



Location and Context

The *Lowland Hill Fringes – Central* Landscape Character Type occurs in six areas of the Central region LCA areas. These are defined as the Braes of Doune on the north side of the Forth Valley, the western end of the Ochils at Sheriff Muir, Cameron Muir/Stockie Muir and Mugdock to the west of Strathblane, the East Touch Fringe and Gargunnoch/Fintry Fringe on the south side of the Forth Valley and to the east of Denny Muir to the west, north and north-east of Denny.

Key Characteristics

- Undulating, rolling topography rising to larger scale hill landforms.
- Gradation of topography creates transitional landscape linking the open hills of more pronounced relief and the neighbouring settled valley landscapes.
- Diverse landcover of arable and open improved and unimproved pasture land, interlocks with woodland and forestry, with some estate landscapes with frequent beech hedgerows and shelterbelts.
- High proportion of woodland cover including large coniferous blocks, mixed shelterbelts and broadleaf tree clumps.
- Scattered residential development and small settlements on slopes, with recent expansion in some areas.
- Minor roads.
- Concentration of small water bodies, reservoirs and small watercourses.
- Strong interrelationship between stepped escarpment and lower foot slopes in Gargunnoch/Fintry and East Touch Fringe.
- Estate and designed landscapes give distinctive character to East Touch Fringe area.
- Hill fringes offer important panoramic views to neighbouring hills, valleys and straths, as well as large settlements such as Glasgow and Falkirk.
- A sense of remoteness and isolation in some areas despite proximity to settlement and relatively limited geographic extent.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Lowland Hill Fringes – Central* form an undulating, rolling expanse, often interrupted by intermittently exposed bedrock forming hummocks and mounds, shelving towards the adjacent river valleys. Small expanses of water, minor lochans and small reservoirs within slope depressions, and a proliferation of small burns originating in the neighbouring hills, incise the slopes feeding into the broader low lying rivers.

Within the Braes of Doune area, the horizon line is broken by a smoothly swelling mantle of till deposits which results in the distinctive hummocks of the step-like transitional hill fringes. These coalesce and zigzag across the Braes, occasionally slicing into the lower slopes through narrow valleys with rounded sides and pebbled floors.

The Cameron Muir/Stockie Muir is dominated by a broad, crag-rimmed volcanic plateau of Auchineden Hill (357 metres) the ground shelves gradually northwards as the underlying bedrock changes into softer, lower-lying sedimentary deposits. The distinctive till ridges of a glacial end moraine mark the head of the Camock Burn. Below the western slopes of Auchineden Hill two reservoirs lie close together, absorbed within the undulating terrain and craggy extrusions of the Kilpatrick Hills. The eastern boundary of the area is punctuated by several distinctive rocky knolls.

The underlying volcanic bedrock of Mugdock is intermittently exposed to reveal mounds or hummocks close to Loch Ardinning or, more dramatically, the steep scarp slopes at the perimeter of Mugdock Wood.

The dolerite outcrops of Gillies Hill and Lewis Hill within the East Touch Fringe area denote the edge of a broad swathe of strongly rolling, occasional hummocky farmland, which forms a transition in height and form from west to east between the Touch hillslopes and the wide flat valley of the Forth Estuary. To the south the area is bounded by the steep gorge of the Carron Glen and the broad industrialised expanse of the adjoining lower Carron River and Bonny Water.

A distinct topographical division demarcates the meeting of the Gargunnock/Fintry Fringes and the broad carselands of the Forth valley; to the west, the separation of the slopes from the broad plateau of Kippen Muir is less well-defined. The hill fringes of Denny Muir form a gentle backdrop to the built-up valley edges below. Frequent stream courses incise the slopes, cutting their routes towards the Bonny Water and River Carron.

Sheriff Muir is a small but distinct area of broadly shelving moorland, separated from the more elevated and rougher terrain of the Ochil Hills to the East by a single-track road. The southern section is more rugged. The landscape is of medium to large scale.

Landcover

A pattern of moorland grasses, peatland, bracken and heather moorland is consistent across much of the *Lowland Hill Fringes - Central* Landscape Character Type, forming an often complex mosaic of landcover. This gives way to varying sized fields of rough and semi-improved grazing, to smaller fields of lush pasture and occasional arable land, divided by tumbledown stone walls, post-and-wire fences, hedgerows and gorse scrub. Coniferous forests cover considerable tracts of the hillslopes, concealing the subtleties of the underlying terrain, while coniferous and mixed shelterbelts are common throughout the lower slopes, where more isolated deciduous trees occur scattered along field boundaries and burns flowing from the adjacent slopes.

As the land of the Braes of Doune drops towards the river valley to the south, occasional

clumps of rushes and boggy ground mingle with drifts of birch and alder and delineate several of the larger stream courses. As the Braes fade into the slopes of the Teith valley more varied policy woodland, associated with the estates along the river, occurs.

Across Cameron Muir/Stockie Muir, the landcover is occasionally broken by scattered birch trees or clumps of gorse scrub. There has been recent large scale forest planting to the north and east of Cameron Muir and to the south of Stockie Muir. Mugdock is characterised by the varied habitats which associate throughout the area, which in combination with changing landforms, produce a landscape of great diversity concentrated within a relatively small area. Woodland cover includes the large swathes of coniferous woodland, fringed with birch and beech trees, and the rugged oak and alder woodlands at Mugdock, which lie to the south and west; the unusual wall-rimmed clumps of mature beech and Scots pine which cap the rocky knolls near the A81, and a variety of policy shelter belts and tree clumps. Areas of gorse scrub, Scots pine, feathery birch and groups of young trees stud the stretches of grass and heather moorland near Mugdock Country Park. Field boundaries are varied in style, including high coped stone walls and clipped beech hedges around estate grounds and villages, or occasional low walls and post-and-wire fences throughout expanses of rough grassland and moorland.

Within the East Touch Fringe, the mixed and broadleaf woodlands and curving lines of shelterbelts, tree clumps and roadside and avenue trees which characterise the policy landscapes dispersed across the hill slopes create a notably well-wooded character. While larger expanses of coniferous forest and semi-natural woodland define the striking topography of the dolerite hills to the west and form a backdrop to the Scots pine-dotted islands of North Third Reservoir, and a broad extent of mixed forest lies at the south-east tip of the area at Torwood. A textural mix of clipped beech, hawthorn and holly hedgerows, low stone walls and post-and-wire fences define the field boundaries of the lower ground and the estate landscapes.

The proliferation of policy landscapes across the hillslopes of the Gargunnock/Fintry Fringe has produced a visually diverse landscape, where fields of crops intermingle with lush pasture land, broken by lines of mature oak and beech trees, curving shelterbelts, clipped hawthorn and beech hedgerows and fence lines. The farmland is heavily wooded, particularly to the east where medium scale gentle swathes of spruce and larch forest integrate with broadleaf woodlands and streamside planting. Groups of mature specimen trees, such as exotic conifers and weeping ash, cluster around mansion houses, the grounds of which are dotted by parkland trees. Avenue trees overhang many of the roadsides and line the driveways of the estates. Towards the eastern edge of the hillslopes, areas of boggy ground and semi-improved pasture land relate to the rougher adjacent landscape of Kippen Muir.

The higher ground within the west of Denny Muir is bordered by the dense, dark coniferous forests of Carron Valley Reservoir, which contrast with the broad expanse of rough grassland, blanket peat cover, and fen vegetation of rushes and sedges which dapples the adjacent slopes. Elsewhere, woodland is limited to the broadleaf fringes of Castlerankine Burn. Occasional shelterbelts and tree clumps dot the farmland of semi-improved pastureland, divided by stone walls, fences and gappy hedges across the lower ground.

Sheriff Muir is a mix of rough and improved grazing and woodland, with a little arable production on more level and sheltered ground in the west towards Dunblane. Fields are large with low stone walls along roadsides with post and wire fences generally used for internal boundaries. A small number of conifer blocks and shelterbelts are scattered across the area, with more extensive plantations, of limited age and species diversity, along the boundary between Sheriff Muir and upper slopes of the Allan Water.

Settlement

Settlement is widely scattered across the hill fringes, often consisting of traditional farmsteads, villages and estate houses located on the rolling slopes, to create a well settled farmland landscape dissected by minor roads, with evidence of recent urban expansion and development in some areas. Major road corridors intersect the eastern extents of the Landscape Character Type, to the east of the Touch Hills, while commercial scale wind farm development is prominent within the lowland hills which neighbour the Braes of Doune, Gargunnoch/Fintry Fringe, East Touch Fringe and Denny. The Beaully Denny pylon line crosses Sheriff Muir, and its large pylons can reduce the appreciation of scale of the hills.

Across the Braes of Doune area, predominantly traditional farmsteads and huddled outbuildings, serviced by several small winding roads, spread across the slopes, becoming more frequent at lower altitudes.

Within the Cameron Muir/Stockie Muir settlement is predominately located towards the eastern perimeter, close to the Blane Valley, and leading off from the main A809 road which runs northwards out of Glasgow. Further scattered houses and farmsteads, and the pink turrets of Aucheneck House, lie in the slopes above Carnock Burn. The John Muir Way long distance walking and cycling route passes through the southern part of this area.

Mugdock Country Park forms the heart of the Mugdock area lying adjacent to large Victorian and Georgian mansions, and smaller houses and cottages, which composes Mugdock village. Within woodland around Carbeth sits the Carbeth hutting site, the foremost site of its type in Scotland, and two pylon lines zigzag through the woods and across the adjacent moorland. Several rural roads, tracks and footpaths, including parts of the West Highland Way and the John Muir Way, as well as the A81, cut along the eastern edge of Mugdock between Strathblane and Glasgow.

The East Touch Fringe is characterised by frequent scatterings of farmsteads and estate houses which dot the rolling slopes. The area is bisected and bound by the M80 and M9 motorways and the main A872 and A9 roads, the embankments and bridging structures of which fragment the landscape. Further urban influences within the south-east corner of the area include the presence of numerous pylon lines, dismantled railway tracks and the operative line from Edinburgh to Stirling. The valuable rock of the dolerite outcrops on the edge of the hills has been gnawed into and visually interrupted by quarrying operations.

The Gargunnoch/Fintry Fringe consists of a well-populated farmland landscape with an abundance of attractive farmsteads and larger mansions of varying architectural styles and origins. The ancient village of Gargunnoch clings to the hillside, its core sited at the 18th Century stone bridge over Gargunnoch Burn.

The south-eastern hillslopes of Denny Muir have further urban influences located along the perimeter of the area close to the M80 motorway. A stone quarry at Cowden Hill to the south, two overhead power lines through the area, numerous telegraph poles and telephone wires, a single transmitter mast at Easter Banknock and the Myot wireless station on the more high, rugged ground are all conspicuous features within the landscape to varying extents.

Settlement across Sheriff Muir is limited to isolated farmsteads and cottages, accessed by minor roads and the Sheriff Muir Inn. Several small reservoirs nestle into the landscape and the tall pylons of the Beaully Denny line crosses the moorland before cutting down the Ochil escarpment above Logie Kirk. The area is also the site of the Battle of Sherrifmuir.

Perception

The neighbouring hill masses often dominate outward views from the hillslopes, the imposing landform of open character in juxtaposition to views of the densely settled conurbations also evident from this landscape, creating a sense of transitional character.

The unusual breadth and gently shelving profile of the hillslopes within the Braes of Doune restricts views southwards, instead directing them across the sweep of the Braes themselves and towards the hill summits which form the horizon to the south. Localised interest is contributed to the overall smooth slopes by the rippling undulations of boulder clay.

The simplicity of the open moorland within the Cameron Muir/Stockie Muir contrasts with the more diverse woodlands and rocky hillocks which fragment its eastern boundary. Views, which open out across the moorland towards the broad swathe of the Carse of Forth are dominated by the steep mass of the Campsie Fells.

Views southwards to the Glasgow conurbation from within the Mugdock area reveal the proximity of dense settlement to this landscape of rural character. The horizon-line to the north is terminated by the enclosing presence of the Strathblane Hills. The collection of contrasting yet unified landscapes, where the relative naturalness of the Country Park contrasts with the well settled surrounding farmland, is the most notable characteristic of the area.

The Gargunnoch Hills focus views northwards across the flat expanse of the carselands; however, the combination of thick woodland and farmland with the rolling slopes often limits the impact of more panoramic views, creating a more intimate experience of smooth undulating fields and valleys. Estate houses and the avenues, woodlands, walls, and hedgerows of their policies create a well-tended character to this landscape.

The transitional character of the East Touch Fringe area is accentuated by the infiltration of urban and industrial elements towards the eastern edge. Views of the surrounding dense settlement, and the restraining influence of major transport corridors, are more evident to the east. Denny Muir and the Kilsyth hill fringes form an important and calming moorland and farmland backcloth to the urban elements which combine along the congested margins. They provide a nearby refuge, edging the greater, wider landscape of the Gargunnoch and Touch Hills.

Lying away from the outward facing edges of the Ochil Hills and views to the busy Forth Valley, much of Sheriff Muir has a sense of remoteness and isolation, despite proximity to settlement. There are outstanding views to the Braes of Doune, Ben Ledi and beyond from the Sheriff Muir Road north of the Inn, whilst views south-west take in the Touch/Gargunnoch Hills. Large scale wind energy developments are now features in both of these scenes. External views from lower ground are generally at some distance and the area is usually seen together with areas of adjacent landscape, but discernible because of different topography, textures and colours. Contrasting visual experiences and perceptions of exposure and shelter are provided by the juxtaposition of elevated and long-distance panoramic views over a large geographic area and more contained views, near woodland and in folds of land.

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 Central Region LCA (ASH Consulting Group), published 1999.