



### Location and Context

The *Coastal Agricultural Plain* is an extensive Landscape Character Type comprising a low-lying and often very open sweep of exposed farmland in eastern Aberdeenshire where the influence of the sea is particularly strong. It is characterised by its gently undulating landform, relatively large scale, extensive mosses and the influence of development including transmission masts, electricity transmission lines, the A90 and A953, and the gas terminal at St Fergus on its eastern edge. The transition between the *Beaches Dunes and Links* Landscape Character Type in the east and the hinterland formed by this landscape is very gradual.

### Key Characteristics

- Low-lying and very gently undulating landform, with a pattern of subtle ridges and valleys in the north-east.
- Prominent landmark feature of Mormond Hill on the western edge of the area, which includes the White Horse and White Stag quartz hillside figures, the only such in Scotland.
- Water courses in broad shallow valleys.
- Mainly arable farming, with fairly extensive areas of moss and wetland.
- Large, open, geometric fields.
- Coniferous forest particularly extensive in southern part of the area.
- Limited broadleaf woodland, forming rare shelterbelts and small groups around farms.
- Well settled landscape of dispersed farms, many newer houses and a number of settlements, and occasional mansions in designed landscapes.
- Communication structures and tall masts on some higher ground, and power transmission lines radiating from Peterhead power station, which itself is highly visible.
- Major roads crossing the area.
- Consistent views of high coastal dunes and sea, giving a strong coastal context,

## **Landscape Character Description**

### *Landform*

The low-lying and very gently undulating landform of the *Coastal Agricultural Plain* generally lies below 60 metres, with much of the area reclaimed from moorland to accommodate resettled crofters now forming a rich agricultural resource. Land gradually rises to the west. Mormond Hill, a 'stand-alone' hill formed of resistant quartzite, lies on the western edge of this Landscape Character Type. The hill rises to 230 metres and forms a prominent landmark feature which is seen extensively across much of north-eastern Aberdeenshire. The presence of a White Horse, constructed in the late 1700s and depicted in white quartz, adds to the visual presence of Mormond Hill. Further east, constructed in the 1870's, the White Stag is less well known, with views increasingly blocked by immediate tree growth. These are the only two hill figures in Scotland.

Water courses occupy broad shallow valleys and basins with occasional more steeply cut scrub-covered banks. The River Ugie, which meanders across a large floodplain west of Peterhead, and the River Ythan which flows across the central part of the plain, are the most significant of these. A small area west of Peterhead is patterned with narrow, deep dens, filled with dense broadleaf woodland.

### *Landcover*

Predominantly arable farming occasionally gives way to fairly extensive areas of moss and wetland including St Fergus's Moss where peat extraction is undertaken and the more intact and less modified remnant mosses of Rora and Cruden. Coniferous forest borders these areas of moss and is particularly extensive in the southern part of this character area. Broadleaf woodland and trees are scarce, largely restricted to rare shelterbelts, estate policies, occasional small groups around farms or more substantial plantings on the outskirts of settlements, for example around the village of Hatton. Where this woodland does occur it is visually prominent.

Large open fields are mostly bounded by post and wire fences with dilapidated and overgrown stone walls becoming more prominent in the north of this area. Stubby beech, thorn and gorse hedges also occur in places.

### *Settlement*

This is a well settled landscape with regularly dispersed often relatively large farms, often sited on subtle rises and ridges, and many newer houses and a number of settlements including villages such as Hatton, Longside and New Leeds. Small and occasional large wind turbines are a regular feature on farmland, and the nine large turbines close to St Fergus Moss are prominent in this part of the coast. Peterhead power station, transmission lines, communication structures on Mormond Hill and other tall masts are highly visible in this open landscape. This landscape is also crossed by major roads and a number of small quarries and landfill sites are present particularly in the south. Tall structures, such as farm silos and pylons and are generally prominent against the horizon in this landscape.

Notable historic features include several grand mansions within designed landscapes, such as Cairness (18<sup>th</sup> Century), Crimonmogate (19<sup>th</sup> Century), Cairnbulg Castle (medieval to late 19<sup>th</sup> Century) and Haddo (18<sup>th</sup> Century former laird's house and parkland). There are also

the 18<sup>th</sup> Century houses of Memsie and Auchries, ruinous medieval Inverallochy Castle, and old parish churches of St Ethrenan's Rathen, Crimond, and Longside. In addition, there is a prehistoric cairn on Mormond Hill and a medieval motte at Trefor Hill.

### *Perception*

The proximity of the coast is perceived in the strong sense of openness, lightness and space. The high coastal dunes and sea are consistent features within views, particularly from the eastern-most parts of this character type. These views, together with the windswept exposure of the landscape, give a strong sense of the coastal context of this landscape.



This is one of 390 Landscape Character Types identified at a scale of 1:50 000 as part of a national programme of Landscape Character Assessment republished in 2019.

The area covered by this Landscape Character Type was originally included in the Banff and Buchan LCA (Cobham Resource Consultants), published 1994 and South and Central Aberdeenshire LCA (Environmental Resources Management), published 1998; and Aberdeenshire Landscape Character Review (Carol Anderson Landscape Associates), published 2014.