



### Location and Context

The *Coastal Flats - Dumfries & Galloway* Landscape Character Type is most commonly found adjacent to river mouths, from Luce Bay and Loch Ryan in the west to Gretna in the east.

Generally lying between sea level and 50 metres, but locally higher, this landscape type contains a variety of different character - coastal plain, estuarine flats, intimate coastal parkland, coastal moss, and merse; these are described separately below. Although each of these nuances has a distinctive character, they share their lowland coastal location as a unifying influence overall. Much of the land is exposed, with long views across coastal flats as they merge into the tidal waters of the Solway.

### Key Characteristics

- Coastal flats are generally extremely flat and low lying, although the coastal plain and coastal parkland have some gentle undulations.
- More varied topography in the Nith Estuary.
- Exposed with long views over the flats, as they merge with the Solway waters out to sea and distant views of opposite coastline.
- A more intimate feel to coastal parkland enhanced by the minor road network, abundant trees and the generally well-managed appearance.
- Large to medium sized fields of improved pasture, more lush in parkland areas, with some arable cultivation. Fields enclosed by hedgerows or fences, or a combination of both, although sheep grazed salt marsh is traditionally unenclosed.
- Predominantly rural character with generally sparse, isolated settlements and occasional caravan/camping parks, contrasting with occasionally larger towns such as Annan.
- Policy landscapes around large houses and farmsteads in coastal parkland.
- Varied tree cover, with generally few woodlands or shelterbelts, except in coastal parkland where trees and small woodlands create intimacy. Some coastal moss areas contain large dominating coniferous forests, creating dark green bands on the skyline (others are being restored to moss moorland).
- Wet vegetation in areas of coastal moss

- Telegraph poles, power lines and farm structures are very evident as they break the flat horizon in flat estuarine areas.
- Major communication routes for road, rail and power lines on coastal plain.
- Man-made drainage features on coastal parkland.
- Open network of small burns dissecting merse areas.

## **Landscape Character Description**

### *Landform*

The *Coastal Flats* – Dumfries & Galloway Landscape Character Type forms the low lying (generally 0 – 50 metres above sea level) landscapes which are found adjacent to river mouths in Dumfries and Galloway. The land is exposed, with long views over the flats as they merge with the waters of the Solway. Despite these unifying features there are subtle differences between areas in the LCT which can be summarised as follows.

### *Variation in Landform, Landcover and Settlement*

Areas of coastal plain are generally found inland from estuarine flats. The topography is gently undulating from about 15 to 100 metres at the most inland extent, with an average of around 30 to 40 metres. The land is more elevated and slightly less exposed than the estuarine flats. Although not always in view, the coastal influence remains apparent in the onshore winds and glimpses of the sea.

This landscape is predominantly farmed, mostly pasture with some arable cultivation providing variations in field colours and textures. It is generally cattle-grazed nearest the coast with a mix of sheep and cattle further inland. Fields are medium sized and are bounded by hedges or fences and less commonly by drystone dykes. Many hedges are incomplete, and their loss to fences is quite apparent. Strength of onshore winds can be seen in the bend and shear of trees. Large areas of early improvement-period (i.e. pre 1750) field systems survive between Cardoness and Carsluith castles, and south of Dumfries.

Around the coastal plain of Annan, localised peat extraction occurs. Major lines of communication have often been routed through this landscape type, particularly along the Annan coast, where main road, rail and power lines are located. Larger settlements such as Annan, contrast with the otherwise generally sparse distribution of farmsteads and predominantly rural character of the landscape. Tourist trails such as the Solway Heritage Trail have taken advantage of the coastal location and good road network. Vertical structures such as telegraph poles and large farm buildings break the horizon and are particularly noticeable in the flattest areas.

Estuarine flats are found along the Solway coast, in particular bordering the estuarine mouths of tributaries into the Solway Firth, namely around Luce Bay, Cree estuary, Fleet Bay, Kirkcudbright Bay, the Urr Water estuary and Nith estuary. They are also found along the stretch of coast between the Nith estuary and Gretna, and on the eastern coastline of Loch Ryan above Stranraer. Small indentations in the coast also display the estuarine flats characteristics. These areas form the very flat land edge, and often include intertidal sand and mud flats. Occasionally the flat expanses of land are broken by an edge of sand dunes which break the horizon, for example, on Torrs Warren in the west, and to the west of the Nith estuary, at Preston Merse. The flatness of this land appears to merge into the sea, the feeling of being on an estuary enhanced by hazy views of the opposite coastline. Small

indentations in the coast are characterised by stretches of sand which give way to rocky slopes inland. The coastal location and flatness make this a very exposed landscape, this being graphically illustrated by steeply angled growth of trees and hedges resulting from strong and frequent onshore winds.

A fringe of salt marsh may border this landscape. Natural drainage of the flats is often poor, giving rise to mosses, but elsewhere the land has been drained using a network of open ditches. These flat areas are dominated by very large hedged or fenced fields of cattle grazed pasture. Often hedgerows have been replaced by fences, are 'gappy' or have become overgrown. Some isolated broad leaved trees and shelter belts are found here which stand out starkly against the flat horizon.

Power lines and telegraph poles often traverse this landscape and are very visible on the horizon, as are large farm structures. This landscape is generally sparsely settled, with isolated farmsteads and the occasional medium sized caravan and camping park or lay-bys/picnic areas provided for tourists. Farmhouses predominantly date from the early 19th Century, are 2-storey, painted white and surrounded by large contemporary and modern agricultural sheds. They often have single-storey farm-labourers' cottages nearby – both 19th/early 20th century in date, and modern. In the west there is the strong influence of airfields and military firing ranges. Relics of previous industrial works are found in the east around Annan. Features of architectural and historic interest in this landscape include Castle of Park at Glen Luce in the west, Caerlaverock Castle, and neo-Tudor red brick houses near Annan, as well as the munitions works around Eastriggs. The majority of prehistoric archaeology takes the form of buried archaeology relating to settlements and enclosures. However, there are some notable castles including Caerlaverock and Carsluith Castles, a small number of mottes and other features including Roman remains near Annan.

There are several important 18th and 19th Century designed landscapes within the area, including Castle Kennedy, Kinmount and Arbigland, all with associated early improvement-period field systems around them. Castle Kennedy is particularly notable as a very complete early 18th Century designed landscape including dense tree planting in the central garden area, which lies between the White and Black Lochs. The planting was originally designed to form vistas to near and far landmarks including Cairn Macneillie and Ailsa Craig. The whole isthmus has been dug out into a series of mounds and terraces – these are most obvious on the northern edge to Black Loch.

Intimate coastal parkland is found in estuarine areas where localised topography and human management have created a much more intimate and lush landscape than the otherwise exposed estuarine flats or coastal plain. Altitudes range from 30 - 90 metres in the parkland area around New Abbey on the Nith estuary, and are lower in the Stranraer Basin where topography is more gently undulating between 15 and 40 metres. Around Luce Bay this area is characterised by a network of streams and lochs, the latter appearing predominantly man-made. Many of the streams also appear to have been straightened. The gently undulating land provides limited views, giving this an intimate, enclosed feel. The influence of land management and the design of the landscape is evident in these coastal parklands. Around New Abbey it is the combination of a varied topography and the laying out of the landscape for example The Park and Shambellie Grange, which give rise to its intimacy.

Around Luce Bay in the Stranraer basin however, it is the predominantly 'managed' nature of the land which creates a similar feeling of intimacy, for example around Castle Kennedy. Small to medium fields of arable pasture are divided by hedges or fences in the west and by hedges or walls further east.

Trees are a very important aspect of this landscape, helping to create the parkland feel, particularly around New Abbey where large deciduous trees rise up from the lush grazed pastures. Small woodland belts and plantation blocks of mixed conifer and broad-leaved trees are frequently found, particularly inland from Luce Bay, where they form avenues alongside minor roads, limiting views. The landscape type has a coastal location but lacks any obvious coastal influence. Main roads border these intimate parkland landscapes with minor roads traversing the landscape type itself. Isolated farmsteads and large houses are found in this landscape type, with evidence of early defence and fortification from towers on the Nith estuary and Castle Kennedy in the Stranraer basin.

Coastal moss landscapes are found to the east of the Nith estuary and south of Newton Stewart along the western banks of the Cree estuary, adjacent to estuarine flats at similar altitudes, i.e. 10 to 20 metres above sea level. These areas are very flat, with poor drainage and therefore naturally support mosses with vegetation dominated by rushes and areas of low shrubs such as bog myrtle and willow. Some of this land is cattle grazed in large fenced enclosures. These moss areas have been largely drained and are often covered in large conifer plantations (some areas, e.g. Lochar Moss are being restored to wetland habitat) which raise the altitudinal appearance of the mosses, yet retain their flatness due to the largely similar age/ species profile within the plantations, creating a dark green band on the skyline. There are few settlements or buildings in these areas.

Merse (grazed salt marsh) landscapes are found in estuarine flats, often forming the fringe of land which gives way to sand, mud flats and water. It forms substantial areas, rather than simply a narrow edge. The most extensive are found in the Cree estuary, and around Caerlaverock Castle. The topography is completely flat with all merse areas lying below 10 metres ASL. Views are extensive across the estuary. It has a dark green appearance, is often dissected by very small burns, and is traditionally unenclosed and grazed by sheep. More recently fences have been erected to prevent sheep falling into the burns. These areas are generally of high nature conservation value, particularly as breeding areas for birds.

#### *Perception*

The *Coastal Flats* are dominated by the ebb and flow of the tide. At high tide the effects of changing weather conditions create movement on the water whereas at low tide the extensive exposed mudflats are home to birds feeding.

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 Dumfries and Galloway LCA (Land Use Consultants), published 1998.