



Location and Context

The *Farmed Basin - Aberdeenshire* Landscape Character Type comprises three areas - the “Howe of Cromar”, Inch Basin and the “Howe of Alford” in the centre of the county. These areas form flat to gently undulating broad basins surrounded by the higher *Outlying Hills and Ridges* Landscape Character Type.

Key Characteristics

- Simple, flat to gently undulating broad valley floor contained by undulating slopes which rise to the high heather-clad and forested *Outlying Hills and Ridges*.
- Large geometric fields forming a colourful patchwork of arable and pasture land on basin floors, often extending far up containing slopes.
- Wetter rushy pastures and some small areas of remnant moss and birch woodlands present on flatter basin floors.
- Small copses of broadleaf trees and conifer shelterbelts pattern the farmland.
- Policy woodlands a particular feature in parts of the area..
- Distinct ‘Highland fringe’ character in parts.
- Regular scattering of farms, villages and isolated houses.
- Rich mix of archaeological remains.
- Large scale character with powerful landform and simple landscape pattern.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Farmed Basin - Aberdeenshire* Landscape Character Type forms swaths of simple flat or gently undulating farmland. The River Don and the Tarland Burn are aligned through the centre of the Howes of Alford and Cromar while a series of smaller water courses create a succession of subtle shallow basins, divided by low gently undulating ridges, across the Inch Basin. It is additionally interrupted at its core by a chain of higher knolls and small conical hills. The sides of these basins are gently undulating but occasionally steeper and more rolling where they merge with the higher *Outlying Hills and Ridges* in the west. Landform is more rolling and complex to the west and north of the Howe of Cromar where it merges with higher upland areas.

Landcover

These landscapes are fertile and have sustained productive farming since Neolithic times. Modern farming has resulted in an area dominated by large rectilinear fields with different cropping influencing the geometric patchwork pattern rather than field boundaries. Tumbledown stone dykes have been replaced or reinforced by post and wire fencing along field boundaries in many areas. Small but widespread clumps of broadleaf and conifer woodlands add to the diversity of the landscape. Clumps of Scots pine and the backdrop of higher hills of the Cairngorms National Park to the west give the Howe of Cromar a distinct 'Highland fringe' character. More marginal land on rolling hill slopes in this area is enclosed by rough stone walls. Mixed policy woodlands are a particular feature of the Howes of Alford and Cromar where they are associated with the River Don and lower hill slopes. A strong framework of woodlands and avenue plantings enclose fields in these areas. The Insch Basin is less wooded, with a more open character, yet it has distinctive mature beech avenues and tree belts.

Settlement

These are well settled landscapes with a number of sizeable settlements and a regular dispersal of farms. A wealth of archaeological features includes a mix of numerous prehistoric stone circles, Pictish carved stones and Iron Age hillforts. In particular, the Insch Basin contains a complex network of probably Iron Age defended hilltop forts and enclosures on most of the prominent knolls and small conical hills, including Dunnideer. This is a corridor in the landscape that was important two thousand years ago, but all of these monuments are overshadowed by Tap O'Noth to the west and Mither Tap on Bennachie to the south-east. The Howe of Alford contains the site of the Battle of Alford in 1645, which was a battle where the topography of a hill within the broader basin played a key role. Numerous small to medium scale wind turbines relate to farm steadings in the Insch Basin.

Perception

These richly patterned farmed and settled basins strongly contrast with the heather-capped and forested ridges and hills of the *Outlying Hills and Ridges*. The scenic composition is enhanced where the surrounding uplands are higher and feature more pronounced peaks.



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