the south west to Coyle Hill in the north east, and includes Cairn o' Mount, the summit above the scenic viewpoint on the B974. The eastern boundary crosses the Drumtochty Forest via a forest track, and then follows minor roads and tracks between Bogburn and the B966 south of Auchenblae. The southern boundary follows the B966 along the Howe of the Mearns until the boundary with Angus at Gannochy. The western boundary follows the Aberdeenshire - Angus border.

These boundaries include the wooded farmlands at the foot of the Highland Boundary Fault, and the steep hills which form the backdrop of the Howe of the Mearns. The boundary therefore contains this important combination of landscapes, but does not cover the broader and less visually diverse farmland of the Howe of the Mearns.

The Howe of the Mearns is a uniformly flat landscape, which slopes steeply up into the Mounth, marking the line of the Highland Boundary Fault. Designation of part of the Howe of the Mearns and the enclosing ridge of the Mounth recognises the contrast between the distinctive flat farmed valley of the Howe, with its beech woodland and avenues, and the rugged upland ridge which forms its backdrop. Designation also recognises the highly visible nature of the landscape, and commanding views from its summits including the Cairn o' Mount Scenic Viewpoint, a popular resting place for passers-by.



*View south from Cairn o' Mount, looking towards Strathfinella Hill and the Howe of the Mearns (Source: LUC)*

## Designation Statement

The Braes of the Mearns comprises a pleasing juxtaposition of uniformly flat farmland and woodland, with a dramatic and rugged ridge to the north marking the line of the Highland Boundary Fault.

The northern part of the Howe of the Mearns is well wooded, with notable beech hedges and woodland associated with traditional estates, some of which is ancient woodland.

Notable built heritage features include Fasque House, a mansion house near Fettercairn, set in a wooded estate. The village of Fettercairn is a Conservation Area with some notable buildings such as the Royal Arch.

There are opportunities for walking and cycling in this SLA. The Sturdy Hill to Coyle Hill ridge is widely visible from the Howe of the Mearns including the A90, as well as the Hill of Garvock on the opposing side of the Howe. The Cairn o' Mount viewpoint is an easily accessible location for panoramic views south across the Howe.

The Howe is farmed and settled, and accessible via a network of roads. The rugged moorland and forested hills rising to the north display some qualities of wildness, such as the perception of natural land cover and pockets where remoteness from human influence can be experienced.

The following aspects and features of this landscape are considered worthy of recognition through SLA designation:

- Strong contrast between the distinctive flat Howe and the dramatic ridge of the Mounth to the north.
- Clear expression of the Highland Boundary Fault, where Highland and Lowland Scotland meet.
- Intact historic farmed landscape of the Howe of the Mearns, with a strong structure of beech woodland and avenues along the foot of the slopes.
- Highly visible ridge viewed from across the landscape to the south east, including from the A90, which defines the Howe of the Mearns.
- Cairn o' Mount scenic viewpoint, a popular stopping place on the former old military road with views across the Howe and remains of Bronze Age burial cairns which give the spot its name there are also views inland to the Cairngorms and northwards.
- Strath Finella, an intimate wooded glen leading into the hills.
- Wooded estate landscapes including Fasque, Fettercairn and Drumtochty whose distinctive policies and tree belts give a richness and cultural diversity, which reinforces the contrast of landscape character with the simplicity of land cover of the adjacent uplands. They also have historical connections with national figures such as Gladstone.
- Well known literary associations of the Howe of the Mearns including the work of Lewis Grassie Gibbon.

## Forces for Change

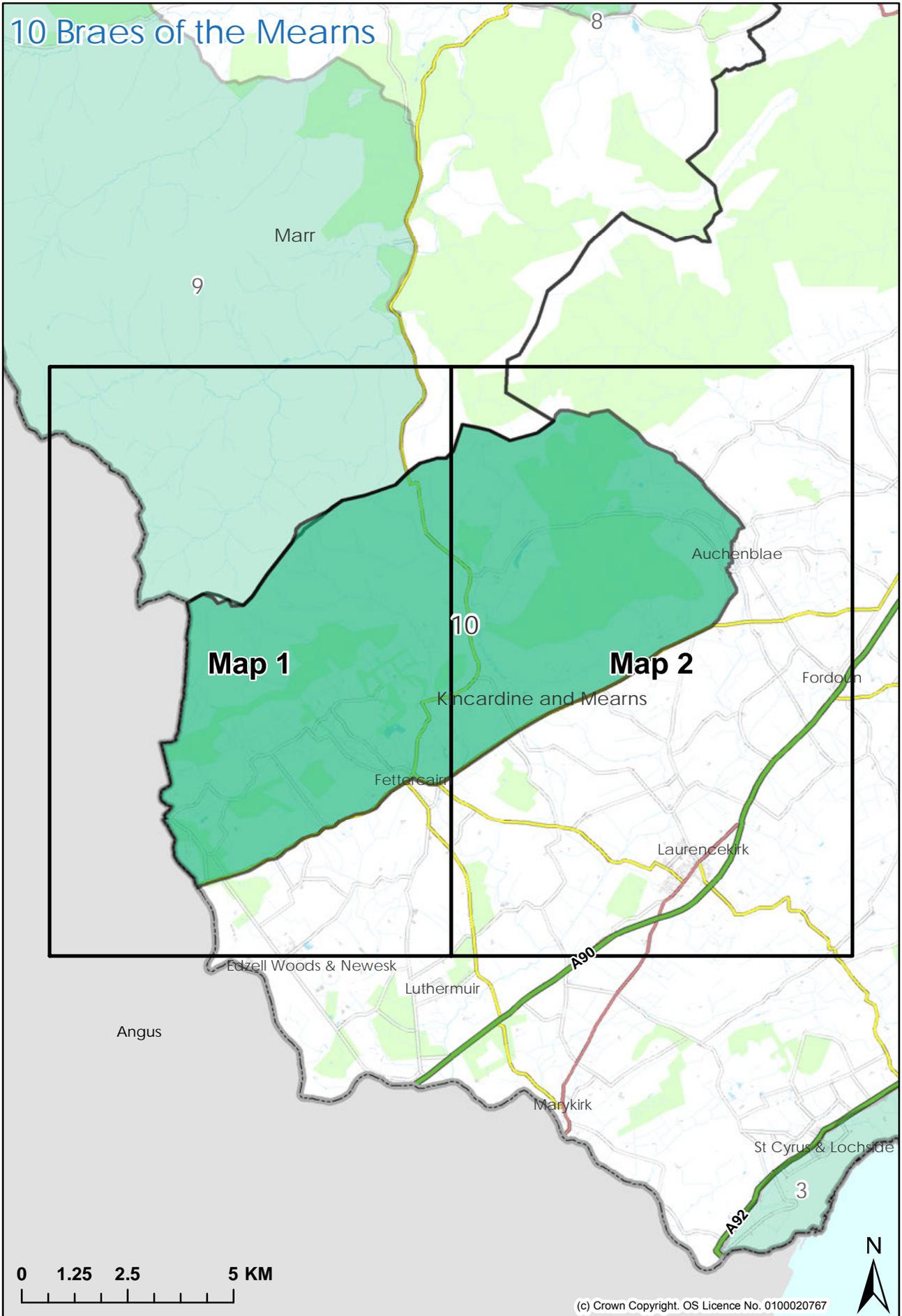
- Changes to landscape as a result of forest management and changes to agricultural practices in this area.
- Creation and maintenance of hill tracks associated with land management.
- Changes in estate and moorland management practices.
- Development pressure in and around towns and villages including Auchenblae, Fettercairn and unallocated development around Fasque.
- Scattered and incremental development e.g. single houses cause negative impact on sense of place.

- Development of renewable energy technologies (e.g. on-shore wind turbines and associated infrastructure).
- Development associated with mineral extraction.
- Development which could erode the clarity of expression of the Highland boundary fault and the transition of character from upland to lowland.
- The presence of tree viruses/diseases which may lead to large scale tree loss.

### **Management Recommendations**

- The strong contrast between the distinctive flat Howe and the ridge of the Mounth to the north should be maintained.
- The Braes of the Mearns is classed a lowland landscape type. As such emphasis should be to retain the distinctive rural character of the landscape. Isolated developments in the open countryside should be avoided wherever possible. Agricultural development and proposals for farm diversification or conversion of traditional vernacular buildings (i.e. agricultural buildings, bothies and redundant houses) should retain their character and avoid the creation of incongruous elements.
- Development proposals should maintain the intact farmed landscape of the Howe of the Mearns, with its strong structure of beech woodland and avenues.
- Due to high visual sensitivity of the ridgeline and qualities of wildness and remoteness, development proposals need to be carefully considered, sited and designed so as to avoid adverse impacts.
- Impact of development at both long and short ranges towards the Cairn o' Mount scenic viewpoint should be carefully considered to ensure that any negative impacts to the view are not disproportionate or disrupted and mitigation measures can be put in place, including landscaping in and around new developments.
- The sense of place associated with wooded estate landscapes should be maintained and where possible enhanced.
- Development involving hill tracks should be undertaken in line with best practice guidance and should take account of landscape character and qualifying features of the SLA.
- Development proposals which seek to take advantage of and promote literary associations of the Howe of the Mearns including the work of Lewis Grassie Gibbon are likely to be supported.

# 10 Braes of the Mearns

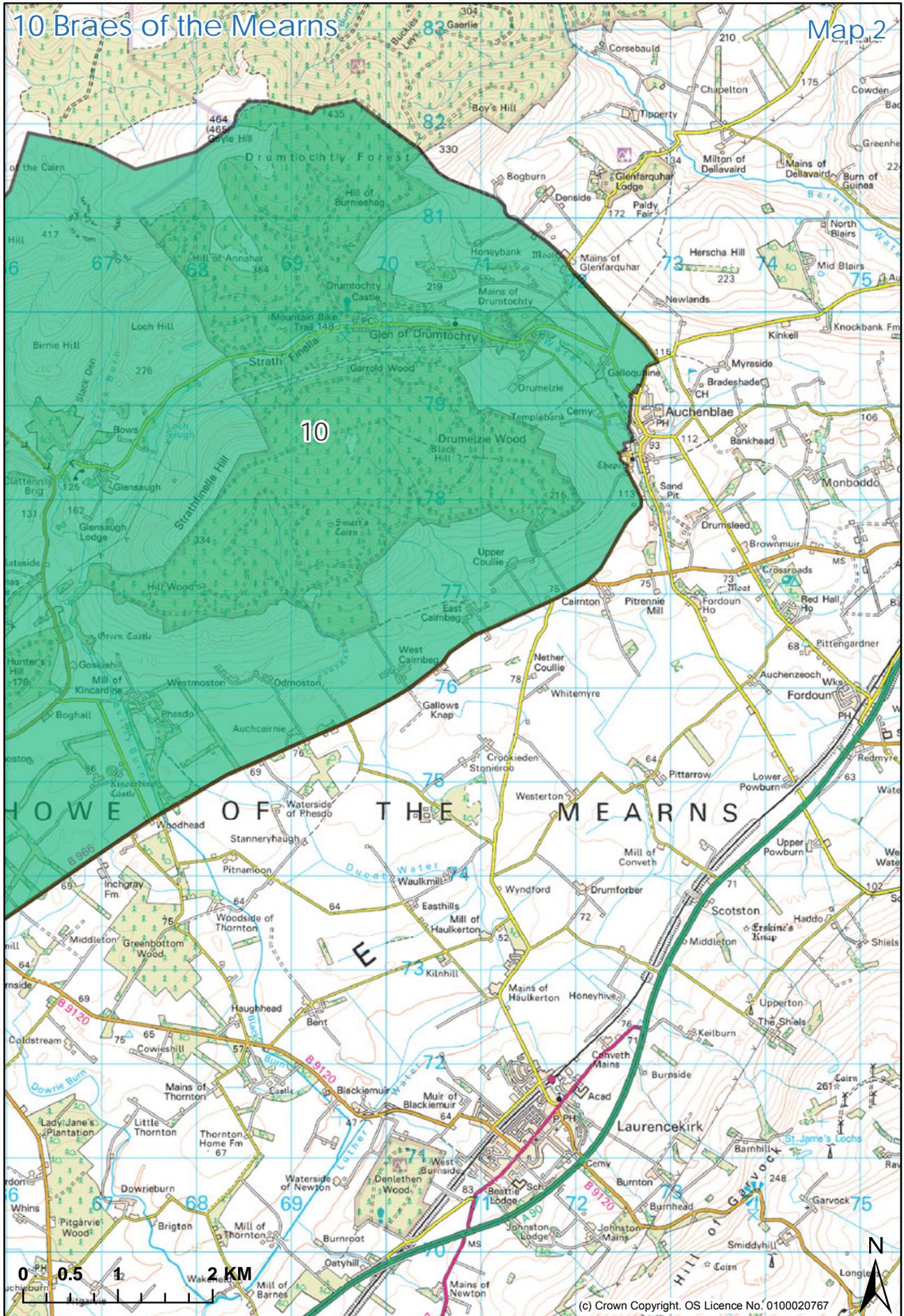


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# 10 Braes of the Mearns

Map 2



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## **Consideration of Other Relevant Policies**

In applying this Supplementary Guidance, it is important to note that it does not act in isolation. There could be other relevant policies which should be cross-referenced, most notably policies within Shaping Development in the Countryside, Protecting Resources and Shaping Places sections of the LDP. Pre-application discussions are encouraged where impacts to the landscape could occur from development proposals in order to determine the extent to which policies of the LDP apply to a proposal.

## **Monitoring**

In common with other Supplementary Guidance, the SLAs will be subject to review every five years as part of the local development plan-making process. Although landscape change generally occurs over a longer time period, it is important that the boundaries and qualifying criteria are monitored on a regular basis to ensure that the special qualities and characteristics for which a SLA is designate are maintained.

### **Policy Background**

#### **The European Landscape Convention**

The European Landscape Convention was signed in the year 2000 and came into force in the UK March 2007. The Convention defines landscape as:

*“An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.”*

The Convention aims to encourage public authorities, including planning authorities, to adopt policies and measures at a local, regional and international level to promote the protection, management and planning of European landscapes and organises European co-operation on landscape issues. It marked a key milestone in recognising that all landscapes are important, not just those that are “special” and it underpins the landscape character approach advocated in SPP (paragraph 194) and found in Policy E2 of the LDP2017.

#### **National Planning Framework 3**

Scotland's third National Planning Framework (NPF3) is a long-term spatial expression of the Scottish Government's Economic Strategy, and outlines plans for national infrastructure investment across Scotland. The contribution Scotland's landscapes makes towards our quality of life, our national identity and the visitor economy is celebrated in paragraph 4.4 of NFP3:

*“Landscape quality is found across Scotland and all landscapes support place-making. National Scenic Areas and National Parks attract many visitors and reinforce our international image. We also want to continue our strong protection for our wildest landscapes – wild land is a nationally important asset. Closer to settlements landscapes have an important role to play in sustaining local distinctiveness and cultural identity, and in supporting health and well-being”.*

#### **Scottish Planning Policy**

Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) is the Scottish Government's policy on nationally important land use planning matters. SPP outlines the need for planning authorities to protect, enhance and promote *“access to natural heritage, including green infrastructure, landscape and the wider environment”*.

SPP paragraph 196 states that:

*“International, national and locally designated areas and sites should be identified and afforded the appropriate level of protection in development plans. Reasons for local designation should be clearly explained and their function and continuing relevance considered when preparing plans”.*

Paragraph 197 identifies that non-statutory local designations should be limited to areas designated for their local landscape or nature conservation value. SPP notes that the purpose for designating a local landscape area should be to:

- *“safeguard and enhance the character and quality of a landscape which is important or particularly valued locally or regionally; or*
- *promote understanding and awareness of the distinctive character and special qualities of local landscapes; or*
- *safeguard and promote important local settings for outdoor recreation and tourism”.*

## **Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Strategic Development Plan 2014**

The Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan sets out the vision for the future of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. The Quality of the Environment Objective sets targets for *“Local Development Plans and Supplementary Guidance [to] make sure the North East’s natural environment, historic sites and buildings continue to be protected”* and commits the Council to taking account of landscape in assessing development proposals LDP level.

## **Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2017**

The Aberdeenshire LDP2017 sets out statements of the policies which will be used in assessing planning applications and through the proposals confirms the principle of development on sites across Aberdeenshire.

Policies contained within the “Natural Heritage and Landscape” section of the LDP seek to protect Aberdeenshire’s landscape, and contribute to sustainable management and improvement to landscapes across the region. Policy E2 Landscape outlines the Council’s approach to development which may affect the landscape of Aberdeenshire. The aim of this policy is to ensure that SLAs are afforded adequate protection against inappropriate development.

This Supplementary Guidance has been prepared to support the implementation of this policy.

### **Policy E2 Landscape**

*“We will refuse development that causes unacceptable effects through its scale, location or design on key natural landscape elements, historic features or the composition or quality of the landscape character. These impacts can be either alone or cumulatively with other recent developments. Development should not otherwise significantly erode the characteristics of landscapes as defined in the Landscape Character Assessments produced by Scottish Natural Heritage or have been identified as Special Landscape Areas of local importance.”*

*“Boundaries and qualifying criteria for Special Landscape Areas are identified in the Supplementary Guidance Special Landscape Areas. Developments located within Special Landscape Areas will only be permitted if the qualifying interests are not being adversely affected or effects of the development are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of at least local importance.”*

## **Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Scotland Guidance on Local Landscape Designations (2006)**

This Guidance document was developed by SNH and HS to help local authorities refresh their approach to local landscape designations. Part 1 reviews the changing context for local landscape designations; Part 2 sets out the key elements in refreshing the approach to local landscape designations and reviewing them in practice; and Part 3 addresses aspects of policy and management and other practical designation issues. This Guidance has been used by Aberdeenshire Council and LUC to prepare this Supplementary Guidance.

## **Study Approach**

In 2015 Aberdeenshire Council undertook a LLDR, to identify landscapes that merit additional protection at a local level. The LLDR followed the process recommended by the “Guidance on Local Landscape Designations”.

LUC were appointed and tasked to assess the relative importance of the landscape evaluation criteria and to identify a selection of SLAs. Their approach to the LLDR included desk based over view of existing Landscape Character Areas, quantitative evaluation, field work and qualitative evaluations, formation of areas of search and application of practical criteria to identify SLAs. Extensive stakeholder engagement was carried out during the course of the study. Full description of the method used is contained in the document “Aberdeenshire Local Landscape Designation Review” (2016) available online at [www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/ldp](http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/ldp).

Stakeholder engagement confirmed that the purpose of SLAs in Aberdeenshire should be to *“Safeguard and enhance the character and quality of landscapes which is important or particularly valued locally or regionally”*.

Recognising that the consideration of a landscape as “special” is subjective and a matter of public opinion, Aberdeenshire Council’s LLDR sought consensus of the characteristics of landscape that should be considered in the identification of SLA’s. Consequently, a set of 12 criteria were identified to score Landscape Character Areas to define “search areas” from which SLAs were then identified.

### **Landscape character criteria**

- Typicality / Representativeness – The extent to which a landscape represents the study area as a whole, and contributes to its wider identity and sense of place.
- Rarity / Uniqueness – Landscapes which are unique to Aberdeenshire, or uncommon elsewhere.
- Intactness / Condition – Landscapes that are intact and distinctive, having been unaffected by development over a considerable period of time and where these may be threatened by development.
- Wildness – The relative remoteness of the landscape, including lack of human features, distance from settlement, and ruggedness of terrain
- Scenic qualities – The extent to which the landscape contains pleasing combinations of features, or to which it prompts strong sensory appeal.
- Enjoyment – Landscapes which provide access and recreation opportunities for local people and visitors.
- Built heritage assets – Landscapes which provide key views, in to and away from, important built heritage assets.
- Cultural qualities – Landscapes which provide cultural associations such as with literature, music, art or local history or which have spiritual associations.
- Naturalness and natural heritage assets – The perceived importance to the landscape of features of natural heritage interest, including important habitats, protected sites, and features of biodiversity value.
- Settlement setting – Landscapes of particular importance to the setting of settlements, as a whole, or particular aspects of the settlement.
- Views – The extent and importance of views in and out of the landscape, including the relative visibility of the landscape from key routes and locations, and key views from outwith Aberdeenshire boundaries.
- Connectivity – Landscapes which contribute to green networks, such as those which provide green corridors between settlements and the countryside.

## AREA OFFICES

**Banff and Buchan**  
01261 813210  
bb.planapps@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

**Buchan**  
01779 483724  
bu.planapps@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

**Formartine**  
01358 726429  
fo.planapps@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

**Garioch**  
01467 534333  
ga.planapps@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

**Kincardine and Mearns**  
01569 768300  
km.planapps@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

**Marr**  
01569 768300  
ma.planapps@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

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## Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan

Woodhill House,  
Westburn Road  
Aberdeen,  
AB16 5GB

Tel: 01224 664221

Fax: 01224 664679

Email: [ldp@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:ldp@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)

Web: [www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/ldp](http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/ldp)