

Appendix 6 – Landscape

This appendix is supported by **Appendix 11 – Visualisations, Map 1 – Location and Viewpoints, Map 4 – Analysis and Concept** and **Map 8 - Landscape**.

Landscape Context:

The forests covered by the South Loch Ness plan are located on the eastern side of the Great Glen, on the north western edge of the Monadhliath mountain range. It includes the forests which surround Stratherrick, Foyers and Farigaig. Comprising a number of individual forest blocks it extends across an area of 4,388 ha. Given this geographical extent, the character of the landscape varies across it.

The Loch Ness corridor is designated in the Highland Structure Plan as a Special Landscape Area, formally an Area of Great Landscape Value. Beyond the Great Glen the forest extends to the south east into the foothills and moorland.

Landscape Character:

Broad steep sided glen with loch:

The Great Glen with Loch Ness filling its base is described in landscape character as ‘Broad, steep sided glen’ in the Landscape Character Types (2019) and attributed as the area’s most significant feature. The Loch Ness and Duntelchaig SLA citation identifies as notable ‘the vast linear expanse of Loch Ness within its dramatic landform trench, flanked by steep towering wooded slopes. It refers to the:

- dramatic sequence of landscape elements along its length;
- a horizontal water surface and adjacent steep slopes which create a simple distinctive profile of contrasting planes and edges;
- a generally horizontal skyline; and
- long vistas of grand proportion, where the scale of Loch Ness dwarfs man-made elements on and around it.

Qualities of note include the strong sense of linear enclosure and even skyline and the visual movement along the glen or across the water.

Across much of the Great Glen it is difficult to scale the landscape due to lack of scale indicators. The Landscape experienced for most people (from key roads, the forest and the loch) is from an oblique angle.

The glen is characterised by its steep sided landform, broadly forested, with rocky outcrops, creating variety and dramatic effect. The forest cover has influenced the landscape character as it alters the patterns of vegetation. Broadleaved woodland extends to loch edge and colonises rocky areas of the side slopes. There are large scale coniferous plantations on side slopes.

As a result of a scarcity of flat land along the sides of the glen, the occurrence and extent of small farms and settlement is limited to a few places where there is an intersection with a side glen e.g at Foyers and Drumnadrochit, or a localised area of gentler slope.

Although part of the same landscape character unit, there are differences between the northern and southern sides of the Great Glen. There is a strong contrast between northern and southern

slopes in terms of access, activity and settlement. The southern side of the loch is more remote feeling than the northern (dominated by transport corridor of A82). On the southern side road hugs the shore of the loch as far as Foyers. The small amount of settlement which exists is clustered leaving large areas uninhabited, much of which is wooded.

Woodlands within this landscape character area:

As mentioned above the forest cover has influenced the landscape character as it alters the patterns of vegetation. The forests of the southern side of the great glen have a mixture of broadleaved woodland and coniferous blocks.

Broadleaved woodland extends to loch edge and colonises rocky areas of the side slopes. Along much of the B852 to the north of Farigaig, broad scale coniferous blocks are sandwiched between strips of broadleaves on the most accessible, more fertile slopes. This has the effect of creating parallel strips along the glen.

The mixed woodland along the B852, provide a sense of place which contributes to the setting of Loch Ness and adds an element of visual and seasonal diversity. Narrow bands of broadleaf woodland line both sides of the B852 along much of the road between Dores and Farigaig (shown below). The hazel and mixed broadleaf below and above the road have a significant role in shaping the sense of place experienced by travellers on the road. Management in and around these elements should be sensitive where possible to be retained and managed for longevity.

Upslope from these broadleaves, the conifer plantations have undergone restructuring (felling and restocking) over the past rotation. Unfortunately this was carried out in a way which has left the plantations now exhibiting straight and unnatural looking internal and upper margins, contrasting with the natural character of the landform.

The SLA citation identifies potential for landscape enhancement through mitigation of the incongruity of some forest edges which are clearly apparent when viewing between opposite sides of glen.

Along the sections of slope between Farigaig and Foyers and Foyers to Knockie, the conifer woodland is found on very steep ground which is presently difficult to access. It is well integrated with the broadleaf woodland. There has been only very limited restructuring to date.

Although there will be compromises due to the limitations of extraction on steep terrain, to reinforce the character of the area the design of future restructuring (fell coupes, future upper margin and restocking species) will take account of the landscape characteristics, underlying ground conditions and landform to ensure the forest is unified with the rest of the landscape wherever possible. If necessary, this will mean that felled areas will be larger than usual to ensure all trees are removed and the end result is more unified and responds to the landform and landscape character

Internal woodland design is important in areas where access is encouraged (for example at Farigaig), and along the roadsides, in particular at the viewpoints and rest points dotted along the road where it runs close to the shore.

Farmed and wooded Foothills (Farigaig Forest)

To the south east above the steep sides of the glen the gradient lessens altering the landscape character to form farmed and wooded foothills.

Being more enclosed and of a smaller scale the landscape lacks the drama of the Great Glen. The stark contrast in scale from the Great Glen accentuates the differences. Instead it is a place of intimacy, and enclosure
Visual movement remains within the glen, due to the inability to see anything beyond.

Woodlands within this landscape character area:

These narrow glens are almost entirely wooded with a narrow range of conifers and broadleaves.

Much of the forests of Farigaig are located in this area. Conifer and broadleaves fill steep sided narrow glens near Inverfarigaig and sweep over gently undulating hills, such as Carn an Dubh-ghlaic and Carn an Dubh-choire.

Where ever practical, future woodland restructuring in the area should reflect the scale of the locality, increasing from small and intricate on the valley bottom, to medium size on the mid slopes

Internal woodland design is important in areas where a public road passes through the forest and where access is encouraged, for example around Farigaig.

Through increasing the range of species and age and creating a balance between planted and open areas the landscape character will change, relieving the oppressive, enclosure experienced within the deep narrow glens.

Over much of the area within this landscape character area visibility is limited due to tree cover, a scarcity of open vantage points, and the flattish nature of the upper parts.

Farmed Straths

Located to the south east of the Farm and Wooded Foothills, Landform is not dominant as the Strath as is mostly wide and flattish where farm land use dominates and characterizes the area.

Woodlands within this landscape character area:

As the name indicates woodland is not a dominant land use. Most are found in the transition areas to rolling uplands and farmed and wooded foothills landscape character areas. The woodland block nearest Loch Mhor is largely on the level, slightly raised topography to the north of the loch and public road. Its outer margins influence the character of the locality. As such the emphasis of design within these areas is to reinforce and extend the enclosure pattern so its external margins integrate with the neighbouring field boundaries.

Rolling Uplands

To the south of the Farmed Straths and the Great Glen Trench, is an extensive area of rolling upland. This moorland which is expansive and open extends to the south and east. The distinctive round topped hills draw the eye across the wider flatter areas creating landmark features. These are high, remote areas where the dominant land cover is open moor, montane heath, and bog.

Woodlands relationship with this landscape character area:

In general, woodland cover is limited within these landscape character areas, being of higher elevation where management and elevation limit tree growth. As such forest upper margins are mostly located in the transition between these landscape character areas and those of the glens below. The alignment of the forest upper margins, related to landform, and character of the woodland cover have a strong influence

over appearance in the landscape, colour difference and height, shape and density.

Mostly these forests are plantations, limited in species and age structure. Height and colour contrast with upland vegetation which draws the eye.

The landscape scale of these upland areas is extensive. Management coupes and upper margin alignments wherever possible are designed to reflect the sweep of the landform and the broad scale of the moorland.

Recent felling to address tree pathogen issues has been considerable in size, but given the broad scale of the landscape these are appropriate. Being an expansive forest on a wide relatively even slope, interlock and coalescence are used to increase unity across it. Replanting species boundaries should reflect these qualities to augment the landscape character.

Visibility and Views

Being comprised of a number of woodland blocks across an extensive area the whole forest is not visible from any one viewpoint.

The forest on the southern slopes of the Great Glen forms the backdrop to the vast majority of views of Loch Ness. With the major arterial route of the A82, following the northern side of the glen, most visitors' views of Loch Ness have at least one of Erchite, Farigaig, Camus or Knockie Forests in their background.

These forests could be some of the most photographed of the Public Forest Estate with many commercial photos taken of Urquhart Castle adorning shortbread tins and tourist brochures the world over.

Notable popular locations are:

- Urquhart Castle
- Intermittent views from A82; most noteworthy from viewing laybys from Lochend to Allt Sigh.
- The loch (and pleasure boat routes on it)
- Rest points along the newly completed upper route of the Great Glen Way between Invermoriston and Drumnadrochit
- From the summit of Meall Fuar-mhonaidh.

Out with the great Glen the visibility of the forest is considerably less. There is only one other location where the expansive nature of the landscape has provided the opportunity of panoramic views, most notably from the B862 south of Whitebridge. The recent felling along this section of road has significantly opened up the landscape enabling views to the hills and the woodlands around them.

Elsewhere views are limited by terrain and woodland. They comprise more of glimpses through clearings and across small field systems to wooded hills beyond. Around Loch Mhor, in general only the forest edges are visible.