



Location and Context

The *Agricultural Lowlands-Ayrshire* Landscape Character Type occurs in five places focussed on the northern half of Ayrshire. It covers a large area, including most of the Ayrshire Basin to the north of Kilwinning and Irvine. It comprises inland areas on the mainland between the coastal edge and higher moorland to the east.

Key Characteristics

- Complex landform, gently increasing in height from the coastal fringe, dissected by many burns and streams draining to incised main river valleys to create an undulating lowland landscape.
- Geology dominated by coal measures, though basalt, sandstones, limestones, millstone grit and volcanic intrusions are also present.
- Generally small to medium scale landscape.
- Landcover is predominantly pastoral, with some arable on lower and better soils.
- Fields often regular in shape and enclosed by beech or hawthorn hedges, with mature hedgerow trees giving the landscape a surprisingly wooded character.
- Settlement pattern historic in origin based upon larger, more self-contained farmsteads set in a hinterland of fields.
- Number of larger towns and villages with historic cores surrounded by more modern development.
- Several major road corridors creating a degree of conflict between the rural character and presence of heavy traffic.
- Dense network of often very rural minor roads.
- Varying landscape character which ranges from very rural to more fragmented and developed landscapes on urban fringes.
- Views tend to be dictated by the local topography and landcover.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Agricultural Lowlands - Ayrshire* Landscape Character Type forms extensive areas of agricultural lowland which occupy much of the Ayrshire Basin. Lying between about 10 metres and 150 metres, the area's geology is dominated by coal measures, though basalt, sandstones, limestone's, millstone grit and volcanic intrusions are also present.

The landform is surprisingly complex and variable, dissected by many burns and streams draining to incised main river valleys to create an undulating lowland landscape. There is a gentle increase in height from the coastal fringe to the more abrupt transition to upland.

Landcover

Landcover is predominantly pastoral, though with some arable areas on lower and better soils. Cattle, sheep and ley grassland are common. North of Kilmarnock, a number of place names include the term 'moss', reflecting the presence of peat bogs and mires. While many of these have been drained and reclaimed for agriculture, some areas of peatland remain such as the more elevated areas close to the North Ayrshire/East Ayrshire border. Fields within this landscape type, probably dating back to the 18th or 19th Century, are often small to medium in scale, regular in shape, and enclosed by beech or hawthorn hedges. For the most part, the hedges are intact and in good condition. Many field boundaries are also marked by mature hedgerow trees. Again, beech trees predominate. These trees give the landscape a surprisingly wooded character, often forming avenues along minor roads. In places this structure has begun to decline as trees have been felled and not replaced. More extensive woodland is limited, concentrated in river valleys and formed into shelter belts in some of the more exposed areas, or around large estates.

Settlement

The area's settlement pattern is historic in origin. Unlike Highland areas where a system of joint-tenancy land holding prevailed, resulting in the creation of villages and hamlets, the typical lowland settlement system was based upon larger, more self-contained farmsteads with a hinterland of fields. Many existing farms are on historic sites, though buildings are invariably newer and old field systems lost beneath more recent enclosures. Farms are often sited on low hills and ridges, typically comprising a courtyard with the farmhouse at the centre. Buildings are often limewashed with slate roofs and black painted woodwork. More modern farm buildings, including sheds and barns are rarely intrusive, often dark red or green in colour. It is less densely settled in the broader valleys and Craigs of Kyle than in the south eastern part of the Ayrshire Lowlands at the transition with the more expansive simple uplands.

A number of towns and villages are found throughout the lowlands, again many with medieval or earlier origins. Examples include Tarbolton and Kilmarnock. Invariably, the historic cores of such settlements are surrounded with more modern development. This often comprises standard municipal or suburban designs (white render and orange pantiles) which reflect neither the character of the historic core or the surrounding landscape. There is a fragmented pattern of large buildings, roads, transmission lines and other infrastructure on the urban fringes of Ayr, Prestwick and Kilmarnock. This creates visual clutter and intrusion into the lowlands. Field enclosure and woodland patterns are weaker in these areas.

Several major road corridors cross this landscape type, principally the A77 between Glasgow and Ayr, but also the A735, A736 and the A76. The A77 in particular has been upgraded over time and it now comprises a dual carriageway route for much of its length. There is inevitably a degree of conflict between the pastoral character of this landscape type and the presence of a major road carrying heavy traffic. There have been few successful attempts to tie the improved roads into the structure of the landscape.

This landscape type also contains a dense network of minor roads many of which are very rural in character. Where recent improvements have taken place, modern kerbing has sometimes been introduced at the road edge, introducing an urban feature into the rural landscape. Signage can have a similar effect. On the other hand, Ayrshire retains a large number of milestones which should be retained.

Perception

The *Agricultural Lowlands - Ayrshire* provide a simple rural setting to larger settlements like Troon, as well as the foreground to views to the Firth of Clyde and Arran from roads and settlements.

This small to medium scale landscape has a diverse landscape character which ranges from very rural areas to a more fragmented landscape where modern development and transport corridors have eroded the character. Views tend to be informed by the local topography and landcover. From certain areas views open up towards the Firth of Clyde and Arran to the west and the Plateau Moorlands often form a simple, flat horizon in longer distance views to the east however, views of the operational Whitelee Wind Farm and its extensions have somewhat complicated this skyline. The southern hills of Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park provide an immediate backdrop to the western part of this Landscape Character Type.

This is one of 389 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 Ayrshire (Land Use Consultants), published 1998.

