



Location and Context

The *Lowland River Valleys - Central* Landscape Character Type forms well-defined corridors with flat valley floors, enclosed by commanding hills. It occurs in several areas in Central Scotland;

- The narrow valley of the River Teith, which winds its way eastwards from its origin just outside Callander along the base of the broad expanse of the Braes of Doune.
- The valley of the Allan Water, including the uppermost stretch of its valley to the north-east of the Forth valley, bordered to the west by the Braes of Doune, and to the east by the hill fringes of the Ochils.
- The middle Devon Water valley on the south-easternmost edge of the Ochils, which includes the strongly undulating low hills, bluffs and spurs which enclose and conceal the middle stretches of the River Devon and adjoin the steep, rounded south-easternmost edge of the Ochils.
- The valleys of Strath Blane, Endrick Water, Blane Water, and Middle Endrick Water which surround the north and eastern flank Campsie Fells. From its origin in the Strath Blane Hills the Blane Water cuts a course north-westwards between the commanding presence of the Campsie Fells and the rugged rock outcrops and steep slopes edging the moorland fringes of the Kilpatrick Hills, while to the north Endrick Water/Blane Water consists of a strongly rolling terrain landscape that encloses the lower Endrick Water at its confluence with the Blane Water to the north-west of the Campsie Fells. Middle Endrick Water comprises the landscape towards the head of the middle Endrick valley, west of its hill-top origin, where the river is pinched between and dominated by the volcanic masses of the Fintry Hills to the north and the Campsie Fells to the south, before flowing westwards towards Drymen.
- The valley containing the Upper Carron and Middle Carron lying to the south of the Gargunnock, Fintry and Kilsyth Hills and the urban fringe of Falkirk/Denny to the west, and the flat floodplain of the Forth. The Carron Valley sits astride the southern boundary of the area, nestling within and enclosed by the volcanic masses of the Campsie Fells and Gargunnock, Fintry and Kilsyth Hills, running eastwards leaving the Touch and Kilsyth Hills, and descending to the urban fringe of Falkirk/Denny where it meets its major tributary, the Bonny Water.
- The northern side of the Avon Valley, south of Grangemouth (the southern side is in West Lothian and has a separate Lowland River Corridor Landscape Character Type description).

Key Characteristics

- Well-defined river corridors, most with flat valley floor enclosed by often commanding hills.
- Strong topographic and visual identity, with varying scale and character.
- Glacial terrain and deposits located on valley margins, often subject to mineral extraction.
- Relatively high proportion of tree cover, with roadside and hedgerow trees and semi-natural woodland.
- Dense areas of coniferous forest cover the slopes surrounding the reservoir in the Upper Carron Valley.
- Road corridors often running parallel to river corridor form key linear features.
- Settlement often closely linked to the river corridor and parallel road corridors.
- Intensive settlement and urban development on margins of valleys south and north of Firth of Forth.
- Predominance of traditionally managed estate, policy and designed landscapes.
- Nature conservation importance of river and associated habitats.
- Frequently enclosed and focussed views along the river valley.
- Visibility of remnant derelict land, motorway and road corridors, power lines, wind farms and industrial sites from the urban fringe of Falkirk/Denny.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Lowland River Valleys - Central* vary from contained, narrow and fast flowing watercourses in their upper reaches, to broad flat bottomed valleys, with slow moving and meandering rivers which flow across the neighbouring carse/carselands in their lower reaches. Small streams and tributaries fed by the adjacent hill slopes, plateau and fringes, often deeply incise the valley slopes, leaving remnants of soil creep and erosion before flowing into the main watercourses.

The River Teith meanders gently through a predominantly narrow valley, which occasionally opens out into area of flatter ground along the water's edge, and is enclosed by higher undulating farmland to the north and south. The River is fed by numerous minor watercourses which originate in the hill mass of Uamh Bheag set some distance to the north. As the river becomes gradually enlarged by the input of these tributaries it swings south-eastwards, cutting a wider route through rolling farmland to reach its confluence with the River Forth.

The broad, flat length of Strath Allan becomes, as it enters the area, narrower and more contained, eventually cutting through high, tightly enclosing slopes within a narrow cleft. Steep-sided knolls and ridges of glacial moraine pock the flatter parts of the valley floor, sometimes scarred and rippled by soil slip. The hummocky western slopes of the Braes of Doune encroach more closely than the shallow, tiered, gently shelving slopes of Sheriff Muir which edge the east of the valley. Several minor watercourses trickle across the hillsides before feeding into the meanders of the river.

Within Middle Devon Water, the Devon winds through a twisting narrow valley, the steep sides of which are often marked by freshly exposed slopes of soil and till. The river is deeply incised within the hummocky landform, and is at its most dramatic on the outskirts of the area where waterfalls, gorges and pools have been gouged out of the rock.

The flat-bottomed valley of Strath Blane is occasionally broken by subtle undulations, becoming broader as the river flows westwards from this source towards its confluence with Endrick Water. The minor stream tributaries which traverse the hill slopes to either side

become modified and straightened into field ditches on the valley floor. The low, smoothly rounded interlocking ridges and hummocks of Endrick Water/Blane Water form a common horizon-line, through which the winding river is generally inconspicuous and obscured. Further east, the small, strongly meandering river runs across the near-flat valley floor of Middle Endrick Water, occasionally broken by gentle undulations, and enclosed by steeply rolling valley slopes.

The River Carron, which arises in the hills above Lennoxton, has been dammed on its journey eastwards to create the long curving sweep of water of Carron Valley Reservoir. Along the southern edges numerous inlets interweave between jutting promontories, backed by the steep, mostly convex slopes of Meikle Bin (570 metres), Little Bin and Cock Hill. To the north the smoother, more rounded forms of Cairnoch, Craigannet and Dundaff Hills drop down to the even sweeping margins of the reservoir. In its middle reaches, it has carved deeply into the volcanic rocks, creating a narrow river valley with often precipitously steep sides, marked by the ripples and scars of soil creep and soil slip. The interweaving spurs are cut through by several prominent tributaries which are bordered by frequent rocky extrusions. Above the glen the landform becomes gentler and more level, grading out into rounded undulating slopes.

The urban fringe of Falkirk/Denny consists of the lower stretches of the River Carron and its major tributary, the Bonny Water, which run eastwards through the shallow, relatively flat open valley. To the north and south the ground raises gradually, the broad valley basin being cupped by the fringes of the east Touch Hills and the Slamannan Plateau.

The northern side of the Avon Valley, which is in Falkirk District, forms a narrow, deep, sinuous, gorge-like incised river valley along the south-eastern Falkirk Council boundary with West Lothian. It has steep slopes on both sides of the river.

Landcover

A complex pattern of landcover is evident across the lowland river valleys, however deciduous and mixed broad-leaf woodland is dominant across much of the Landscape Character Type, and often creates a well-wooded character to the river corridors, and slopes of the broader river valleys. Hedgerows, field boundary trees, post-and-wire fences and stone walls, associated with estate landscapes, delineate the fields of the fertile valley sides of the lower lying river valleys, which are often utilised for arable crops and lush pasture. Coniferous forests of varying scales are found across the Landscape Character Type, often located on the higher valley sides, with deciduous woodland often integrated at the margins to soften its geometric appearance.

The policy woodlands of the numerous estates which straddle the Teith River Valley are a particularly dominant feature, resulting in a thickly wooded character of great variety. Deciduous woodland surrounds dwellings and fringes the river; shelterbelts cap the rounded valley slopes; exotic conifers and majestic parkland trees dot the estate grounds; corridors of beech trees delineate roads, and numerous deciduous trees stud the hedgerows.

Uppermost stretch of the Allan Water are edged by small and medium fields of arable and pasture, become larger and intermixed with rougher grazing towards the eastern slopes at the merging of the valley with Sheriff Muir. Lines of roadside and avenue beech trees, creating a well-wooded character, and along steeper ground, clumps and thickets of gorse scrub are an occasional feature.

The field network of improved grassland is punctuated by deciduous trees which stud the numerous hedgerows across the Middle Devon Water. Avenues of beech and low stone walls are common close to larger farmsteads. Strath Blane valley floor woodland is

concentrated along the sides rather than the bottom of the valley, although along the wider stretches a few small blocks of woodland, unrelated to settlement, disrupt the open character.

Within Middle Endrick water the presence of several estates dotted along the valley slopes contribute to well-wooded areas of mature deciduous avenue and roadside trees; curvilinear shelterbelts; copses and thickets of trees hugging dwellings; streamside fringes; and mixed and broadleaf semi-natural woodlands of ash, beech and oak. To the north of the valley, where it merges with the higher open plateau of Kippen Muir, small patches of birch and conifers, and hawthorn and gorse hedges, form rougher intrusions.

Within the Upper Carron valley, the hillsides are covered almost entirely by mature coniferous forest of varying ages, which sweep up to the edges of the reservoir, leaving only the peaks of Meikle Bin, Little Bin and Cairnoch Hill exposed. Along the northern edge of the reservoir narrow drifts of mixed and deciduous trees are scattered. Tumbledown stone walls, topped by post-and-wire fencing, line the roadside and enclose the rough grassland on the slopes of Craiganet Hill. On the western flank of Dundaff Hill, a distinctive group of shelterbelts is conspicuous. In its middle reaches, fields of pasture on the higher slopes are broken by ribbons of drystone walling and post-and-wire fencing, stippled by patches of rushes and sedges in damp flushes. The steeper valley slopes support swathes of rough grassland, thickets of gorse and birch scrub, and sweeps of bracken, which define agricultural limits. Ancient fringes of semi-natural oak, ash, hazel, birch and wych-elm flow along the valley floor and penetrate the base of larger tributaries.

Within the urban fringe of Falkirk/Denny a mixture of pasture and arable fields lies on the edges of settlement, often cut through by roads, resulting in scattered patches of scrub and areas of waste ground. Throughout the agricultural parts of the landscape, several isolated areas of mature deciduous woodland lie close to the rivers, and fragmented lines of beech and ash stretch along roadsides and hedgerows.

The steep slopes of the Avon Valley are extensively covered in mixed and semi-natural broadleaf woodland interspersed with unimproved, semi-improved and, occasionally, improved pastures. Shelterbelts and some policies, as well as many overgrown hedges, add to the well-wooded character.

Settlement

Settlement within the *Lowland River Valleys – Central* varies from the densely settled and industrialised low lying areas of the urban fringe of Falkirk/Denny, to the relatively uninhabited reaches of the Upper Carron Valley. Settlement is often linearly located along main communication routes or close to bridging points across the rivers. Several trunk roads and minor roads run through the river valleys, often closely following the incised course or meanders of the rivers, while evidence of mineral extraction is evident in several locations where glacial deposits are accessible. Wind farm development is evident to the east of Denny, located between the network of transport routes and pylon lines which cross the river valley and adjacent hill fringes. From the upper reaches of the Carron Valley wind farm development within the Gargunnoch Hills forms a visual focus in views.

Settlement within the valley of the Teith consists of numerous traditional and modern modern dwellings and farmsteads, further varied by the glimpsed rooflines of several fortified houses, castles and mansions emerging above the treetops. The small town of Doune is the main settlement and nearby lie the planned village of Deanston, with its historic rows of mill cottages, and the hamlet of Buchany, a group of stone cottages within the ground of Doune Estate. Other country estates, such as Blair Drummond and Lanrick, have a notable presence in the form of designed landscapes and estate buildings such as gate lodges and

stables. The busy A84 trunk road which leads from Stirling to the Trossachs, runs parallel to the river for much of its length, as do the remains of an old railway line, now converted to a cycle path east of Doune.

The valley of the Allan Water is dominated by several route corridors running in parallel, including the broad sweep of the A9 trunk road and the railway line, and two smaller winding roads which lie lower down the valley. Towards the southern edge of the area these transport routes converge to form of major and minor roads, through and around the town of Dunblane, with its winding streets and Gothic cathedral. The slopes within the Middle Devon Water area are criss-crossed by the winding routes of several roads, tracks and footpaths, including the eastern extremity of the A91 trunk road. While the low stone pantiled cottages of Muckhart village guard the entrance into the Glendevon Pass, and a number of prosperous farmsteads, such as the 19th century farmhouse of Kellybank, are scattered across the slopes.

The head of the Blane Water is overlooked by the neighbouring villages of Strathblane, Netherton and Blanefield, which are well-integrated mixtures of red sandstone-trimmed, harled cottages, late Victorian and Edwardian houses, and small scale modern residential peripheral development. A wealth and variety of dwellings lines the valley sides, ranging from small cottages and farmsteads through to Duntreath Castle, the Georgian farmhouses of Carston and Leddiegreen, and the early 18th Century Killeam House. The A81 trunk road which runs along the foot of the Campsies is paralleled by the faint line of a dismantled railway along the valley floor and the occasionally visible line of pylons which is backed by the western slopes of the valley. The John Muir Way long distance walking/cycling route passes through the southern part of this area.

The line of a dismantled railway track curves through the rolling landform of Endrick Water/Blane Water, part of it being utilised as a section of the West Highland Way. The landscape is well settled by a multitude of farmsteads and larger houses such as Balfunning House, Boquhan Old House, and the castellated mansion at Carbeth. The village of Killearn spreads across the southern perimeter of the slopes, centred on the red sandstone Old Church, with the grey obelisk of the Buchanan Monument, and older, white painted houses.

Two small roads run parallel to each side of the valley within the Middle Endrick Water, along which numerous farmsteads and estate houses are strung, including Culcreuch Castle, Old Ballikinrain, and Ballikinrain Castle. The small linear village of Fintry bridges the river where it leaves the hills, and contains numerous pleasant stone or harled dwellings, including a stretch of 18th Century millworkers' cottages. To the west, below Ballindalloch Muir, the large village of Balfron spreads up the valley slopes, extended by occasionally new housing at its edges.

Within the Upper Carron area a limited number of houses and farmsteads of varied styles dot the winding line of the B818 along the northern perimeter, generally restricted towards the eastern end of the reservoir and leaving the hillsides uninhabited. The forest walks and cycling routes which run through the southern hillsides commence at the parking area below Cock Hill, and are a popular recreational resource. The small country road which winds along the southern slopes above the river valley within the Middle Carron area is regularly dotted by farmsteads, the less accessible northern slopes being predominantly unsettled. At the easternmost edge of the valley, separated by the M80 motorway from the larger towns of Denny and Dunipace, lie the linear villages of Fankerton and Stoneywood, although the mill buildings which nestled within the wooded valley slopes have now been removed and the site developed for new housing.

The urban fringe of Falkirk/Denny is a densely settled, industrialised area consisting of a mix

of new residential development, business parks, and factories and other industries on the outskirts of the older centres of Falkirk, Larbert, Bonnybridge, Longcroft, Denny and Dunipace. Sprawling across the valley, the settlements create the effect of near continuous development. The close, often parallel, spacing of motorways, trunk roads, various minor roads, and operational and dismantled railway lines combines to form a chaotic, busy transport network. The river meets the restored Forth and Clyde Canal at its eastern end, where a series of locks provide landscape interest, including the Helix gateway area, which includes the sculptural Kelpies, a new canal hub and attractive greenspace parkland. The John Muir Way long distance walking/cycling route also crosses this river valley east-west. The occasional incidences of older settlement traces, including the tree bounded length of the Antonine Wall and the ramparts of Rough Castle, are often visually diminished by the surrounding newer development.

The Avon Valley contains the River Avon Heritage Trail between Avonbridge and Linlithgow, which is a significant recreational resource following the river bank, with features of interest including weirs, waterfalls, the Westfield Viaduct, Avon Viaduct (taking the Edinburgh to Glasgow railway across the river), and the Avon Aqueduct (the second longest in Britain, housing the Union Canal) and Muiravonside Country Park. Mill Hall Reservoir and Grangemouth Golf Course lie to the north of the A9, north of Polmont. The A801 road bisects the area from north to south, with a number of minor roads (including the B825) running east-west, linking the larger settlements of Avonbridge, Whitecross and Linlithgow along the northern boundary and numerous regularly-spaced farmsteads throughout the area. Two large overhead power lines and pylons cut north-south through the area.

Perception

The river valleys create a strong sense of transition, gradually slowing and broadening from their upper reaches, where they are fed by the open hills, hill fringes and elevated plateau, before flowing towards the low lying carse/carselands, where they meander along their slow moving wooded courses. The perceptual experience of the lowland river valleys varies dramatically across the nine areas within the Landscape Character Type, with the low lying river valleys displaying characteristics of a well settled, heavily managed and ordered landscape, dominated by farmland enclosure and movement along roads often running parallel to the river courses. The valleys of the Carron and Middle Endrick display a more remote character heavily influenced by the adjacent hill masses of the Fintry, Gargunnock and Touch Hills and the Campsie Fells. Outward views from the river valleys are often contained by the steep nature of the valley slopes, or the presence of dense woodland cover, whether it be predominantly deciduous along the river corridors, or coniferous forests across the surrounding slopes.

A strong sense of activity and movement along the Teith Valley is engendered by the rush of traffic along the A84 and the parallel course of the river. Intermittent long-distance views of the stern profile of the Ochils to the east and the Trossachs to the west are channelled along the valley floor and sides, widening southwards to encompass the Forth Valley and the Gargunnocks. Wind farm development across the Braes of Doune to the north forms a visual focus in outward views from open sections of the valley. The valley appears lush, well-tended and long-settled due to the variety of settlement combined with the strong elements of diverse farm and policy woodlands.

Within the Allan Water area to the west of the Ochils, a combination of mansion-houses, neat suburbia and the presence of an ancient cathedral creates a long-settled, well-kept character, emphasised by the varied colours and textures which abound in the surrounding farmed, domesticated valley sides. Views open out across the upper slopes of the valley

towards the distant peak of Uamh Bheag and the closer rounded summits of the northern Ochils. To the south-west of the Ochils, Middle Devon Water displays a strong sense of harmonious movement created by the sinuous swells which enclosed River Devon. The interlocking and interweaving of the river spurs, divided by curving fringes of woodland, emphasises the rhythm of the landform. Views are frequently enclosed becoming less dominated by the presence of the Ochils than further west as they diminish in height and become more integrated with the valley landscape.

The domestic character of Strath Blane with its lush, well settled landscape is overshadowed by the dominant volcanic hills which rear above. Westwards of Strathblane, there is a strong sense of escape as the river emerges from compression within the hills to wind through the flatter, more open strath. The sweeps of policy woodlands and small scale clumps and lines of trees absorb and soften built edges. Travelling from east to west, views along the valley become less dominated by the proximity of the Campsies, opening out towards the lower undulating farmland near Drymen.

Wider views from the higher ground within the Endrick Water/Blane Water area encompass the craggy sculpted northern face of the Campsie Fells and the glinting, convoluted meanders of the Endrick Water near Drymen, alternating with the more localised views within the lower dips. The undulations of the landform are emphasised by a strong pattern of field enclosure, the hedgerows and trees of which break up the rolling farmland.

At its eastern end, the middle reaches of Endrick Water appear as a fissure slicing through the steep wall-like sides of the constricting hills. The roughly textured assortment of rock outcrops, bracken and moorland which covers the encroaching hillslopes creates a strong contrast with the smooth grassland fields which break up the valley floor. Views are predominantly channelled along the river floodplain, restricted and dominated by the surrounding landscape of hills and moorland plateau. Although heavily textured and enriched by well-tended farmland and mature woodland, the influence of the encroaching moors lessens the settled character of the valley.

Within the Upper Carron valley, the simple composition of water and afforested hillsides, combined with a lack of settlement and the position of the reservoir within the hills, creates a moderately remote atmosphere. The sweep of the reservoir leads the eye westwards towards the banded edge of the Fintry Hills and beyond, backed by the distant profile of the Trossachs. The tight circle of hills and blanket coniferous forest creates a sense of enclosure, lessened only by the availability of glimpsed views westwards. The river cutting through the low hills of the Middle Carron, produces views outwards and creates a strongly contained visual corridor. The bare soil, rocky outcrops and scrubby thickets, blending with feathery broadleaves, etch and stipple the base and sides of the valley, forming a highly textured landscape of inaccessible and untouched character.

The spreading western edge of Falkirk has expanded onto surrounding farmland to encompass smaller settlements. The visual attraction and interest of ancient, well-preserved Roman remains, large farmsteads, thick belts of mature woodland, a concentration of watercourses, and fertile farmland, have been contracted by development. Within this landscape, views are frequently blocked and diverted by the edges and physical division of road embankments, and industrial and residential areas, giving way to filtered glimpses of the nearby hills and the neighbouring petrochemical plant at Grangemouth.

The enclosed, incised Avon Valley limits views but elsewhere but on rolling ridges there are extensive distant views to the south towards the Pentland Hills and northwards across the

Firth to the Ochil Hills. However, these distant features do not provide an important backdrop in views from within the Landscape Character Type.

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.