



Location and Context

The *Undulating Agricultural Heartland* Landscape Character Type is an extensive area of gently undulating farmland lying at the core of north-eastern Aberdeenshire. It merges gradually with the lower-lying character areas within the *Coastal Agricultural Plain - Aberdeenshire* and different coastal farmland Landscape Character Types to the north and east. Its southern and western boundary is formed by the *Farmed and Wooded River Valleys*. A distinct higher ridge within the *Farmed Rolling Ridges and Hills* provides a more marked change along the south-eastern boundary near the Ythan valley.

Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating, rolling landform of low hills and ridges, with broad shallow valleys.
- Smoothly rounded terrain.
- Large fields.
- Occasional beech and thorn hedges, with stone dykes more common in parts.
- Generally sparse woodland cover, with broadleaf trees concentrated in shelterbelts along ridges, and around farms. Larger coniferous forests occur in some areas, and estate policies and occasional beech shelterbelts also occur.
- A well settled landscape with a number of small settlements including historic planned fermtouns, castles and designed landscapes.
- Frequent, regularly dispersed medium-sized farms, with pockets of smaller farms and crofts.
- Open, expansive character with views to landmark hills; the Culsh monument above New Deer is a key landmark feature.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Undulating Agricultural Heartland* comprises a gently undulating, rolling landform, forming part of a vast rolling plain, with low hills and ridges cut by broad shallow valleys. Relief generally ranges between 100 to 190 metres.

Landcover

The smoothly rounded terrain is accentuated by large fields divided by fences, or, more rarely, low walls, and by the rotation of arable cropping and ploughed fields and closely-grazed improved pasture. Occasional beech and thorn hedges add diversity in places and stone dykes are more characteristic in the north near Strichen.

Woodland is sparse although a frequent scattering of broad-leaved trees occurs in shelterbelts along hill ridges, around farms and in small coniferous blocks. Larger areas of coniferous plantation occur on the higher ridge of Waggle Hill, on the western hill slopes at the transition with the Ythan valley, where they form part of the wider policies of estates such as Hatton, and within wetter basins west of Strichen. Some mixed policy woodlands are present within the den of Craigston Castle in the north of this character area and around Cuminestown where a particularly strong framework of beech shelterbelts is a feature. There are pockets of moorland around New Pitsligo.

Settlement

There are no large towns. A number of small settlements and larger villages, many of these 18th Century planned fermtowns, include Strichen, New Deer, New Byth and Cuminestown. Farms are frequent, regularly dispersed and generally medium-sized, some with large barns and silos but also pockets of smaller farms and crofts occur on higher slopes and valleys to the west and most notably in the Greeness area. Farm buildings are invariably sheltered by small clumps of mixed trees which stand out against smooth open farmland.

In addition to the 18th Century planned fermtowns, notable historic features include 16th to 19th Century grand castles in designated landscapes at Delgatie, Craigston and Hatton. There are also the ruins of castles at Brucklay and King Edward, and a stone circle at North Mains of Auchmaliddie. The village of King Edward also contains the old parish church and graveyard. The Culsh monument above New Deer is a key landmark feature and offers wide panoramic views over the subtly rolling and expansive farmland of this landscape.

Small single wind turbines are associated with many farms with single and small groups of commercial scale turbines infrequently located on low ridges and local hills.

Perception

This landscape has an open and expansive character with long views across the surrounding landscape a key feature. Views to landmark hills within Aberdeenshire and Moray are also possible with Bennachie, Tap o'Noth, Knock Hill, Mormond Hill and Ben Rinnes visible in good weather. The relatively limited relief and openness of this landscape give big skies and a notably strong sense of space and light. Movement of the clouds overhead forms patterns of light and shade across the fields.

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 Aberdeenshire Landscape Character Review (Carol Anderson Landscape Associates), published 2014.