

Appendix 3 - Landscape Character Assessment

Pàipear-taice 3 – Measadh air Caractar a' Chruth-tìre

Background

Cùl-eachdraidh

The Planning Acts require Development Plans to indicate measures for the conservation of the natural beauty and amenity of each area. This may be achieved by:

- positively guiding development to preferred locations where landscape capacity, services and other planning considerations are most favourable;
- policy protection of or regard for acknowledged features ranging from National Scenic Areas such as the Dornoch Firth, to maintenance of open seaward views from important visitor routes, and safeguarding of prized local assets such as amenity woodland;
- promoting good quality design, including incorporation of suitable guidelines to assist developers;
- restoration of derelict or otherwise spoiled landscapes through appropriate environmental programmes or land management mechanisms; and
- enhancement and interpretation of landscape features.

The Council's strategic landscape conservation policies are set out in L3 and L4 of the Highland Structure Plan, approved by the Scottish Ministers in March 2001. Structure Plan policies G2 and G6 are also particularly relevant. As Local Plans must conform to the provisions of the Structure Plan it is important to assess and understand the character of the landscape, its quality and relationship with land use activities.

Caithness & Sutherland Landscape Assessment

Measadh Cruth-tìre Ghallaibh & Chataibh

A detailed appraisal of landscape character and change in Caithness and Sutherland was completed by a Scottish Natural Heritage consultant in September 1997. It is part of a national programme carried out with the benefit of a steering group comprising officials from the Highland Council Planning Service, Caithness & Sutherland Enterprise, the Forestry Authority and Scottish Natural Heritage.

The aim is to promote a general understanding of the Caithness and Sutherland landscape, character and the forces for change acting upon these. As a broad based study, it highlights the key landscape issues in relation to pressures for development and other land use change. It does not state where, or in what form, landscape development and change should take place. It is intended as a guide to the preparation of landscape policies and consideration of future proposals.

The study has identified fifteen different **landscape character types** and six subtypes. These are described, the key forces for change are analysed and guidance given in each case. The detailed scope of guidance is set out in the full report (260 pages). The Area Planning and Building Standards Manager has a copy. Additional copies are available from Scottish Natural Heritage, North Highland Area or at <http://www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/looking-after-landscapes/lca/>.

Potential Uses

Cleachdaidhean Comasach

The study can be used to inform planning consultations and Public Local Inquiries where landscape considerations are an issue. They can also be used to help the Area Planning and Building Standards Manager to advise potential new applicants how to integrate a proposed new house in the countryside into its surroundings. In preparing the new Sutherland Local Plan it has been used as one of a range of criteria to help identify broad areas with various levels of sensitivity to and appropriateness for development.