



Location and Context

The *Broad Valley Lowlands - Aberdeenshire* are located in the south of the county, comprising the area known as the “Howe of Mearns”. It forms an extremely broad and gently undulating strath, and is an extension of Strathmore in Angus which is classified as the *Broad Valley Lowlands - Tayside* Landscape Character Type.

Key Characteristics

- A broad and generally gently undulating strath with some flatter basins.
- Steep scarp of the Mounth uplands rising steeply to the north-west and low rounded ridge of Garvock Hill provides a lesser degree of containment along the south-eastern boundary.
- Predominantly intensive agriculture with distinctive patchwork of large open fields divided by ditches and fences interspersed with small conifer woodlands.
- More folded terrain at the foot of The Mounth uplands, with a number of small rounded hills and small incised valleys, supporting diverse policy woodlands and well-managed farmland.
- Mature beech woodlands and avenues with stone walls associated with estates at the base of slopes.
- Pockets of rowan and birch woodland along watercourses stand out within this expansive plain.
- Small traditional villages and numerous farms, constructed of warm red stone, dotted throughout the countryside.
- Landscape forms a major communications corridor accommodating the A90, the East Coast railway and transmission line.
- Striking contrast of open, expansive strath and adjacent uplands.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The extremely broad and gently undulating strath of the “Howe of the Mearns”, which forms the *Broad Valley Lowlands - Aberdeenshire*, lies adjacent to the Highland Boundary Fault. It

is the north-eastern extent of Strathmore that runs from Perth and Kinross, through Angus and terminates here. This strath has been formed by glacial erosion and the fluvio-glacial drifts derived from the underlying Old Red Sandstone have resulted in some of the most fertile soils in Scotland.

The low-lying and gently undulating relief of this broad valley is emphasised by the steep moorland slopes of the Mounth which rise abruptly from it to the north-west, marking the line of the Highland Boundary Fault.

Landcover

Crops, ploughed fields of rich red soils and grassland create a large geometric pattern of seasonally changing colours. The fields' vivid red soils are juxtaposed with the bright greens of pasture or emerging cereal crops, while at other time fields of rape and daffodils present a patchwork of colours. The farmland mosaic dominates the landscape but small conifer plantations and pockets of scrubby birch and moss are also scattered over the flat expanse. Broadleaf estate woodlands and shelterbelts are a consistent feature. The steeper scarp slopes and outer hills of the adjacent Mounth uplands contrast with this, covered with coniferous forest and heather moorland.

Settlement

The agricultural wealth of this area has nurtured the growth of villages, farms and estates and its affluence is reflected in the many large historic buildings notably at Fasque. The intensity of agriculture has probably had an impact on the survival of archaeology on the floor of the valley. At the base of the Mounth, Kincardine Castle survives with its associated system of deer management still present on the hill above; this pattern of landholding, with house and farm on the adjacent lower ground characterises the north-west edge of the character type. The local red soils are reflected in many of the buildings, in Fettercairn for example. Red stone houses, bridges and stone dykes give warmth to the landscape but mixed with newer houses of diverse styles and materials. The estates, with their policy woodlands, have a strong influence on the character of this landscape. The area provides a natural communications corridor and the A90, East Coast Railway and a transmission line are aligned close to the south-eastern boundary of this landscape.

There are several single/double wind energy developments, of medium scale (75-85 metre high) wind turbines across the Howe of the Mearns which create focal points in the landscape. Their pale colour contrasts with the Mounth plateaux and mountains to the west, when viewed from the A90 and eastern areas.

Perception

The distinctive character of this landscape derives from its large pattern of fields, crops and woodlands, this particularly appreciated from elevated locations. The juxtaposition of this expansive and, in places, very open and low-lying farmed strath and the distinct upland scarp of The Mounth is striking.



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 South and Central Aberdeenshire LCA (Environmental Resources Management), published 1998; and Aberdeenshire Landscape Character Review (Carol Anderson Landscape Associates), published 2014.