



# Topic: Landscape

Engagement version June 2024

## Requirements addressed in this section

Table 1 Information required by the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, as amended, regarding the issue addressed in this section.

Section	Requirement
Section 15(5)	The principal physical, cultural, economic, social, built heritage and environmental characteristics of the district.

## Links to evidence

- National Park (Scotland) Act 2000  
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2000/10/contents>
- National Planning Framework 4  
<https://www.dpea.scotland.gov.uk/LibraryDocument.aspx?id=2094>
- Council of Europe Landscape Convention  
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/landscape>
- Scotland's Landscape Charter  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20220706002832/www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2019-10/Scotland's%20Landscape%20Charter%20-%2028%20September%202010.pdf>
- Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan 2022  
<https://www.dpea.scotland.gov.uk/LibraryDocument.aspx?id=2147>
- Cairngorms Local Development Plan 2021  
<https://www.dpea.scotland.gov.uk/LibraryDocument.aspx?id=1096>
- Cairngorms Special Landscape Qualities  
<https://www.nature.scot/snh-commissioned-report-375-special-landscape-qualities-cairngorms-national-park>
- National Scenic Areas



<https://www.nature.scot/naturescot-commissioned-report-375-special-landscape-qualities-cairngorms-national-park>.

- Cairngorms Landscape Toolkit  
<https://cairngorms.co.uk/planning-development/landscape-toolkit/>
- Cairngorms Landscape Character Assessment  
<https://cairngorms.co.uk/caring-future/cairngorms-landscapes/landscape-areas/>
- Wild Land Areas  
<https://www.nature.scot/doc/wild-land-areas-map-and-descriptions-2014>
- Relative Wildness  
<https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2018-01/A1342460%20-%20Mapping%20Scotlands%20Wildness%20-%20non-technical%20methodology%20-%20June%202014%20%28A1191408%29.pdf>
- Cairngorms Dark Sky Park  
<https://www.cairngormsdarkskypark.org/>
- Mapping hill tracks in the Cairngorms National Park  
<https://cairngorms.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Mapping-Hill-Tracks-in-the-Cairngorms-National-Park-2019.pdf>
- People, Place and Landscape: A Position Statement from Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Environment Scotland  
<https://www.historicenvironment.scot/archives-and-research/publications/publication/?publicationId=13053e28-f83a-464d-90d9-aae100f92c3b>
- Community Action Plans  
<https://cairngorms.co.uk/working-together/publications/publication/496/>

## Summary of evidence



## Policy Context

### National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000)

The National Park has four distinct aims as set out in The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000). The first aim is 'to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area'. The aims are all to be pursued collectively. However, if there is conflict between the first aim and any of the others, greater weight is given to the first aim (as set out in Section 9(6) of the 2000 Act).

### National Planning Framework 4

National Planning Framework 4 recognises Scotland's rich heritage, culture and outstanding environment as national assets which support our economy, identity, health and wellbeing.

The identification and protection of nationally important landscape assets are provided in Policy 4 Natural Places with the intent to protect, restore and enhance landscapes and to ensure they are managed in a sustainable way. The protection Policy 4 affords applies to both National Parks and the National Scenic Areas that sit within them.

Policy 4 c) as two stages of the policy test for managing change from development proposals and has a high level of protection, where development will only be supported where:

- The objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the areas will not be compromised: or
- Any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of national importance.

Wild lands Areas (as identified on NatureScot's 2014 mapping) are afforded some protection within Policy 4. As a protected landscape and not a designation in statute, the level of protection is less than the National Park or National Scenic Areas and applies strictly to the defined boundary as indicated in Policy 4(g). Within the Wild Land Area, the level of protection applies only in so far as the assessment of renewable energy developments can illustrate that they support meeting defined targets for generation or small-scale development linked to crofting or fragile communities. Buffer zones around wild land will not be applied, and effects of development out with wild land areas will not be a significant consideration in the determination of development proposals.



Policy 11 Energy requires Local Development Plans to realise the areas full potential for electricity and heat from renewable, low carbon and zero emission resources by identifying a range of opportunities for energy development. This is to encourage, promote and facilitate all forms of renewable development onshore. The exception to the National Park (and National Scenic Areas in Policy 11b) is that wind farms proposed in these designations will not be supported.

Policy 14 Design, quality and place gives a strong steer of the importance of a design-led approach to encourage, promote, and facilitate well designed and successful places. This requires Local Development Plans to be place-based and created in line with the Place Principle adopted by the Scottish Government illustrating commitment to a collaborative design and inclusive approach with local communities.

According to Policy 14 the spatial strategy of local development plans should be underpinned by the six qualities of successful places and provide clear expectations for design, quality and place taking account of the local context, characteristics, and connectivity of the areas. The production of detailed design guidance, using formats such as development brief and masterplans, are expected and encouraged. Use of the Place Standard Tool is expected in the preparation of the Local Development Plan and design guidance and to engage with communities and other stakeholders. National Planning Framework 4 sees the connection of this Policy with all other policies in the Framework, imparting a strong steer on the importance of siting and design to deliver sustainable growth, even in the context of the global climate crises and just transition to net zero. This would draw on information gathered through approaches including Place Standard assessments.

Other policies which raise new or particularly significant issues directing change within the National Planning Framework are:

Significant expansion of the existing woodland resource in the National Park is proposed. Policy 6 Forestry, Woodland and trees seeks to protect and expand forests, woodland and trees and ensure their sustainable management. This policy requires the production of an up-to-date Forest and Woodland Strategy. National Planning Framework 4 cites both Policies 4 and 6 as being key connections and which should influence the siting and design of the forestry and woodland proposals recognising and responding to the special landscape qualities of the National Park.

Policy 21 Play Recreation and Sport place a requirement in the Local Development Plan to identify sites for sports, play and outdoor recreation for people of all ages. This is



particularly salient in a National Park where one of the 4 distinct aims is to promote the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park, including enjoyment in the form of recreation. The existing management and development of new facilities and spaces should be based on an understanding of the needs and demand in the community and informed by the planning authorities Play Sufficiency Assessment and Open Space Strategy. For the purposes of the Open Space Strategy, National Parks are not considered to be a planning authority and therefore are not required to do this. In any event open space assessment information is not required to inform the evidence report but is required for the new Local Development Plan. The National Park are required to produce an audit of play sufficiency, which will be developed in consultation with the relevant local authorities.

Linked to this Policy 20 b) considers the Open Space Strategy to be an appropriate means for the design of blue and green infrastructure to take account of existing provision and new requirements and network connections for well-designed and integrated infrastructure. In the preparation and publishing of an Open Space Strategy, National Parks are not considered to be a planning authority and as such are not required to produce one.

There are no specific policies addressing the development of private roads and ways within National Planning Framework 4.

## **National Park Partnership Plan 2022**

The Partnership Plan sets out the vision and overarching strategy for managing the National Park and provides the strategic context for the Local Development Plan. The Partnership Plan seeks to strike the right balance to ensure that the National Park strives for both nature and people in the future. The landscapes of the National Park are the fundamental way people (communities and visitors alike) experience all that the Cairngorms has to offer, its nature, culture and settlements.

The National Park also has a significant role to play in delivering the policy ambitions of Scottish Government and is pursuing several ambitious projects like Heritage Horizons: Cairngorms 2030. Across these projects Heritage Horizons will bring about transformational change in the Cairngorms, benefiting people's health and wellbeing, delivering on proposals to tackle climate change and enhancing nature across the National Park. Whilst all the projects are relevant to the appreciation of the landscapes in the National Park, in particular two projects have direct or significant implications:

- Landscape and Communities
- Effective Community engagement and outreach



Within the Partnership Plan, Policy A4 seeks to conserve and enhance the special landscape qualities of the National Park. Within this the Partnership Plan places a particular emphasis on the conservation and enhancement of the special qualities of wildness and dark skies. Woodland expansion is supported where it maximises opportunities for long-term enhancement of the special landscape qualities through good design. Policy A4 also seeks to enhance the opportunities for communities and visitors alike to enjoy and experience the landscapes of the National Park. In open moorland, Policy A4 applies a presumption against new constructed tracks. Where there is agreement for their provision, new tracks are to be constructed to a high standard.

Wild Land Areas within the National Park are identified as a special landscape quality of the National Park and as such have a higher level of protection than that afforded by National Planning Framework 4 Policy 4(g). Areas beyond the wild land boundary, but still within the National Park and which still retain high scores of wildness and contribute significantly to the experience of the wildness special landscape quality will also be given a higher level of protection than that afforded by National Planning Framework 4 Policy 4(g).

Proposals for constructed private roads and ways in the upland landscapes of the National Park are currently considered against Partnership Plan Policy A4 (f) and Local Development Plan Policy 5.2. The inclusion of a policy to manage the numbers and improve the siting and design of all tracks reflected that this is a significant development issue for the National Park. The National Park remains of the opinion that the policy on tracks should remain in place.

## **Community action plans**

There are currently 18 community action plans in place across the National Park. Whilst there is some variation in content and style, all the action plans included some level of community engagement, through a survey and / or workshop days ('Big Conversations'). Most of the action plans used the approach outlined in the Place Standard and the National Standards for Community Engagement to assist in involving the community and shaping the action plan. This improved inclusivity and representation of views and helped to generate a dialogue about what is important in their community and what actions to take.



The majority of the action plans recognised the importance of their local landscapes and valued them as such. Key factors that are relevant to many of the communities outlined in the action plans are:

- The location of the communities within the mountainous setting and within the scenic Cairngorms National Park.
- Spectacular views and scenery.
- The rural setting and natural environment, typically surrounded by hills and often situated in a strath beside a river or confluence of rivers – many natural features are important to setting and sense of place (including Creag Choinnich (Kenneth's Crag) to Braemar, Ben Alder to Dalwhinnie, Roche Moutonness at Dulnain Bridge, the Anagach Woods at Grantown-on-Spey, Abernethy Caledonian Pine Forest to Nethy Bridge, Newtonmore on the confluence of rivers Spey, Calder and Allt Laraidh, Ben Newe at Strathdon.
- Iconic landmark buildings and structures (including Blair Castle, old packhorse bridge at Carrbridge, Glenbuchat and Corgarff Castles along Strathdon, Castle Roy and the Telford Bridges at Nethy Bridge, Dalwhinnie Distillery, Braemar Castle).
- Characterful historic centres of traditional stone-built houses, many from the Victorian era.
- Quiet and peaceful character of many settlements.
- Remoteness and surrounding wild land, surrounded by 'unspoilt and unpopulated countryside, with dark skies.
- Immediate access to the surrounding landscape of woodland, heather moorland, mountains, rivers – strong emphasis on the high quality of outdoor life and links to Long Distance Routes – the Deeside Way, the East Highland Way, Badenoch Way. Annual Highland Games and Gatherings (including the Lonach Gathering at Strathdon, Braemar gathering).
- Countryside that supports a rich and diverse flora and fauna.
- Inspiring landscape influencing poetry, songs, storey telling and art and latterly television and film.

## **Baseline of landscape matters**

At 4,528 square kilometres, and comprising 6% of Scotland's land area, the Cairngorms National Park is the UK's largest protected landscape. It is one of only two National Parks in Scotland. It is without doubt one of the UK's finest montane environments and possess a range of special qualities, often unique to the area imparting a strong natural and cultural identity. Furthermore, nearly half of the National Park's land area is classified as being 'wild land'.



## Cairngorms Special Landscape Qualities

In 2010 work was conducted to identify the Special Landscape Qualities of the Cairngorms National Park landscape, carried out by NatureScot and the Park Authority. The special qualities identified drawn on the distinct landscape and visual character of the National Park, but it is how these qualities are experienced and valued by communities within, and visitors to, the National Park that make them important to our understanding of the National Park's place and identity. While most landscape qualities are appreciated in daylight, dark skies are an important characteristic for many areas of the National Park that contribute to a sense of wildness.

The current Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan 2021 policy 5.1 states that 'There will be a presumption against any development that does not conserve or enhance the landscape character and special landscape qualities of the Cairngorms National Park including wildness and the setting of the proposed development'. Table 1 provides a summary of the special landscape qualities identified. Full details can be found in the Special Landscape Qualities of the Cairngorms National Park via:

- <https://www.nature.scot/snh-commissioned-report-375-special-landscape-qualities-cairngorms-national-park>.

Table 1 Summary of the special qualities of the Cairngorms National Park

General Qualities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i. Magnificent mountains towering over moorland, forest, and strath</li><li>ii. Vastness of space, scale, and height</li><li>iii. Strong juxtaposition of contrasting landscapes</li><li>iv. A landscape of layers, from inhabited strath to remote, uninhabited upland</li><li>v. 'The harmony of complicated curves'</li><li>vi. Landscapes both cultural and natural</li></ul>	
The Mountains and Plateaux	Trees, Woods and Forests
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>vii. The unifying presence of the central mountains</li><li>viii. An imposing massif of strong dramatic character</li><li>ix. The unique plateaux of vast scale, distinctive landforms and</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>xiv. Dark and venerable pine forest</li><li>xv. Light and airy birch woods</li><li>xvi. Parkland and policy woodlands</li><li>xvii. Long association with forestry</li></ul>





<p>exposed, boulder strewn high ground</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>x. The surrounding hills</li> <li>xi. The drama of deep corries</li> <li>xii. Exceptional glacial landforms</li> <li>xiii. Snowscapes</li> </ul>	
<b>Moorlands</b>	<b>Wildlife and Nature</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>xviii. Extensive moorland, linking the farmland, woodland and the high tops</li> <li>xix. A patchwork of muirburn</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>xx. Dominance of natural landforms</li> <li>xxi. Extensive tracts of natural vegetation</li> <li>xxii. Association with iconic animals</li> <li>xxiii. Wild land</li> <li>xxiv. Wildness</li> </ul>
<b>Glens and Straths</b>	<b>Visual and Sensory Qualities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>xxv. Steep glens and high passes</li> <li>xxvi. Broad, farmed straths</li> <li>xxvii. Renowned rivers</li> <li>xxviii. Beautiful lochs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>xxix. Layers of receding ridge lines</li> <li>xxx. Grand panoramas and framed views</li> <li>xxxi. A landscape of many colours</li> <li>xxxii. Dark skies</li> <li>xxxiii. Attractive and contrasting textures</li> <li>xxxiv. The dominance of natural sounds</li> </ul>
<b>Culture and History</b>	<b>Recreation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>xxxv. Distinctive planned towns</li> <li>xxxvi. Vernacular stone buildings</li> <li>xxxvii. Dramatic, historical routes</li> <li>xxxviii. The wistfulness of abandoned settlements</li> <li>xxxix. Focal cultural landmarks of castles, distilleries and bridges</li> <li>xl. The Royal connection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>xli. A landscape of opportunities</li> <li>xlii. Spirituality</li> </ul>



## **Cairngorms 2030 – Landscape and communities project**

This project explores how communities of place and interest perceive, experience and value the landscapes of the National Park, and establishes these community preferences for landscape change. The current suite of special landscape qualities was devised through the application of a technical methodology by professional consultants. Community engagement on this work was not undertaken at that time. However, this Project seeks to engage communities directly into the development of an updated suite of special landscape qualities (that may draw on the existing work) with a programme of engagement extending over the next 5 years.

This innovative work has significant implications for how the special landscape qualities are presented going forward. Work has already begun considering how to spatially map some of the special landscape qualities, providing a more rigorous and transparent evidence base on which to draw from and in turn to inform the Local Development Plan. This thinking will be developed throughout the next 5 years of the delivery phase of this Project.

Draft spatially mapped special landscape qualities are being tested, which illustrate where special landscape qualities are located, and where these qualities are particularly strongly represented or 'enhanced'. The special landscape qualities include:

- Wildness and Wild Land– this approach uses the four components of the NatureScot wildness mapping (ruggedness, naturalness, remoteness, and absence of human artefacts) but are mapped using a simplified method which should be easily repeatable, but importantly is tailored in approach specific to the National Park.
- Dark Skies and the spatial mapping of levels of light intensity
- Magnificent Mountains
- Juxtaposition of Settled and Rural landscapes
- Steep Glens and High Passes
- Heritage Paths and Bridges
- Grand panoramas, Elevated Views, and Distinctive Scenery.

## **National Scenic Areas**

The landscapes of the Cairngorms National Park have long been regarded as worthy of protection, with three National Scenic Areas being designated in 1980 / 1981 (). Two, namely the Cairngorm Mountains and Deeside and Lochnagar, are located entirely within the National Park boundary. These National Scenic Areas are largely centred on the highest mountain plateau at its core (Figure 1), but also include lower hills and areas of moorland, woodland, and inhabited strath (NatureScot and Cairngorms National Park



Authority, 2010). Combined, the two National Scenic Areas cover an area of around 1,072 square kilometres, which equates to just under 25% of the National Park's land area. The third designation is the Loch Tummel National Scenic Area which very slightly overlaps the National Park's boundary at Killiecrankie, near Blair Atholl. The area of this National Scenic Area within the National Park is insignificant when considering its full dimensions.

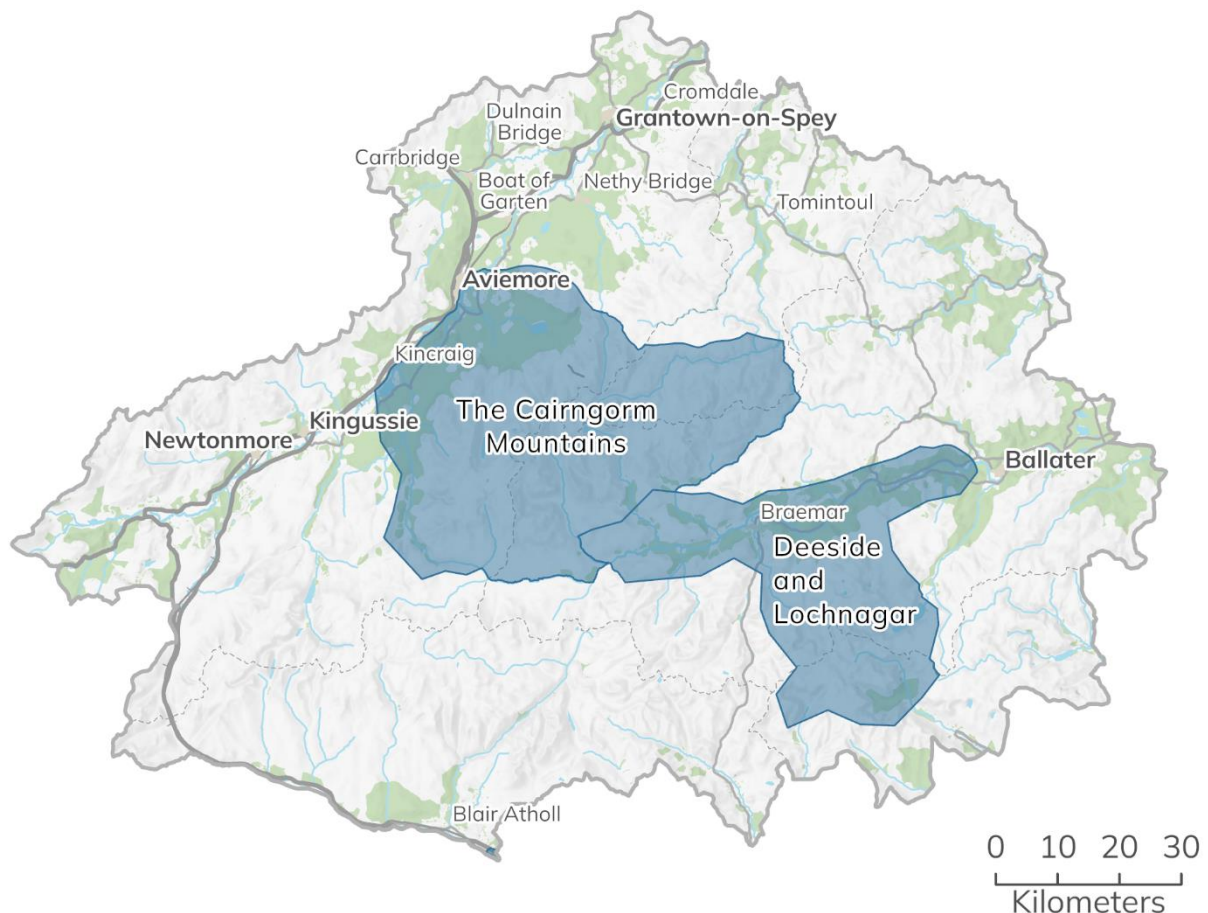


Figure 1 National Scenic Areas within the Cairngorms National Park. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of His Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright and database right 2024. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number AC0000821810, Cairngorms National Park Authority.

National Scenic Areas are designated under Section 263A of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 and are defined as 'of outstanding scenic value in a national context'. The legislation also states that within a National Scenic Areas 'special attention is to be paid to the desirability of safeguarding or enhancing its character or appearance'. Most new developments within National Scenic Areas need to be accompanied by a design statement, and there are restrictions on certain permitted development rights.



The original descriptions given in the 1978 report Scotland's Scenic Heritage, which lead to the designation of National Scenic Areas, may be found in the appendices of The Special Landscape Qualities of the Cairngorms National Park (NatureScot and Cairngorms National Park Authority, 2010):

<https://www.nature.scot/naturescot-commissioned-report-375-special-landscape-qualities-cairngorms-national-park>.

### **Cairngorms landscape character assessment**

The key characteristics of the whole of the Cairngorms National Park have been identified and described within discrete landscape character areas and can be categorised as belonging to either its Uplands or Glens and Straths (Figure 2). This assessment of landscape character areas provides the building blocks to our understanding of the extent, nature, and variety of character across the National Park, and underpins the identification of the special landscape qualities.

These areas are all different and distinct from each other reflecting local context. However, within each area there is a consistency of character influenced by different factors such as the topography, land use, vegetation patterns, settlement, and the way the landscape is experienced. Within the glens and straths there tends to be more diversity of landscapes in a smaller area, whereas in the uplands the landscape tends to be similar over much larger areas.

The character areas provide a spatial framework for the delivery of the National Park's responsibilities, duties and policies. A description of their key characteristics, the way these are experienced and the key sensitivities of each area, along with a succinct summary of what makes the areas distinctive from elsewhere in the National Park, is provided on the Park Authority's website:

- [www.cairngorms.co.uk/landscape-toolkit](http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/landscape-toolkit).



### Landscape character area categories

- Glens and straths
- Uplands
- Settlements

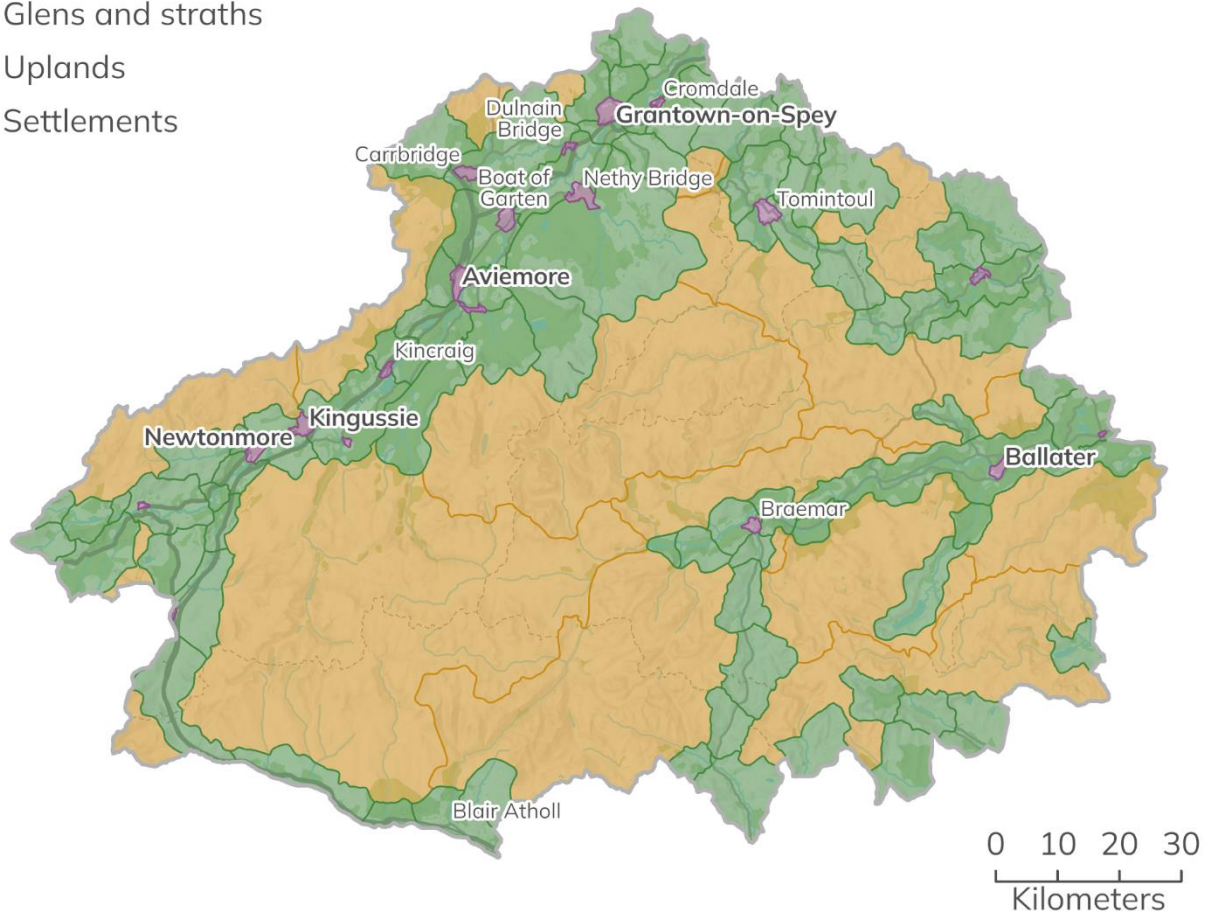


Figure 2 Cairngorms landscape character areas. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of His Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright and database right 2024. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number AC0000821810, Cairngorms National Park Authority.

## Wild land

Based on the work carried out to measure relative wildness, NatureScot published a map of Wild Land Areas, which represent the most extensive areas of high relative wildness in Scotland. This is a national dataset and the areas defined and adjusted based on ensuring national coverage in the scale and location of Wild Land Areas including some of Scotland's island landscapes.

Following this methodology, NatureScot's national mapping of relative wildness (covering the Cairngorms National Park) is provided on their website. This includes mapping of the four attributes which combine to give an overall score of relative wildness.



Around 2,100 km<sup>2</sup>, or 46%, of the Cairngorms National Park has been identified as 'wild land' as defined by its perceived naturalness, rugged or challenging terrain, remoteness from public mechanised access and lack of built modern artefacts.

Five areas (and their descriptions) have been identified within the National Park (Figure 3) namely:

- Rannoch – Nevis – Mamores – Alder (WLA 14)
- Cairngorms (WLA 15)
- Lochnagar – Mount Keen (WLA 16)
- Braeroy – Glenshirra – Creag Meagaidh (WLA 19)
- Monadhliath (WLA 20)

Of these areas 15 and 16 are almost entirely located within the National Park, while the other three only just overlap its boundary.



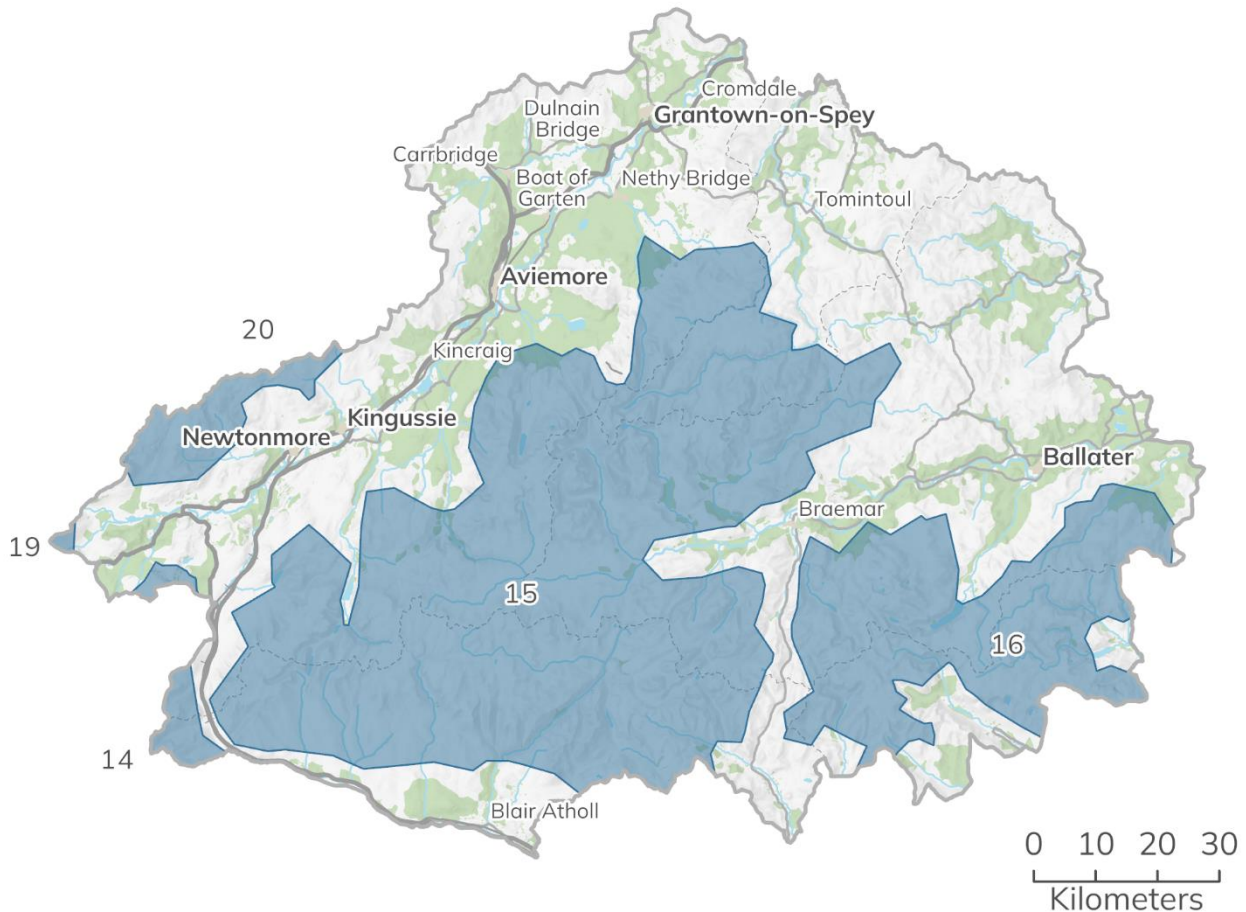


Figure 3 Wild land areas within the Cairngorms National Park. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of His Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright and database right 2024. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number AC0000821810, Cairngorms National Park Authority.

These wild and remote areas have a distinct and special character, which is highly valued and increasingly rare to find. A key component of Scotland's identity, they bring significant economic benefits, attracting visitors and tourists. Many people derive psychological and spiritual benefit from their existence, and they provide increasingly important havens for Scotland's wildlife. The importance of these Wild Land Areas is reflected in the wild land special landscape quality (see Table 1).

## Relative wildness

Wildness is a quality experienced by people when visiting places of a certain character and is typically (but not exclusively) associated with a reduction in or lack of built development. Measuring wildness is inherently difficult, as people respond differently according to their personal experience and their expectations of a place. However, work carried out by NatureScot considered wildness through four physical attributes being



present, which they measured and mapped (using the methodology included above). These attributes were:

- The perceived naturalness of the land cover (Figure 4).
- The ruggedness of the terrain which is therefore challenging to cross (Figure 5).
- Remoteness from public roads, ferries or railway stations (Figure 6).
- The visible lack of buildings, roads, pylons and other modern artefacts (Figure 7).

Perceived naturalness

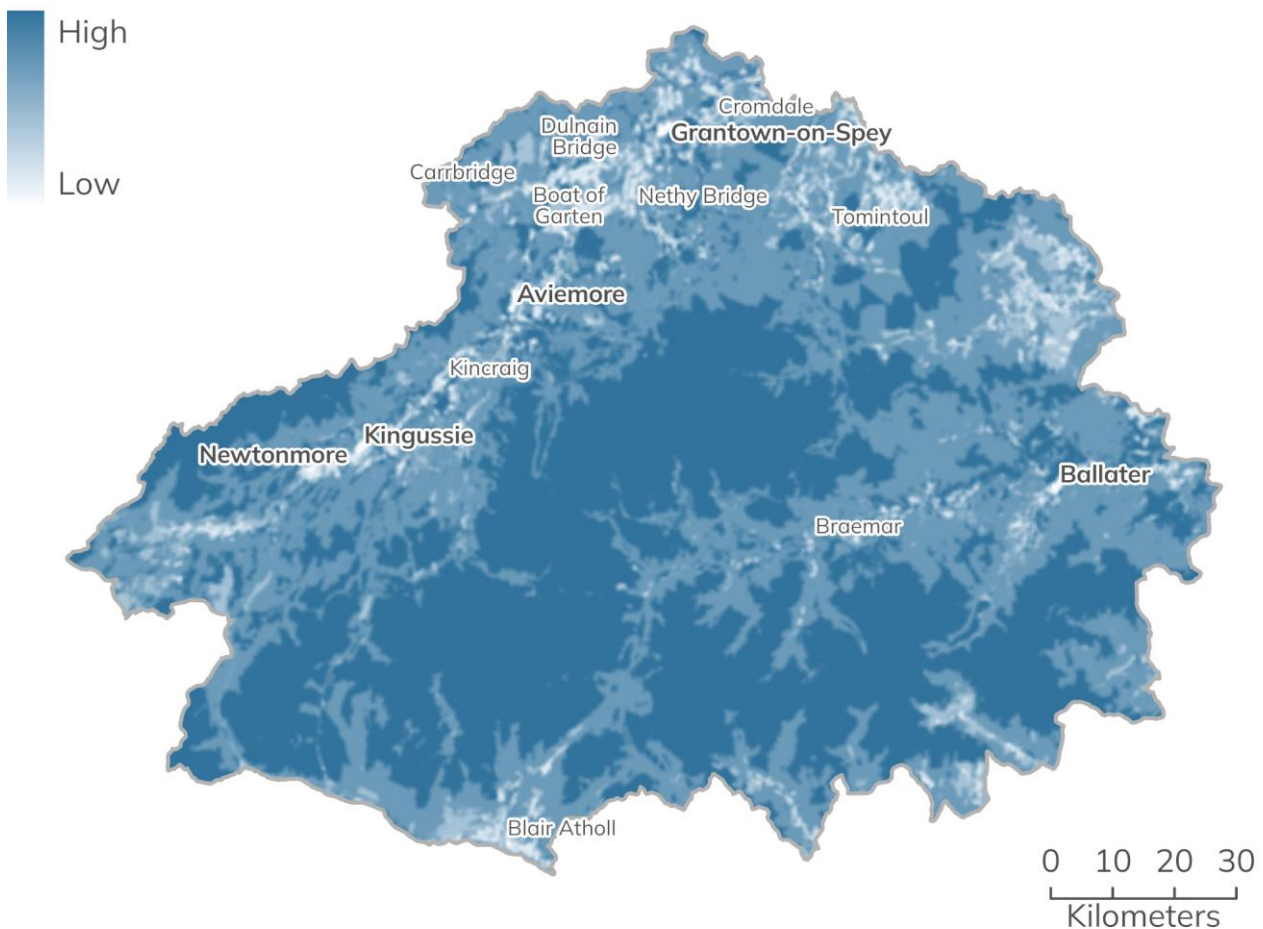


Figure 4 The perceived naturalness of the land cover within the Cairngorms National Park. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of His Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright and database right 2024. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number AC0000821810, Cairngorms National Park Authority.





Rugged or challenging terrain

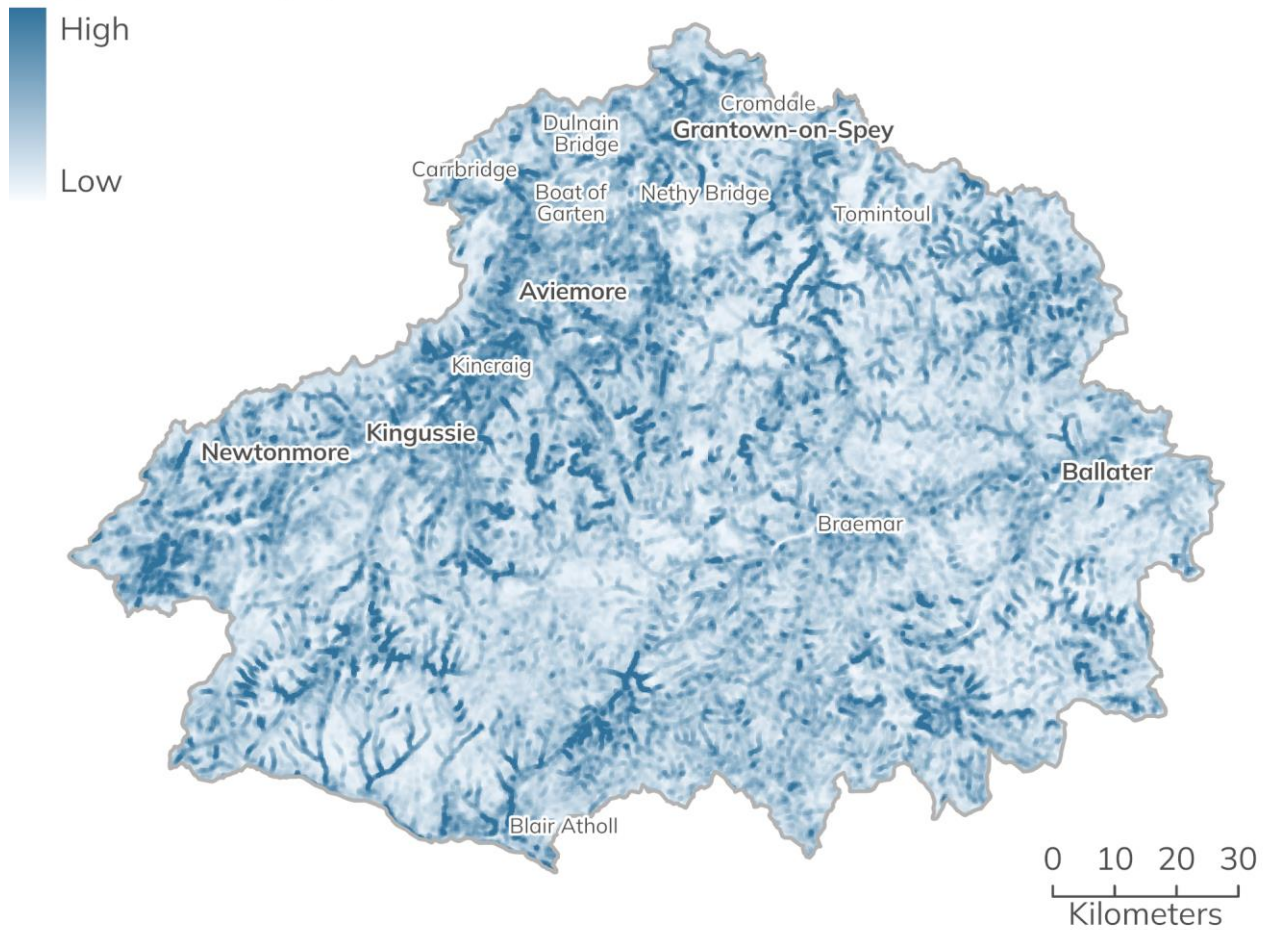


Figure 5 The ruggedness of the terrain within the Cairngorms National Park. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of His Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright and database right 2024. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number AC0000821810, Cairngorms National Park Authority.



Remoteness from roads

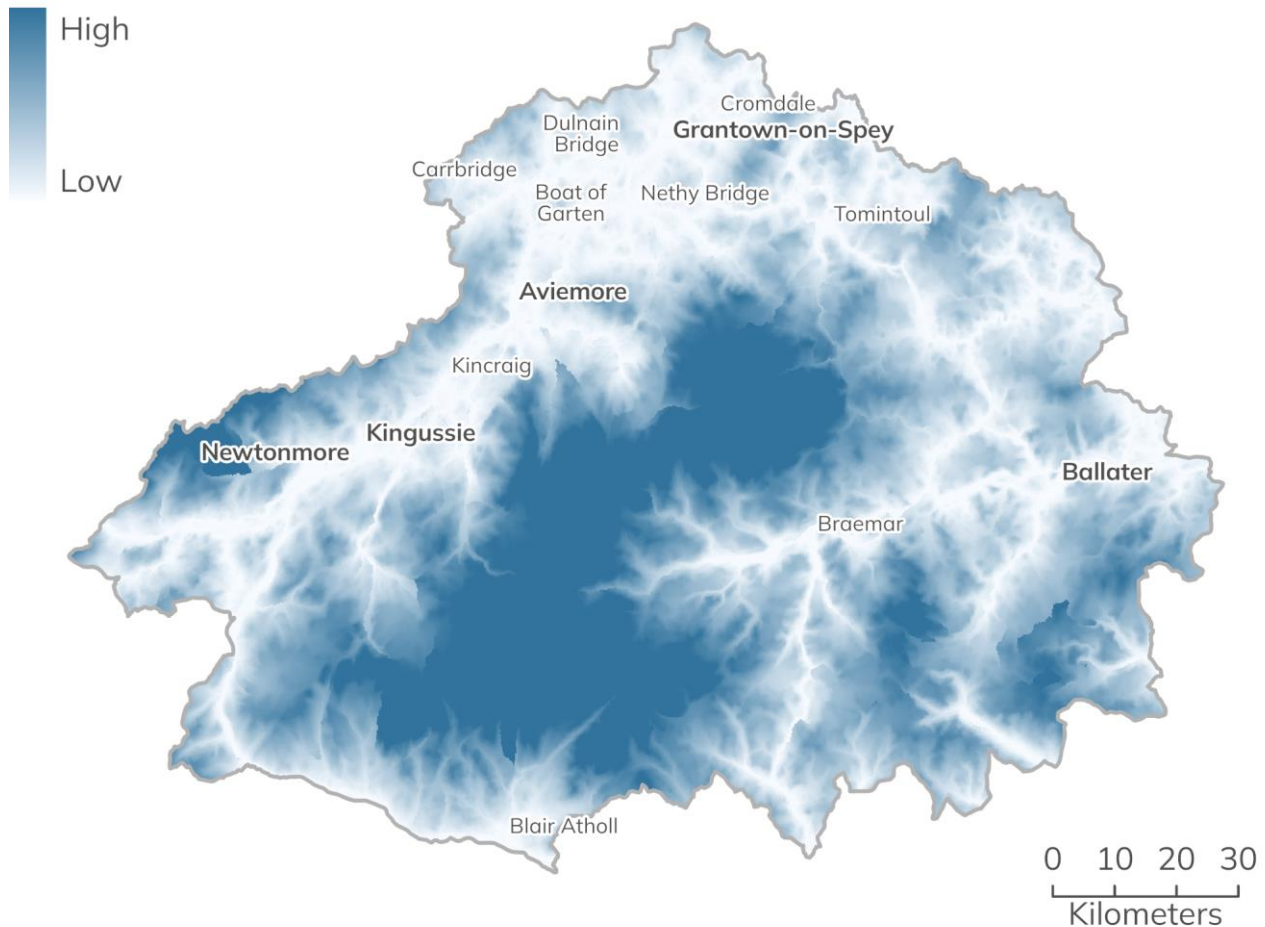


Figure 6 Remoteness of land from public roads, ferries or railway stations within the Cairngorms National Park. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of His Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright and database right 2024. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number AC0000821810, Cairngorms National Park Authority.



Lack of built artifacts

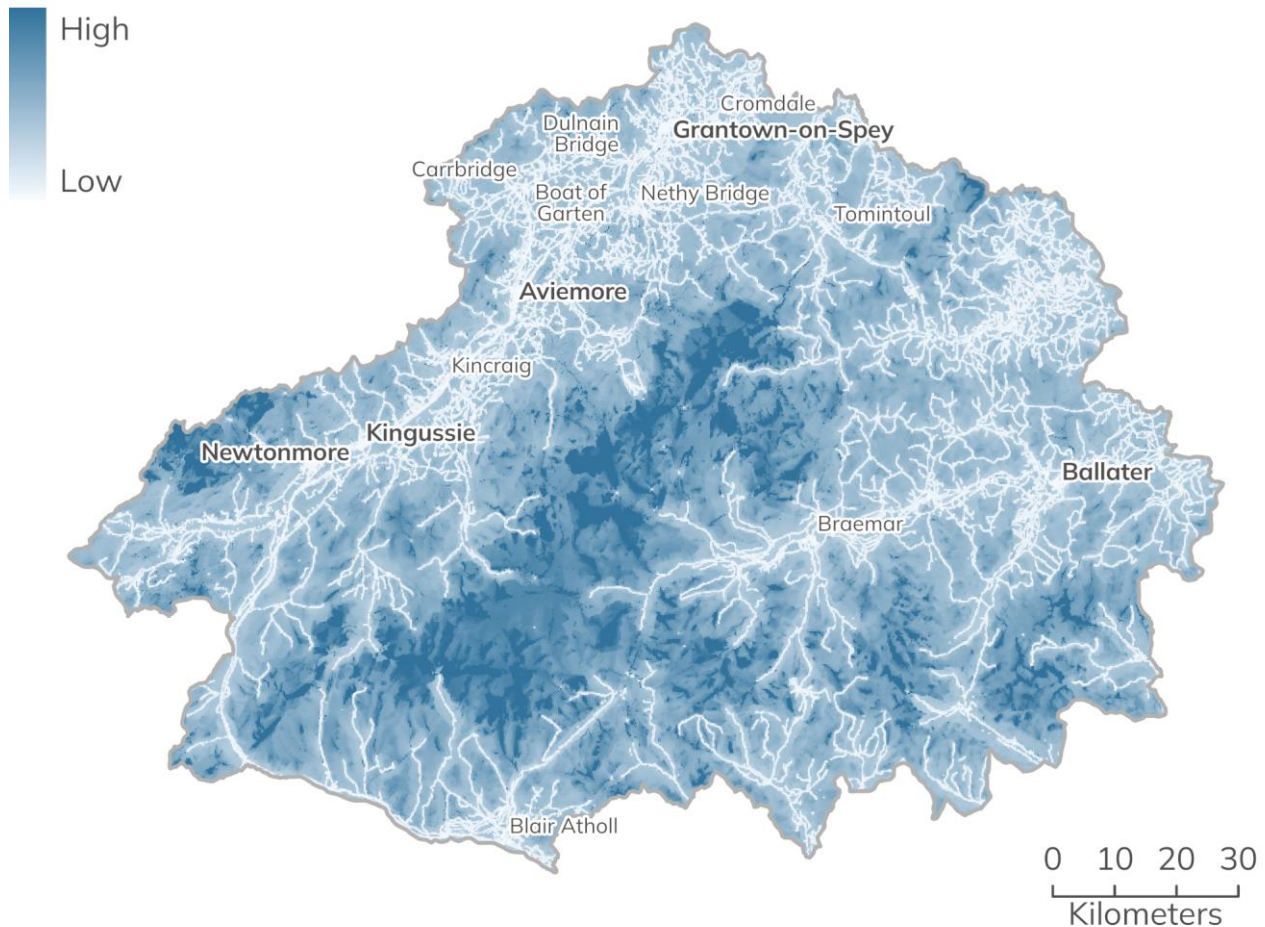


Figure 7 The visible lack of buildings, roads, pylons and other modern artefacts within the Cairngorms National Park. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of His Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright and database right 2024. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number AC0000821810, Cairngorms National Park Authority.

These four attributes were then combined to produce a composite or combined map of relative wildness of the whole of Scotland (Figure 8). This work illustrates that higher relative wildness scores extend beyond the Wild Land Areas, reflecting that the experience of 'wildness' is in many places prevalent as a defined special landscape quality of the National Park.

This mapping work underpins the initial definition of the Wild Land Areas (see page 13).





Relative wildness

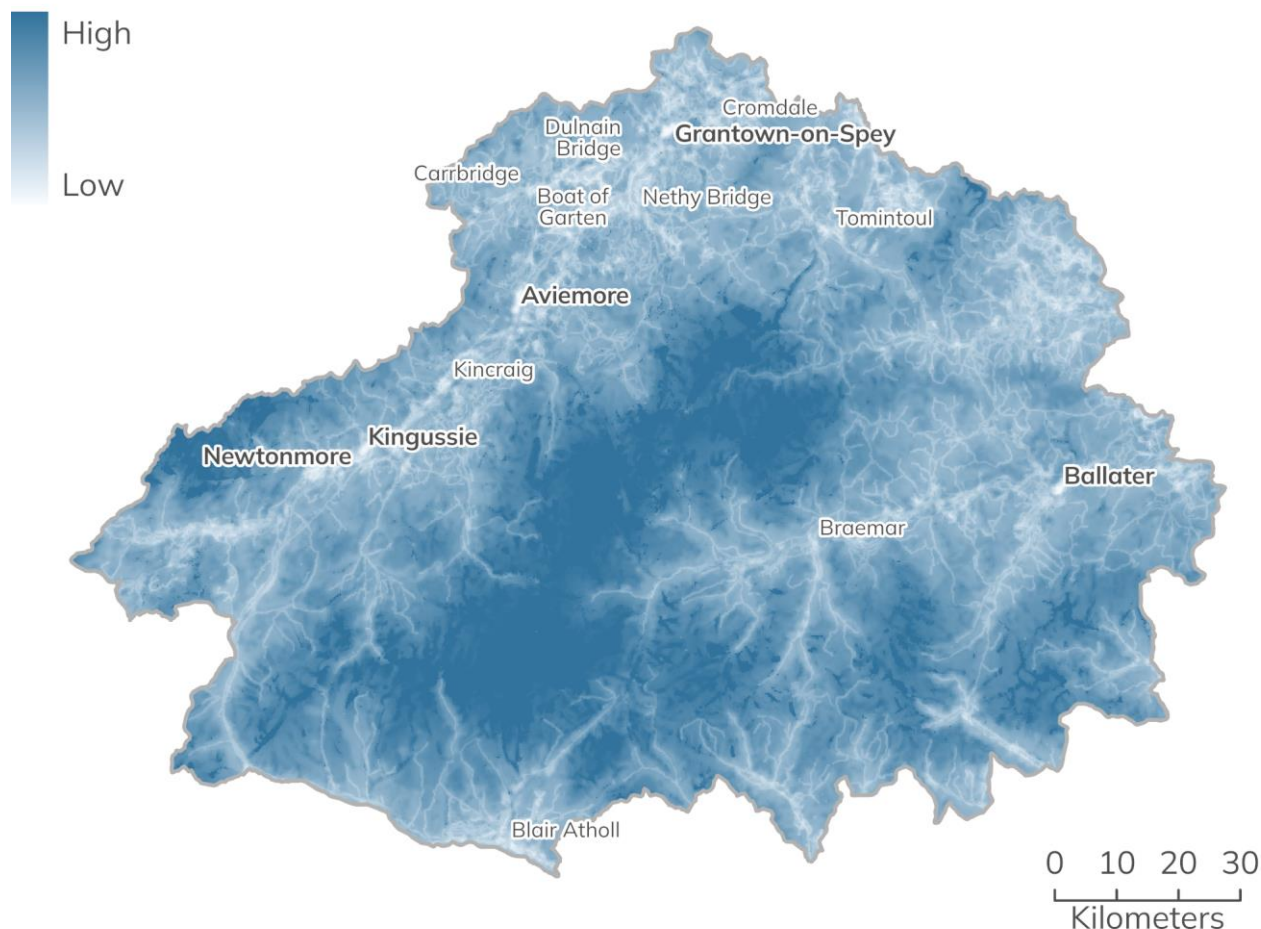


Figure 8 Relative wildness of land within the Cairngorms National Park. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of His Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright and database right 2024. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number AC0000821810, Cairngorms National Park Authority.

## Dark skies

Tomintoul and Glenlivet Dark Sky Park (Figure 9) is certified as part of the International Dark Sky Places Program by the International Dark-Sky Association. Within the protected landscape of the National Park, the certification encourages the implementation of good outdoor lighting and the provision of dark sky programs for visitors. Status updates are required regularly to ensure commitment to dark sky preservation. In the context of the Cairngorms National Park, the Dark Sky Park certification reinforces the more widespread, but not spatially defined Dark Skies special landscape quality.

Both these criteria reflect the relative low development levels across the National Park and current attention given to the management of artificial lighting. In turn these contribute to the numerous positive benefits of managing light pollution, including but



not limited to well-being and health, reduced energy use, reduced effects on species and habitats, and contributing to the wider, more resilience base for tourism extending beyond the lighter warmer months.

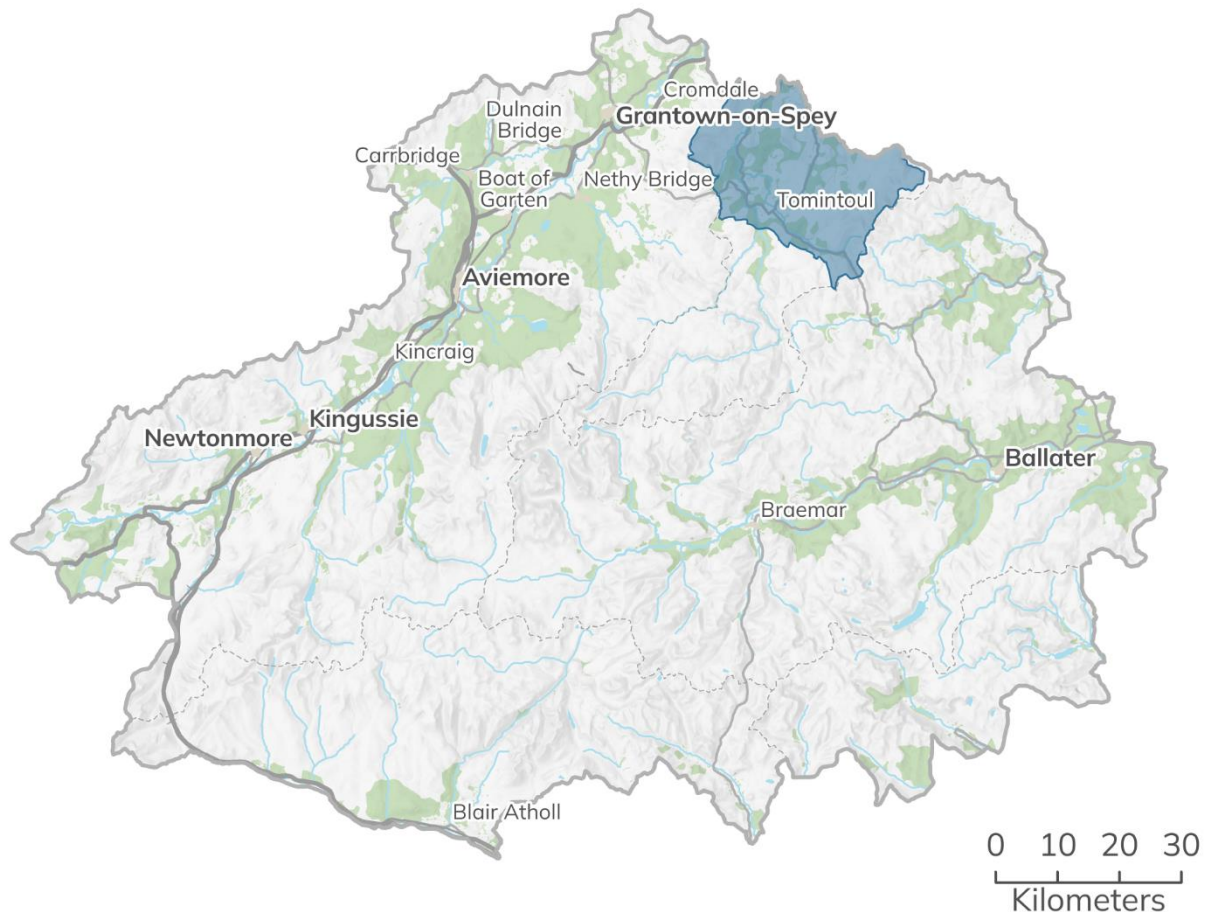


Figure 9 Tomintoul and Glenlivet Dark Sky Park. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of His Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright and database right 2024. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number AC0000821810, Cairngorms National Park Authority.

The whole of the National Park has extremely limited extents of artificial lighting. Where artificial lighting is displayed, this is largely confined to along the main straths and river valleys, focussed around settlements and areas of industry, in particular security lighting for whiskey distilleries warehouses.

This evidence links to that of commercial scale renewable wind energy (beyond but potentially affecting the special landscape qualities of the National Park) where innovations in wind turbine technology, entail that turbines over 150m blade tip height require lighting under Civil Aviation Authority guidelines.



Mapping of the Dark Skies Special Landscape Quality forms part of the Cairngorms 2030 Heritage Horizons project to be delivered over the next 5 years.

### **Private roads and ways**

Planning for constructed tracks in the upland landscapes of the National Park, are currently considered against Partnership Plan Policy A4 (f) and Local Development Plan Policy 5.2.

Work undertaken by the National Park Authority in 2019 found that there has been a significant increase in the number of upland tracks (both constructed and informal) since the establishment of the National Park in 2003. Constructed tracks are defined in the report as having a formalised surface whereby ex-situ material has been excavated and laid, often requiring machinery in the building process. Constructed tracks typically have characteristics such as drainage ditches, wider running widths and borrow pits. This work excludes the full extent of disturbance from ground excavation either side of the track and as such potential environmental effects are likely to be greater than suggested by the spatial information. Informal tracks considered more historic tracks with a lighter imprint, all-terrain vehicle (ATV) tracks (<2m widths) and driven lines / desire lines / tramlines.

This work indicated that there has been a threefold increase in the number of constructed tracks between 2017 to 2018. For informal tracks this increase is greater going from 29 recorded in 2017 to 170 in 2018. It is anticipated, that whilst there has been some reduction in the number of proposals for new tracks in the National Park, this is not of an extent that suggests a policy on tracks can no longer be supported. The current Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan policy 5.2 (a-c) states that there will be a presumption against new private roads and way in open moorland unless the proposal can demonstrate an essential need for land management, is designed to minimise landscape and environment impacts and enhance special landscape qualities, and that they form part of a programme of work to deliver wider net benefits for the special landscape qualities.

Spatial mapping of the tracks is provided within the original Cairngorms Hill Tracks report:

- <https://cairngorms.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Mapping-Hill-Tracks-in-the-Cairngorms-National-Park-2019.pdf>



## Wind energy

National Planning Framework 4 Policy 11 Energy seeks to encourage, promote and facilitate all forms of renewable energy development onshore (and offshore). This includes energy generation, storage, new and replacement transmission, and distribution infrastructure, and emerging low-carbon and zero-emissions technology.

In relation to energy generation from commercial onshore wind, National Parks and National Scenic Areas, development proposals in these designations will not be supported (Policy 11 b).

The currently adopted Local Development Plan (policy 7.3) compliments National Planning Framework 4 where large-scale commercial wind turbines are not compatible with the landscape character or special landscape qualities of the National Park and will not be supported. These turbines are defined as more than one turbine and more than 30m height.

In this context the main pressure for significant effects on the National Park special landscape qualities is from commercial scale wind energy developments, beyond, but proximal to the National Park. This pressure is predicted to increase with the significant weight National Planning Framework 4 Policy 11 places on the contribution of the development proposals to renewable energy generation targets and on greenhouse gas emission reduction targets.

Additional pressure is also predicted from the National Planning Framework 4 'Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure' which is one of six national developments that support the delivery of sustainable places across Scotland. This aims to facilitate the large and rapid increase in electricity generation from renewable resources. In this context, onshore electricity generation including electricity storage, comprising renewable development exceeding 50 megawatts capacity, is designated a national development. From the National Planning Framework 4 Explanatory Report<sup>1</sup> National Developments do not have a 'presumption in favour' status, as the need for development is established and other policies also apply in determining applications for consent.

---

<sup>1</sup> National Planning Framework 4 Explanatory Report: November 2022 PART 2 – National Developments page 42.



Resourcing landscape advice on wind energy proposals beyond but significantly effecting the special landscape qualities and integrity of the National Park, is managed through a Landscape Casework Agreement between the National Park and NatureScot.

Excluding commercial scale wind energy, National Planning Framework 4 requires Local Development Plans to realise their area's full potential from electricity and heat from renewable sources. Policy 11 a) ii – vii sets out the development proposals that will be supported but requires how any effects arising can be addressed Policy 11 e). taking into consideration other policy drivers within the National Park.

The increased strength of renewables policy facilitated through National Planning Framework 4 is already being experienced across Scotland (through Reporter's determinations for a number of wind energy applications where significant weight was given to National Planning Framework 4) and in the landscapes around and immediately adjacent to the National Park Figure 10. In particular for the National Park this represents a marked shift in the levels and likelihood of significant adverse effects on special landscape qualities and National Park integrity, from the increased proximity (scoping proposals ~ 1km from the National Park boundary) and scales of development (scoping development of 200m high turbines).



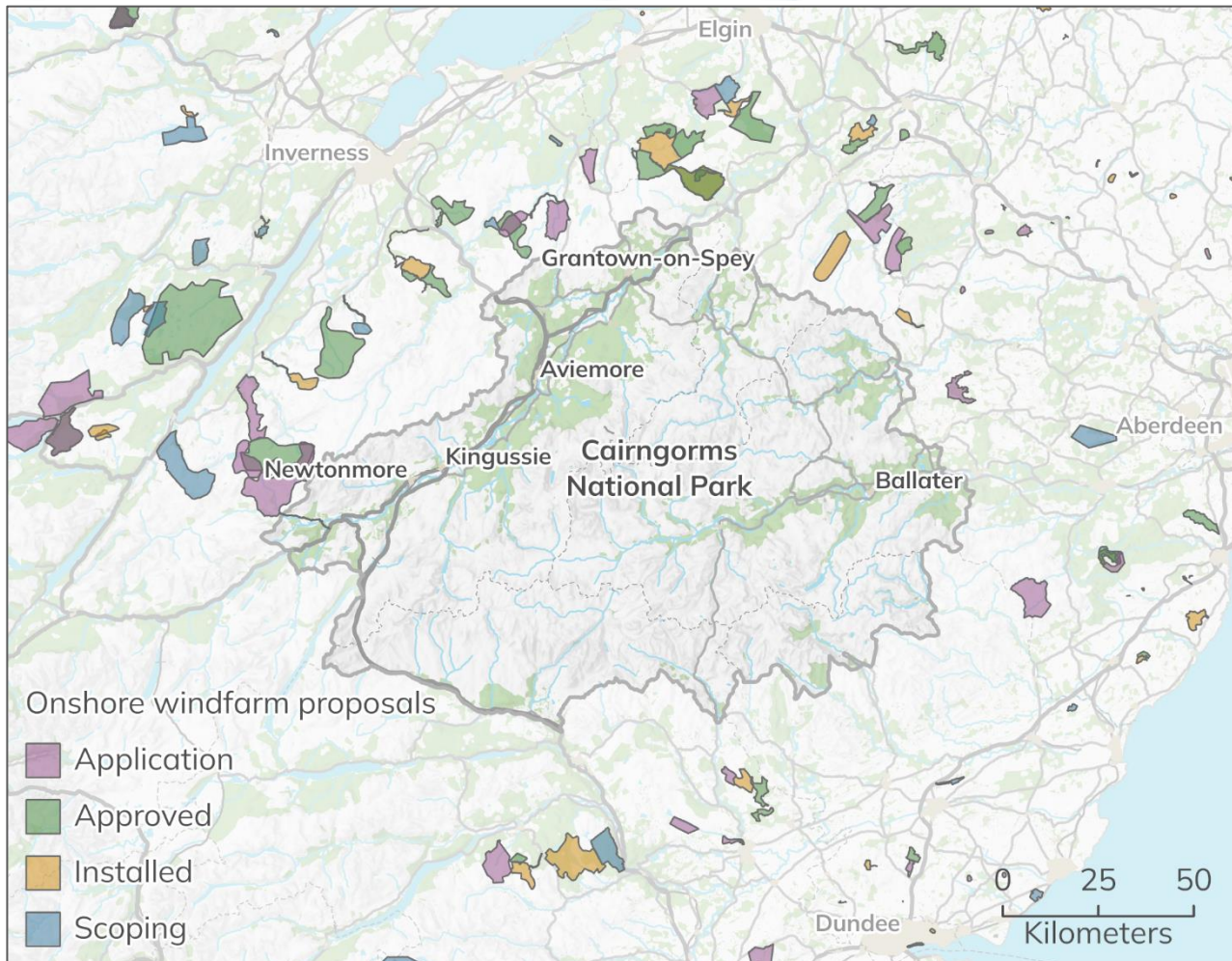


Figure 10 Location and Status of commercial scale wind energy development beyond the Cairngorms National Park. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of His Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright and database right 2024. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number AC0000821810, Cairngorms National Park Authority.

The wind energy spatial data mapped in **Error! Reference source not found.**, is current as of July 2023. This information will be updated at the time of consultation. The National Park Authority are aware of two wind energy proposals currently at Scoping proximal to, but beyond the National Park Boundary:

- Dorenell Wind Farm Extension and Biodiversity Enhancement Plan  
<https://dorenellextension.co.uk/>
- Balnespick Wind Farm  
<https://www.balnespickwindfarm.co.uk/>



## Digital infrastructure – mobile coverage

Good digital connectivity is increasingly seen as a basic service that is required by residents, businesses, students, visitors and the public sector. The current location of telecommunication masts within the National Park is displayed on Figure 11. The policy context for this will be considered in more detail in the digital infrastructure section of the Evidence Report.

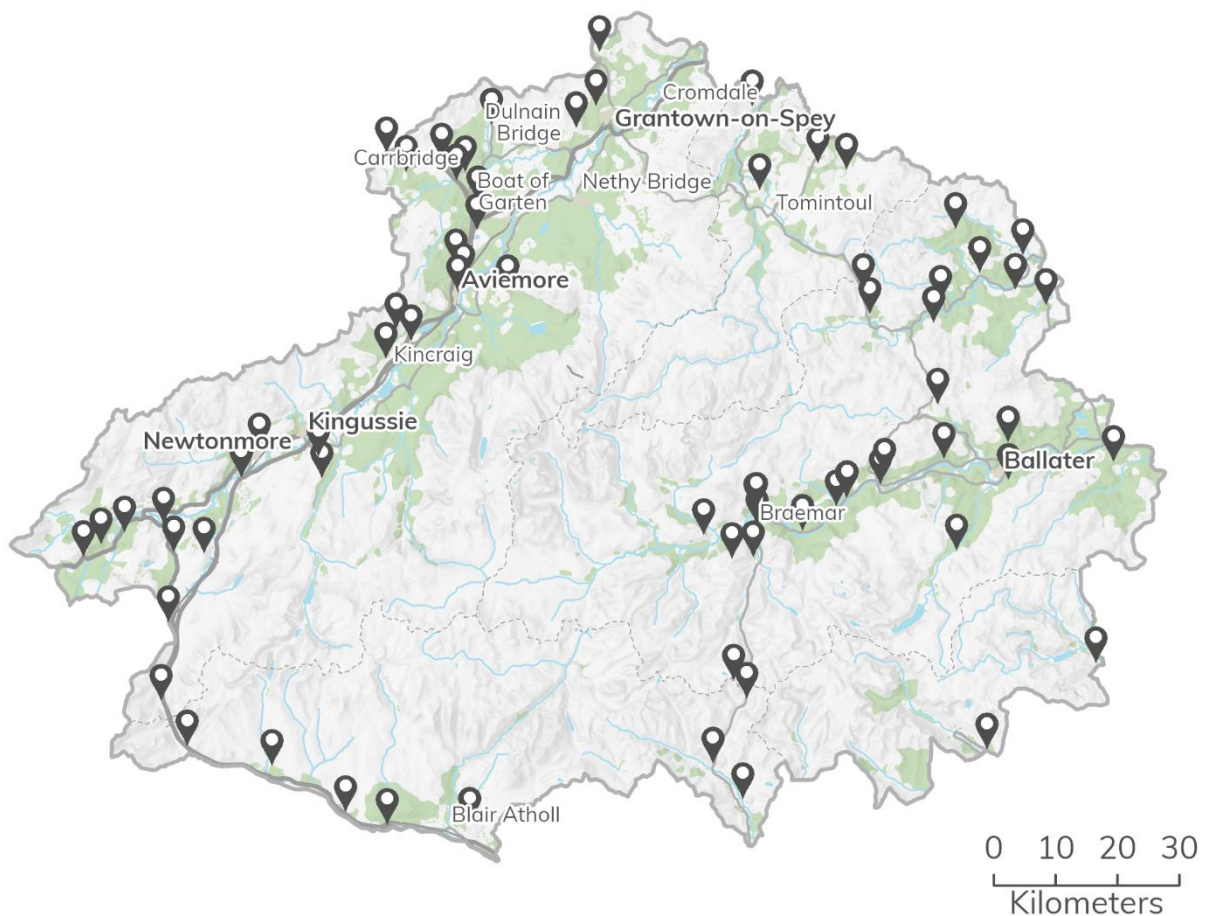


Figure 11 Location of existing telecommunication masts within the Cairngorms National Park. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of His Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright and database right 2024. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number AC0000821810, Cairngorms National Park Authority.

In relation of mobile coverage, there are several 'not spots' within the Cairngorms National Park for mobile reception. However, the Scottish 4G Infill programme, which sought to address up to 60 'not spots' in Scotland by 2022, does not include any areas within the National Park. There are still areas within the National Park that have no 4G coverage, with any of the four main carriers.





Instigated in 2020 the Shared Rural Network programme (comprising agreement between the four mobile network operators EE, Three, VMO2 and Vodafone, and the UK Government) aims to deliver mobile broadband to 95% of the UK, providing additional 4G coverage along the UK's roads and improve geographical coverage within National Parks.

📍 Approved

📍 Under consideration

📍 Withdrawn

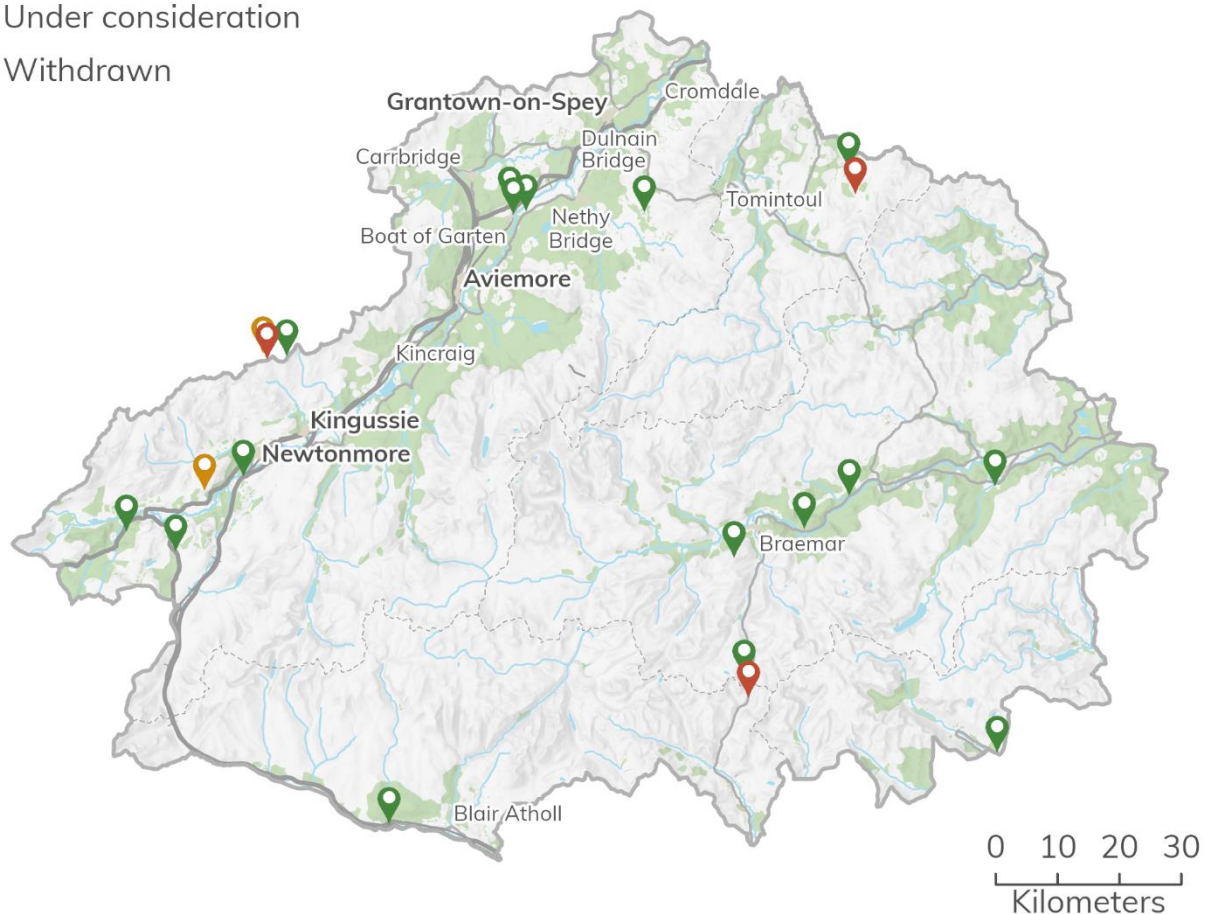


Figure 12 Location of planning applications for telecommunication masts within the Cairngorms National Park 2019 - 2024. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of His Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright and database right 2024. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number AC0000821810, Cairngorms National Park Authority.

The National Park have received a number of pre-application and application enquiries for masts and associated infrastructure, including hill tracks (Figure 12). Proposed in typically upland and more remote locations these masts both individually and cumulatively have the potential to introduce significant adverse effects on the National Park's special landscape qualities.



---

## Summary of implications for proposed plan

The proposed plan needs to be prepared in accordance with:

- The four aims of the National Park as set out in The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000), in particular the first aim 'to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area'.
- The spatial strategy and principles of National Planning Framework 4.

In its preparation the proposed plan should seek to:

- Protect the landscape character of the National Park.
- Protect and enhance the special landscape qualities in general.
- Protect and enhance wild land and wilderness special landscape qualities.
- Protect and enhance dark skies special landscape qualities and the Tomintoul and Glenlivet Dark Sky Park.
- Protect and enhance landscapes of local importance, and the sense of place of communities.
- Minimise the effects from the construction of upland hill tracks.
- Minimise the effects of telecommunication mast development.