



Location and Context

The *Broad Valley Lowlands – Ayrshire* Landscape Character Type occurs in one place in Ayrshire, to the north, at the Garnock Valley. Although a finer grain landscape assessment would draw a distinction between the flat valley floor, the settled and agricultural lower slopes and the moorland upper slopes, this regional scale assessment identifies the valleys as a single landscape Character Type.

Key Characteristics

- Broad, shallow breach valley.
- Moderately steep slopes which rise to the North Ayrshire Hills and which rise less dramatically to the south, blending into the Ayrshire lowlands.
- Underlain by millstone grit and crossed by igneous dykes, subsequently substantially modified by glacial erosion.
- Pasture or ley grassland with some arable predominates on the lower slopes.
- Abandoned fields and rough moorland on higher ground to the north.
- Dense network of woodland, comprising shelterbelts, hedgerow trees, trees along burns and gullies and associated with large houses and estates.
- Settlement predominantly located on drier slopes, many historic in origin though considerably expanded as a consequence of industrialisation.
- Older buildings constructed in stone and slate. Newer structures tend to be rendered and painted white or cream with orange pantile roofs.
- Quite heavily developed and subject to past heavy industrial use contrasting with large parts which are still very rural in character.
- Where views open up the rugged moorland hills tend to form the enclosing ridge in views to the north.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

Underlain by millstone grit and crossed by igneous dykes, the valley has been substantially

modified by glacial erosion forming a comparatively broad, shallow breach valley between the Ayrshire lowlands and the Clyde basin. The valley drains both south-west and north-east, the Ayrshire boundary lying on the watershed. The valley floor is broad and level, naturally flooded to form Kilbirnie Loch (which fills the northern part of the valley floor) and Barr Loch. Elsewhere, the valley floor has been drained to provide level fields. Moderately steep slopes rise to the North Ayrshire Hills. The valley is strongly contained to the west by the Clyde Muirshiel uplands. Hill slopes have an often complex rolling landform which is cut by narrow wooded valleys, backed by steep occasionally craggy, rugged hill slopes at the transition with the uplands. South of the valley the land rises less dramatically, blending into the *Agricultural Lowlands - Ayrshire* Landscape Character Type before the *Plateau Moorlands - Ayrshire* are reached.

Landcover

There is a rich, diverse landcover pattern. The valley has quite a dense network of woodland, comprising shelterbelts, hedgerow trees, trees along burns and gullies and those associated with large houses and estates. Examples include Kilbirnie House and Blair. Pasture or ley grassland with some arable predominates on the lower slopes, with abandoned fields and rough moorland on higher ground to the north. Fields are comparatively small, with good hedges on lower slopes. Some drystone dykes are found on the higher slopes, some abandoned and visible only as changes in colour and texture.

Woodland comprises a mixture of farm woodlands, broadleaf shelterbelts, policy woodlands associated with large estates and, on the higher ground, a series of relatively small conifer forests. Each makes an important contribution to the character of the valley and the contrast with surrounding areas.

Settlement

This is a well-settled landscape and settlement in the Garnock Valley dates back thousands of years. A number of hilltops, particularly to the north-west are crowned with forts, while a line of castles - sited at the foot of tributary valleys - controlled movement between the lowland and the uplands. The survival of Welsh and Pictish names (e.g. Picton) reflects the importance of the area in the ancient kingdom of Strathclyde. It is likely that parts of the valley floor were drained during the medieval period, possibly by monks. Most settlement is located on drier slopes. Many settlements are historic in origin (Kilbirnie, for example has a 14th Century church) though underwent considerable expansion as a consequence of industrialisation. Textile mills, coal mines and iron and steel works were all found within the valley. The largest steelworks was located at Glengarnock, while much of the northern part of the valley between Kilbirnie and Dalry shows the legacy of coal mining in the form of abandoned bings and spoil heaps. Quarrying continues with a hardrock quarry at Carwinning and a limestone quarry at Beith.

Older buildings (including Victorian) are constructed in stone and slate. Newer structures tend to be rendered and painted white or cream with orange pantile roofs. The latter are visible over a wide area. Also intrusive within the valley landscape are the pylons from Hunterston. They are especially visible where they cross the valley skyline.

The A737 provides an important route through the Garnock Valley. The route has already

been subject to considerable improvement where it passes through Johnstone and Linwood to the east. Minor roads, often lined by mature trees, wind through hill slope areas providing access to the regular pattern of traditional farms and cottages giving a rural character.

Two hard rock quarries are sited within the Garnock Valley, one to the north-east of Beith, the other to the north of Dairy. The latter, in particular, is sited in a prominent location.

The Garnock Valley comprised one of the centres of heavy industry in Ayrshire. The development of mills, mines and iron and steel works stimulated the growth of historic settlements such as Kilbirnie, Beith and Dairy. Although the heavy industry is now gone, there remains considerable amount of industrial and commercial activity.

Perception

Although the area is quite heavily developed and subject to past heavy industrial use this contrasts with large parts which are still very rural in character. Views tend to be informed by the local topography and landcover. Where views open up the rugged moorland hills tend to form the defining ridge in views to the north and views of operational wind farms (most notably Dalry, Millour Hill and associated extensions) in this landscape are also obtainable. The horizon in longer distance views to the south tends to be simpler in form.

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.