

# CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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## FOR DECISION

**Title:** The Cairngorms National Park Landscape Character Assessment

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### **Purpose**

To provide a description of the Landscape character assessment (LCA), its functions and to seek adoption by the board to ensure it has material weight within development planning and management.

### **Recommendation**

The board adopts the Cairngorms Landscape Character Assessment

### **Summary**

The CNPA commissioned the LCA in May 2009 from Alison Grant and associates. It is a highly detailed factual description of the various landscapes within the National Park. It is used in planning in considering the impact of development upon the character of the landscape. It will be used by the CNPA directly and partner organisations, particularly the Local Authorities.

It is an innovative study because it considers the importance of geology and cultural heritage as fundamentals of landscape character. It is an important baseline for planning and monitoring of landscape change.

The LCA approach is endorsed by national planning policy and within the European Landscape Convention. The use of landscape character is emphasised within the Cairngorms Local Plan policy on Landscape.

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## THE CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT – FOR DECISION

### Background to Landscape Characterisation

1. Assessing impacts of development on landscape can appear to be subjective. The technique of Landscape Characterization has been developed in the UK over the past 15 years to address this apparent subjectivity. It uses an evidence based and transparent methodology for describing the landscape. The technique has become a fundamental tool for planning decision making and other strategic planning since the early 1990s. The principle of objectively describing the landscape has been incorporated into the European Landscape Convention (Milan 2000) as well as Scottish planning law and the CNP National Park Plan strategic objectives.
2. The European Landscape Convention places an obligation on all signatories to ensure that landscape is considered in all relevant plans, policies and other strategies. It uses the principle of landscape character as way of delivering its objectives through these various policies. This obligation is for National, regional and local administrations and of course the CNPA is included within these.
3. SNH undertook a national programme of describing the landscapes of Scotland by LCAs in the mid 1990s. The area of the CNP was covered by the Cairngorms LCA 1996 by Turnbull associates. This is a high level overview of the park area and consequently it does not have great detail. In addition it was paper based and lacked reference to some key issues that we now have, such as wind turbines and telecommunication masts.

### Background to the Cairngorms Landscape Character Assessment

4. In 2009 the CNPA commissioned a new LCA for the National Park. The purpose was to update the descriptions to include greater detail that would be of more value in the authority's strategic planning as well as for development management. In addition we have been able to take advantage of GIS technology to increase the range of possible analysis. Most fundamentally however the Cairngorms LCA has integrated the available data on geology and cultural heritage in an innovative way. There were three specific project aims:
  - a) To produce an accurate and detailed description of the landscape types (LCTs) and areas (LCAs) within the Cairngorms National Park (CNP) that encompasses the many formative influences upon that landscape
  - b) To make the description clear and understandable to a wide range of users
  - c) To be able to utilise the Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) as a fundamental building block for all policy and activity of the CNPA and its partners in delivering the 4 aims of the National Park.
5. The study was undertaken by Alison Grant and associates. Her team included Carole Anderson a landscape architect who co-wrote the original 1996 LCA and so has a great understanding of the park area. In addition the team included an archaeologist and Geologist. The study was supported by the British Geological Survey (BGS) and the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments

(RCAHM). Both organisations gave considerable staff time towards helping identify the features within their areas of interest that played a particularly important role in forming the character of the landscape of the Park.

## **The Cairngorms National Park Landscape Character Assessment**

6. The Cairngorms LCA divides the landscapes of the National Park into two broad groups, lowland (Glens and Straths) and the uplands (higher glens, moorland and mountain core). There is an overlap between these areas because there are certain features on the boundary that are significant to both.
7. These two groups are then further subdivided into Landscape Character Areas (78 lowland areas and 12 upland ones). Each area is a distinctive unit in its own right and its features are consistent throughout. Each is different from its neighbours; though they may well have some things in common. However differences are enough for a distinction to be made and for the area to be considered as an entity in its own right.
8. The areas vary considerably in size with the upland ones being very much larger. This is due to two reasons. Firstly the lowland areas are where the majority of development is found and therefore a more detailed analysis was undertaken of these areas. This has been mapped at a 1:25,000 scale as a consequence. Secondly the upland areas are generally simpler in form and land-cover, they also tend to have fewer development pressures. These were mapped at 1:50,000.
9. The description for each area consists of five parts. There is a map of the area followed by a written description of the character, the experience of being in the area, the relationship to adjacent areas and lastly an assessment of what is distinctive about the area as a whole. Each description is accompanied by several photographs of typical views. A sample of a description is included in Annex 1.

## **The Use of the Landscape Character Assessment**

10. The LCA will be of primary use in Development Management and the Local Plan. It provides a base line description from which to judge potential changes in the landscape. As such is it particularly relevant to Policy 8 (landscape) which sets out the criteria against which any potential development will be considered. The new local plan and supplementary guidance will be used by all of the planning authorities for the Park. The LCA will support work across all these authorities and enable consistent decisions to be made by each of them in considering development proposals against policy 8.
11. The use of the LCA is best explained by way of an example. In the recent application determined by the board the new lodge at Balinluig, Kinrara, the proposal was for a large building in an elevated position within the Strath. It is common for buildings in the open countryside to be considered inappropriate. However reference to the LCA showed the following features:
  - a) A sense of relative containment
  - b) Prominent outcrop hills of Ord ban and Torr Alvie
  - c) Designed landscapes of Doune, Kinrara and Inshriach

- d) Mansion houses with estate buildings and gate houses
  - e) The intricate pattern of woodland, wetland and pasture along with the designed landscape elements which provide a rich landscape and cultural experience.
  - f) a strong sense of seclusion in places even with the A9 railway and B9152 and B970 all running through this area
12. Looking further at the situation the ground we were able to conclude that the proposal fits in with the description for the general area in terms of its location, relative containment, frequency and design.
13. The LCA will also be of use in other area of work. In particular for the Landscape Framework which will be able to assess the various forces for change in the landscape and assess what changes may occur and how significant they might be. The new National Park Plan and Local Development Plan will both require the information of the LCA in forming their various policies and strategic aims. There is potential for the LCA to be used to support land management applications for SRDP by illustrating the appropriateness of proposals.
14. The LCA is available for free on the CNPA website as pdf down loads. Though the document is long it is broken into small sections so that individuals interested in a particular area may easily find the information on that area and its immediate neighbours.
15. The link is as follows:  
<http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/parkauthority/publications/results.php?publicationID=235>

## Policy Context

16. The development of the LCA has contributed to the National Park Plan strategic objective 5.1a “Maintain and enhance the distinctive landscapes across the Park”. It also forms important baseline work for the Priority for Action 6.1 i – by identifying the natural, cultural and built landscape qualities.

## Implications

### *Financial Implications*

17. There are no immediate financial implications. There will be some small staff costs for organising workshop session for partner organisations into the use of the new LCA.

### *Implications for Stakeholders*

18. The implications for stakeholders is outlined above in relation to our partner local authorities. Other partner organisations such as SNH and SEPA will also be able to use the LCA for more detailed project assessment that may have landscape impacts.

## Next Steps

19. The LCA may now be used by the CNPA planning team immediately. It will also be available for use by our partner Local Authorities and once the new local plan is adopted will be used by them in determining applications. Prior to this the CNPA officers will undertake workshop session for our partners in the use of the new LCA. The LCA will also be used within the development of the landscape Framework.

## Conclusion

20. This new LCA is the most detailed description yet made of the various landscapes of the National Park. It is an essential part of the planning process for the authority and others. Adoption of the LCA by the board will give it greater material weight within planning as a whole. Adoption will also encourage other authorities and private organisations to consider the LCA as part of their strategies and forthcoming applications.

## Recommendation

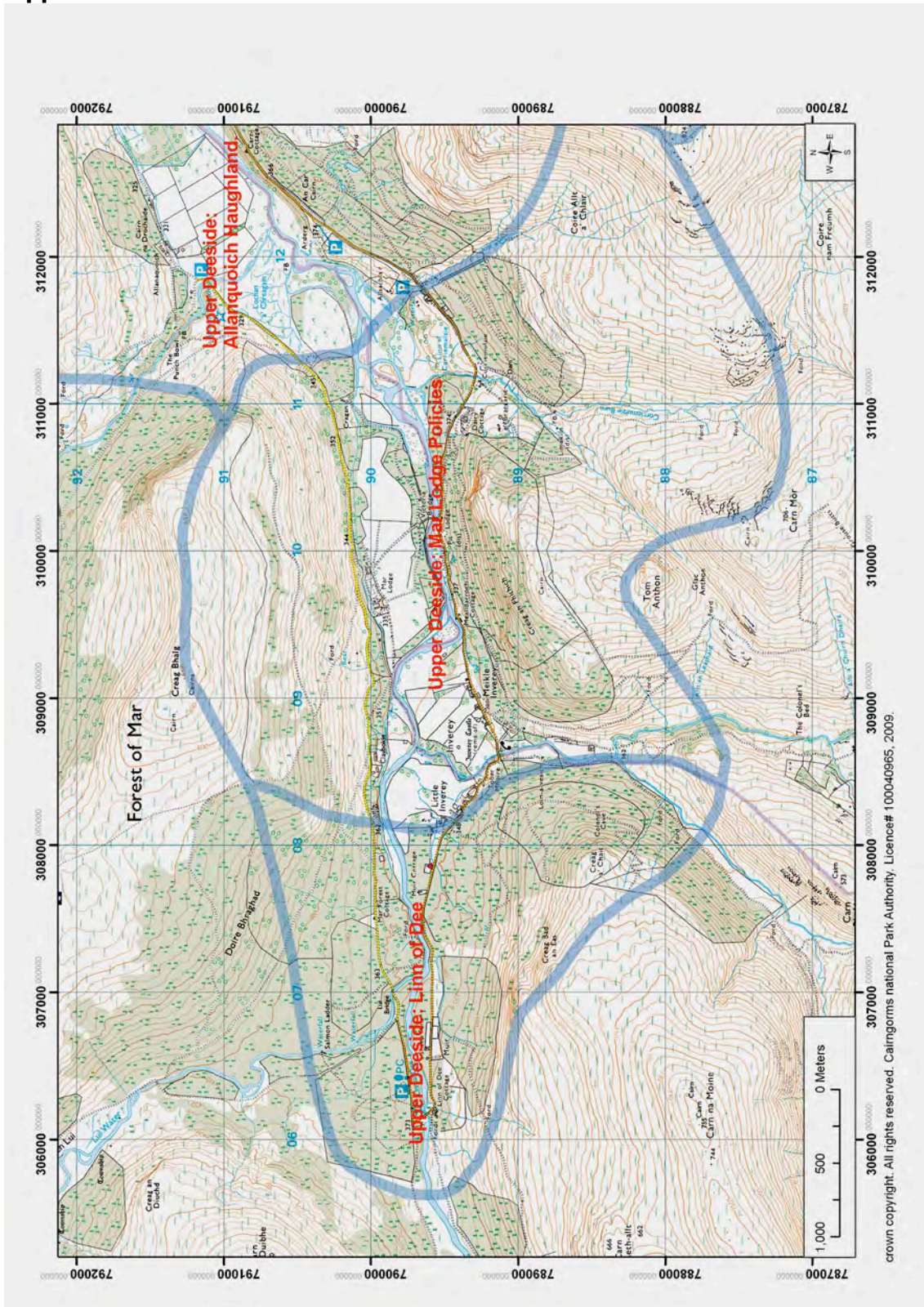
21. **It is recommended that the board formally endorse and adopt the Cairngorms Landscape Character Assessment.**

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**August 2010**

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# Annex I: Sample Character Area Description

## Upper Deeside: Linn of Dee



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#### 1.1.1 *Landscape Character*

- This character area sits at the westerly end of Deeside, at the junction between Glen Lui and the main glen, just as the valley of the Dee narrows into a steep sided glen which heads west into the interior of the Cairngorms
- The alluvial fan of the River Lui, framed by steep hillsides at the mouth of Glen Lui, spills onto the floor of the west/east orientated glen of the Dee, which is contained to the south by the steep hillside of Carn na Moine
- The River Dee thunders through a narrow, rocky gorge at the Linn of Dee to become a fast flowing, broad, but shallow, river with many small rapids and falls. Fractured rocky shelves and projecting boulders extend from its banks
- Conifer woodland at the mouth of Glen Lui extends across the hummocky terrain and then rises up the steep hillside at Doire Bhraghad
- Dense stands of mature, predominantly native pine cover the narrow floor of the glen and the steep banks of the River Dee. Small grassy glades occur within the woodland on the river banks
- Individual vernacular-styled cottages lie adjacent to the Linn of Dee and Quoich roads. The 19th century Linn of Dee Bridge forms an impressive gothic-arch of well-dressed granite.
- The long track which links upper Deeside with Glen Feshie extends west from the Linn of Dee tracing the river through a broad open glen. Further footpaths lead north into the interior of the Cairngorm mountains
- The narrow public road loops tightly over the bridge and provides access to an extensive network of well-used tracks to the Cairngorm plateau via the wooded passes of Glens Lui and Quoich
- The Linn of Dee is a popular scenic destination attracting many visitors. A public car park is located within plantation woodland

#### 1.1.2 *Landscape experience*

- A predominantly wooded area with a strong sense of containment. Overhanging mature pine and larch accentuate the intimate scale of the Linn of Dee where the focus is the dramatic rocky gorge and pounding water of the Dee
- This area lies on the edge of the high Cairngorm plateau and the remote upland landscape of the upper Dee and Glen Geldie to the west.

#### 1.1.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

The strong enclosure of this wooded character area limits the influence of adjacent landscapes although long views are possible into the broad, open upland glen of the upper Dee to the west.

#### 1.1.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The River Dee is a key focus, lying close to the public road, and dramatically funnelled through a rocky gorge. This area lies at the transition between settled Deeside and the more remote uplands and interior glens to the west and north.



*Woodland encloses the narrowing glen of the Dee west of Mar Lodge*



*Extensive regeneration of pine on the hill slopes*



*The dramatic deep chasm of the Linn of Dee*



*The Gothic style bridge of the Linn of Dee*