



### Location and Context

The *Farmed and Forested Slopes – Ross & Cromarty* of the northern Inner Moray Firth are located in large tracts on the south side of the Black Isle and the north side of the Cromarty Firth around to the Dornoch Firth, and in smaller areas on the slopes to the south and west of the *Farmed River Plains*. They also occur on the slopes of Knockfarrel.

### Key Characteristics

- Complex pattern of farmland, tree cover, forests and woodland on sloped, often terraced land rising from firths or river plains to mid-elevations and often backed by large scale forest plantations where there are adjacent hills.
- Overall impression of a well-treed landscape, but within which farming is the dominant land use.
- Generally higher proportion of trees, woodland and forest plantations in upper slopes, forming a well-connected network within which fields are located.
- Terraces of open land, interspersed with forest plantations and woodlands on mid slopes.
- Gradual change to more open landscapes at lower levels.
- Wide range and distribution of archaeological sites indicating a long history of human settlement.
- Occasional large settlements in a predominantly rural landscape.
- Views from more open, terraced areas across lowlands or firth to hills or out to sea.

### Landscape Character Description

#### *Landform*

The *Farmed and Forested Slopes – Ross & Cromarty* Landscape Character Type forms concave, usually south-east facing, terraced slopes of glacial tills, gravel and sands, descending from moorlands and hills. Upper reaches are steep and may extend into higher level valleys and glens within adjacent hills. Lower areas are gentle slopes becoming flat in some areas where they meet the coastal plain.

#### *Landcover*

Land use is a mixture of forestry and farming. Forest plantations vary in size and often form a network with each other and with areas of broadleaf woodland, policy plantings and the tree belts which frequently define fields. The overall character is of a well-treed landscape, overlying gradually sloping and terraced land. The easier gradients of terraces, and flatter, lower land near the coast support large, regular shaped fields. Tree cover becomes less

dense in the fertile soils of lower slopes and flatter areas. Here, it is mainly in the form of mature tree lines and shelterbelts along field boundaries and roads.

### *Settlement*

Much of this Landscape Character Type is well settled in a rural sense, with farms, occasional crofts and small holdings linked by minor roads. Large settlements are occasional and relatively contained, mainly located along the main trunk road, in the low to mid-slopes of the Cromarty Firth and near Dornoch Firth. The towns of Alness and Evanton are centred around the lower reaches of rivers which extend into alluvial fans before entering the Cromarty Firth. These low lying areas, and the foreshore at Invergordon, include some major areas of industrial and commercial development, and jetties and piers extend across the mudflats and shallows to the deeper parts of the firth waters.

Archaeological sites indicate a long history of human occupation. These include a significant number of prehistoric ceremonial monuments such as burial cairns and prehistoric settlements characterised by low circular stone foundation of hut circles, some with associated field systems. Others probably date from the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Tower houses, fortified residences and sporting estates with their attendant buildings and extensive designed landscape are also found. A significant legacy of 20<sup>th</sup> Century military activity relating to defence of the harbour and anchorage of the Cromarty Firth is evident, such as the naval infrastructure at Invergordon.

### *Perception*

The open areas and terraces afford long distance views between woodland and tree groups.

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 Inner Moray Firth LCA (Sarah Fletcher), published 1987; and by Northern Inner Moray Firth review (Deb Munro), produced 2014.