



Location and Context

To the east and south of Forfar in Angus lie a series of hills, forming low, eastern outliers of the Sidlaws, which extend north into Aberdeenshire. These are referred to as the Forfar Hills and constitute the *Low Moorland Hills* Landscape Character Type. The hills can be divided into two sub-groups. Firstly there is a series of isolated, rounded hills. These include Dunnichen Hill and Fotheringham Hill. Secondly there is the more continuous area of upland centred on the lower and broader Montreathmont Moor, which culminates in sharp ridges overlooking east Forfar.

Key Characteristics

- Eastern outliers of the Sidlaws orientated north-eastwards, as a series of locally pronounced hill tops along a relatively low ridgeline.
- Combination of low, rounded hills and craggy, ridged upland, the prominence of which is reinforced by the distinctive summit crags and low elevation of agricultural context.
- Moorland character evident in areas of heather and gorse on the upper slopes and summit which contrasts with the enclosed farmland on lower slopes.
- Some areas of extensive woodland in particular on Montreathmont Moor, which blankets the lower elevation hill and creates a simple dark horizon in views.
- Rich historic heritage including the dramatic Iron Age hill forts sited on the craggy summits of the Hill of Finavon and Turin Hill and an abundance of in situ Pictish sculpture stones
- Settlement on the Low Moorland Hills is limited to a dispersed pattern of farmsteads on the open part of Montreathmont Moor, many with modern agricultural buildings. More recent settlement appears on the transition into neighbouring lower landscapes.
- Telecom masts sit as point features on several of the hills, taking advantage of the elevation in a settled landscape. Infrequent single small commercial and domestic scale turbines are sited on the flanks of hills.
- Situated within a widely settled landscape these series of hills have become

important backdrops to settlements and landmark features, in particular where coupled with stone monument such as Balmashanner Hill at Forfar.

- Views from the elevated summits are wide and panoramic across the neighbouring straths and up to the mountains to the north.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

These hills comprise a combination of the more resistant components of the Old Red Sandstone series and areas of volcanic rocks. The resistant sandstone is clearly visible where crags form outcrops on the Hill of Finavon and Turin Hill. Elsewhere, however, the landform is rounded and smooth. Along the southern side of the River South Esk the northern boundary of the resistant lavas is visible as a steep, straight escarpment running west from the coastal cliffs south of Montrose towards Farnell.

Landcover

Rescobie Loch and Balgavies Loch, both of which are of importance for nature conservation, lie in a narrow valley between Turin Hill and Dunnichen Hill. These lochs feed the Lunan Water which flows eastwards to the coast.

Although lying just 100-150 metres above the surrounding lowland farmland, these hilltops have a very different character, in part reflecting their more recent reclamation and improvement. In agricultural terms, the ridges of the Dunnichen Hill, Hill of Finavon and Turin Hill are categorised as Class 6(2) compared with the surrounding farmland which falls into Classes 3 or even 2. The poorer nature of the eastern part of these hills is reflected in their heathy character (including the survival of gorse and bracken along field boundaries), the existence of large areas of coniferous woodland (other lowland is regarded as being too productive to put into woodland) and the presence of wetland areas. Place names such as Muirton, Muirside, Mostonmuir and Rossie Moor all point to the past or current heathland character.

Settlement

Settlement on the Low Moorland Hills is limited to a dispersed pattern of farmsteads on the unforested part of Montreathmont Moor, many with modern agricultural buildings such as shed and barns which, although generally smaller than those found in lowland straths, can still have visual and landscape impacts if not screened by woodland. However, there is extensive landscape evidence of earlier phases of human activity. This includes the dramatic Iron Age hill forts sited on the craggy summits of the Hill of Finavon, and on Turin Hill where three phases of enclosure suggest long-lived occupation. Nearby, at Aberlemno, some of the finest examples of Pictish sculptured stones and crosses suggest a high status Pictish power centre. Also near Aberlemno stands Melgund Castle, a 16th Century, four storey towerhouse. The concentration of these sites, spanning two millennia, points to the significance of these hills, marking the divide between the lowland route of Strathmore and the coastal lowlands to the south. Modern encroachments onto these hills are limited to a handful of telecommunications masts, as well as infrequent small single commercial and domestic scale wind turbines site on the flanks of hills Extensive sand and gravel working lakes place at the western foot of Turin Hill, and there were recent proposals to extract igneous rock from Dunnichen Hill. The *Low Moorland Hills* have a network of main and minor roads. Although often very straight, these generally fit with the grain of the landscape and

existing forests provide a degree of screening.

Perception

These medium scale hilltops provide fine viewpoints looking northwards across the valley lowland to the Highland Foothills and the Highlands themselves, providing wide, panoramic views.

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 Tayside LCA (Land Use Consultants), published 1999.