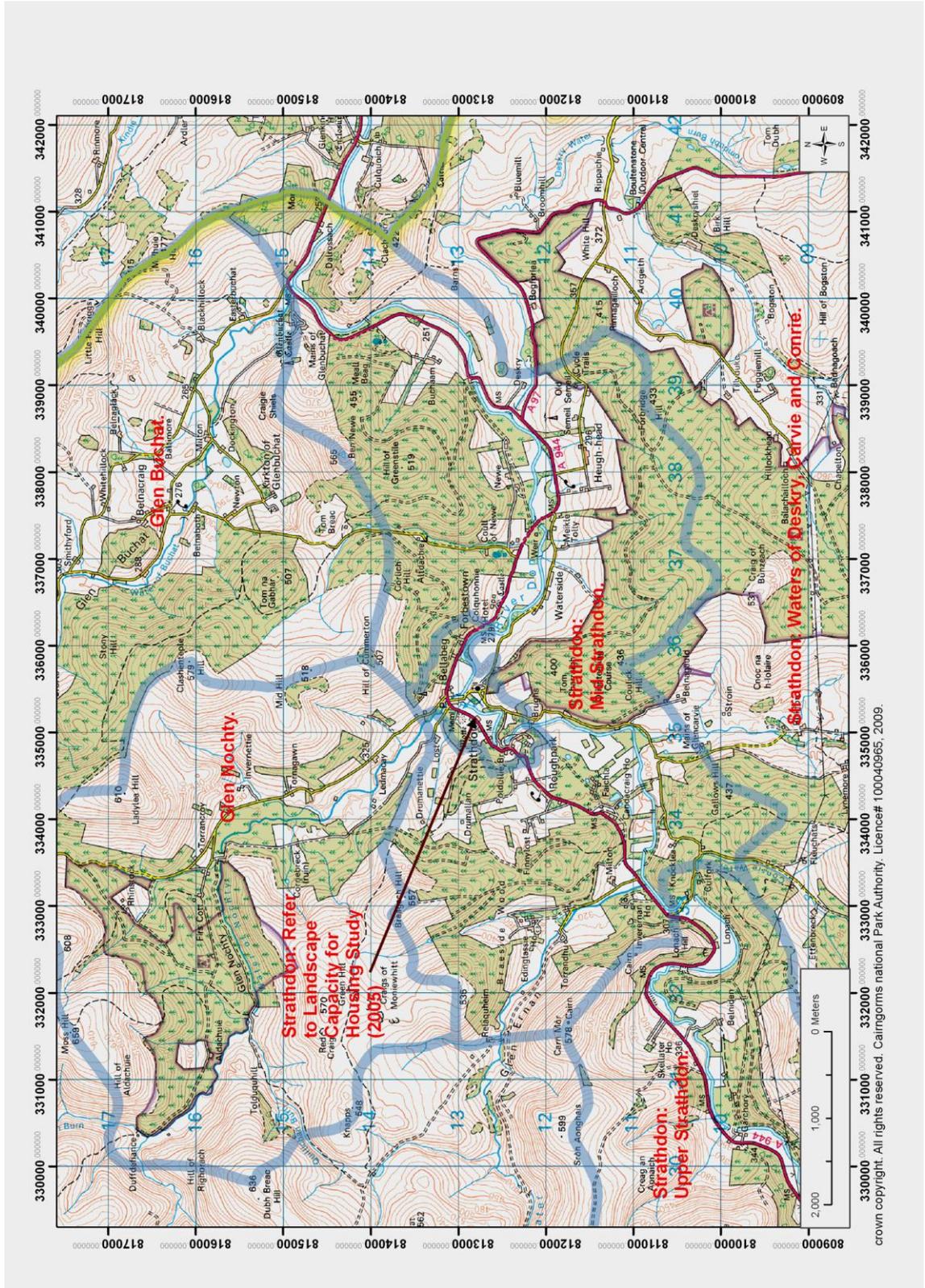


I.1 Strathdon: Mid Strathdon



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### 1.1.1 *Landscape Character*

This winding valley is relatively narrow, contained by gently sloping and rounded lower slopes beneath steeper, enclosing upper slopes

Rounded hill summits and long ridges form the pronounced containment of the valley, with only the narrow-mouthed side glens occasionally breaching the valley sides

The winding River Don meanders in long loops from side to side across the floodplain. This varies in width, lying between undulating slopes of glacial-fluvial deposit

Extensive mixed conifer woodland covers most of the upper, steeper slopes, occasionally linked seamlessly to narrow shelter belts which reach down to the floor of the strath

Several designed landscapes of policy woodland and planted features, including beech and lime in the species mix, avenues, occasional clumps of parkland trees on the floodplain and specimen trees, add to diversity

These wooded designed landscapes associated with a number of estate mansions create a pattern of woodland on steep slopes alternating with farmland on gentle slopes along the sides of the strath

Gaps in the woodland means that in places farmland extends well up the hill sides, with relatively small, late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields on well drained and gently graded slopes, regardless of aspect. These are sometimes contained by walls

The lower fields, some of which are quite large, enclose arable crops as well as grassland, but occasionally on the very highest slopes there is some reversion to more poorly drained, unimproved grassland

The area is well settled. Four or five small linear settlements are located along the valley sides

Loose clusters of estate and farm buildings are sited at intervals, often associated with the sites of now ruined castles. The architectural style of individual estates adds to the diversity of built structures

Strathdon and Bellabeg are associated with the conjunction of glens combined with an ancient crossing point of the River, which is further marked by the striking pre-historic motte and more recent church. This pattern is repeated at the mouth of the Buchat

Dispersed farms are often located on the upper slopes

The A944 winds along this strath, following the sinuous river valley.

All the roads are very tightly located against clearly defined 'breaks in slope', slightly elevated above the floodplain. Several have stone retaining walls along the upside of the roadway

### 1.1.2 *Landscape experience*

The sinuous form of this strath creates a sense of 'intrigue', as when travelling along the length of the valley, the landscape is revealed only in small stages, and it is impossible to see the valley as a whole

The roads wind through a sequence of woodland alternating with patches of open farmland which increases the sense of anticipation as the landscape is revealed and views change at each bend in the road and at every new open space

The strath is very diverse, in large part due to the influence of the individual estates, some of which occupy very old sites, and have well established designed landscapes and many individual features

### 1.1.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This character area is very self contained, with only occasional views into other character areas along side glens.

1.1.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

Small fields extend high up the smooth, undulating side slopes of the strath, reinforcing the sequence of open farmland alternating with enclosed woodland, some of which is associated with designed landscapes along the strath. Roads are firmly tucked into the winding 'break in slope', so that travelling through this strath reveals its sinuous form.



*Rolling land form and gentle slopes support fields of grassland and arable land up the side slopes of the strath*



*Fields extend up higher slopes, although some are reverting to upland grassland and whin*



*Woodland, including shelterbelts and, on the level floodplain, 'roundels' of pine*



*A linear settlement – one of several – adjacent to the River Don, which is hidden within riparian woodland*



*The sequence of woodland and farmland along the glen*



*Walls around these fields, and some mature policy woodland*