



Location and Context

Linear Crofting Landscape Character Type townships are found in coastal locations throughout Lewis and Harris and more infrequently in the Uists and Barra. This type is distinguished from *Gently Sloping Crofting* generally due to its stronger landforms. Examples of the *Linear Crofting* Landscape Character Type can be found at Bragar, Carloway and Leurbost.

Key Characteristics

- Strong linear rectangular field patterns on irregular landform of sweeping slightly concave slopes with rocky knolls, rising to rocky or boggy moor inland and sloping down to rocky shores or broad shallow glens.
- Medium scale landscape.
- Landcover dominated by improved and semi-improved grassland fields.
- Lack of tree cover, limited to a few small mixed and coniferous woodlands.
- Limited colour and textural diversity.
- Sharp contrast between inbye and outbye.
- House siting relates to topography, giving overall effect of being dispersed.
- Narrow buffer of common grazing between townships.
- Callanish stone circle complex.
- Strong, simple relationship between croft houses and land holdings, with occasional views outwards to open moorlands, giving townships a feeling of rural remoteness.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

The *Linear Crofting* Landscape Character Type is characterised by sweeping slightly concave slopes with rocky knolls, rising to rocky or boggy moor inland and sloping down to rocky shores or broad shallow glens. It is a fairly diverse landscape, within which cultural and built elements such as stone dykes, old stone dwellings, archaeological monuments and strong linear patterns of lazy-bed cultivation make a large contribution to the distinctiveness of the landscape character type.

Landcover

Landcover is dominated by linear fields of improved and semi-improved grassland under different grazing regimes. This mixture contributes colour and textural diversity to this landscape type, although this is still quite limited. Although recent woodland policy focussed on increasing woodland cover (through such initiatives as Crofter Forestry Schemes, Woodland Grant Schemes and the Western Isles Biodiversity Partnership) has led to slightly increased tree cover in this Landscape Character Type, tree cover within the *Linear Crofting* townships is generally infrequent, limited to a few small mixed and coniferous woodlands adjacent to occasional crofts.

Contrasts between croft inbye and outbye are often sharp when this type rises to boggy moorland with a pronounced transition between managed grassland and peatlands. A rectangular field pattern overlies the irregular landform. The smaller scale of this field pattern, delineated by post and wire fences and occasional stone dykes, combined with different grazing regimes between croft strips and occasional fields of lazy bed cultivation, create linear patterns which are strong enough to dominate the landform.

Settlement

The varied landform is reflected in dispersed patterns of pre-crofting settlement, irregularly sited in areas of improvable land, particularly in small, sheltered valleys. Prehistoric monuments, particularly standing stones and burial cairns, are located on ridges overlooking lower areas, often within crofting inbye, and crannogs and coastal promontory enclosures emphasise the long-term use of the landscape. Ruinous shielings are found close to or within modern settlements, reflecting a pattern of settlement expansion onto marginal land in the Early Modern period.

The arrangement of croft houses appears linear in plan but access roads and individual house siting depends on topological variation and on the ground the overall effect is dispersed. This gives the impression of a sparsely inhabited landscape. Croft houses gain shelter from landform features and roads and access drives run around and occasionally over landform undulations. The introduction of new houses on inbye can increase the density of settlement without substantially altering the underlying sense of a lightly settled landscape. However, where new housing required additional modern infrastructure such as roads and powerlines, this sense of light settlement is reduced.

Due to the narrowness of the crofting strips, it is common to find a second or third house built behind the ruins of the original thatched croft house. The integration of cultural and historical landscape elements such as stone dykes, old stone dwellings, archaeological monuments and lazy-bed cultivations in the modern landscape is characteristic of this Landscape Character Type. There has been some loss of old stone dwellings and footings from crofts over the years, as the resource is recycled for drystane dyking projects and to tidy the townships, and this has had an impact on the landscape. In recent years, there has been a trend towards the introduction of upgraded roads with tarmac pavements, street lighting and additional power lines into these crofting townships, particularly in townships close to Stornoway, giving the townships a more urban image.

The identity of individual townships relies upon the existence of dividing buffers of common grazing land. These buffers are often particularly narrow and due to this even minimal development on common grazing leads to a perception of coalescence of adjoining

townships.

The settlement of Tarbert has an increased density of housing which reduces some of the dominant characteristics of the type, especially the sense of scale and openness, but this is not so different as to warrant a separate urban category.

The time depth of settlement within this Landscape Character Type is reflected in the high number of relict settlements and field systems. However, this landscape character also encompasses the complex interrelated burial and ritual monuments, including standing stones and stone circles, around Callanish, in Lewis. This prehistoric landscape is visited and appreciated for its spiritual values around the world.

Perception

The strong, simple relationship between croft houses and land holdings, combined with occasional views outwards to open moorlands, give the townships a feeling of rural remoteness.

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 Western Isles LCA (John Richards), published 1998.