

**East Ayrshire Local Development Plan**

**Background Paper: Sensitive Landscape Areas**

**March 2015**

## **East Ayrshire Sensitive Landscape Area - Background Paper**

### **1.0 Background to the Sensitive Landscape Area**

The Sensitive Landscape Area was first identified at a strategic level in the 1999 Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan. The area was based on the Ayrshire Landscape Character Assessment (1999), which for the first time divided Ayrshire's landscape into defined character areas. Within East Ayrshire, 13 distinct landscape types were identified.

Through the Character Assessment process it became clear that certain parts of the Ayrshire landscape had particular qualities that made them more sensitive to development. A landscape evaluation was therefore carried out, whereby each landscape character type was considered against a set range of criteria, to identify those landscapes with special qualities. The criteria comprised:

- Landscape as Resource
- Scenic quality
- Unspoilt character
- Sense of place
- Conservation interest
- Consensus

Against each of the criteria listed, each landscape character area was awarded a high medium or low sensitivity score. Once all the criteria had been considered, a judgement was made as to the overall sensitivity of the landscape character type. Those areas considered to have an overall high sensitivity to development, were taken together to form the Sensitive Landscape Area, as introduced in the 1999 Structure Plan. A more detailed paper on the assessment process carried out by the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan Team can be made available on request.

The 2003 East Ayrshire Local Plan defined the Sensitive Landscape Area more precisely on the ground. This process looked at natural and other topographical features, such as roads, field boundaries, streams etc to delineate precise boundaries for the areas concerned. The Sensitive Landscape Area that was included in the 2003 Local Plan was carried forward into the East Ayrshire Local Plan 2010.

### **2.0 Continued relevance of a local landscape designation**

#### **National context**

SPP continues to give support for designating areas for their local landscape value. SPP makes clear that 'reasons for local designation should be clearly explained and their functions and continuing relevance considered when preparing plans'. SPP requires that the purpose of areas of local landscape value should be to:

- Safeguard and enhance the character and quality of a landscape which is important or particularly valued locally or regionally; or
- Promote understanding and awareness of the distinctive character and special qualities of local landscape; or
- Safeguard and promote local settings for outdoor recreation and tourism.

### **Local Context**

East Ayrshire does not contain any national landscape designations. Nevertheless, the areas landscape is considered one of its key assets that needs to be carefully managed and protected. East Ayrshire has a long history of supporting the energy industry, from deep mining to more recent surface mining and wind energy. This energy sector has played a big part in supporting local communities and the local economy, but at the same time, has had a marked impact on East Ayrshire's landscape. The need to give appropriate weight to the landscape that has not been affected by development and retains scenic and recreational values is therefore an important matter for the LDP to address.

The designation of the Sensitive Landscape Area is considered an appropriate means of ensuring East Ayrshire's most valuable landscapes are fully respected in preparing and assessing development proposals. The Sensitive Landscape Area designation does not prevent development. Instead, it requires development proposals to fully consider the qualities that make the landscape valuable and to seek sites and design solutions that respect these qualities and minimise adverse impacts.

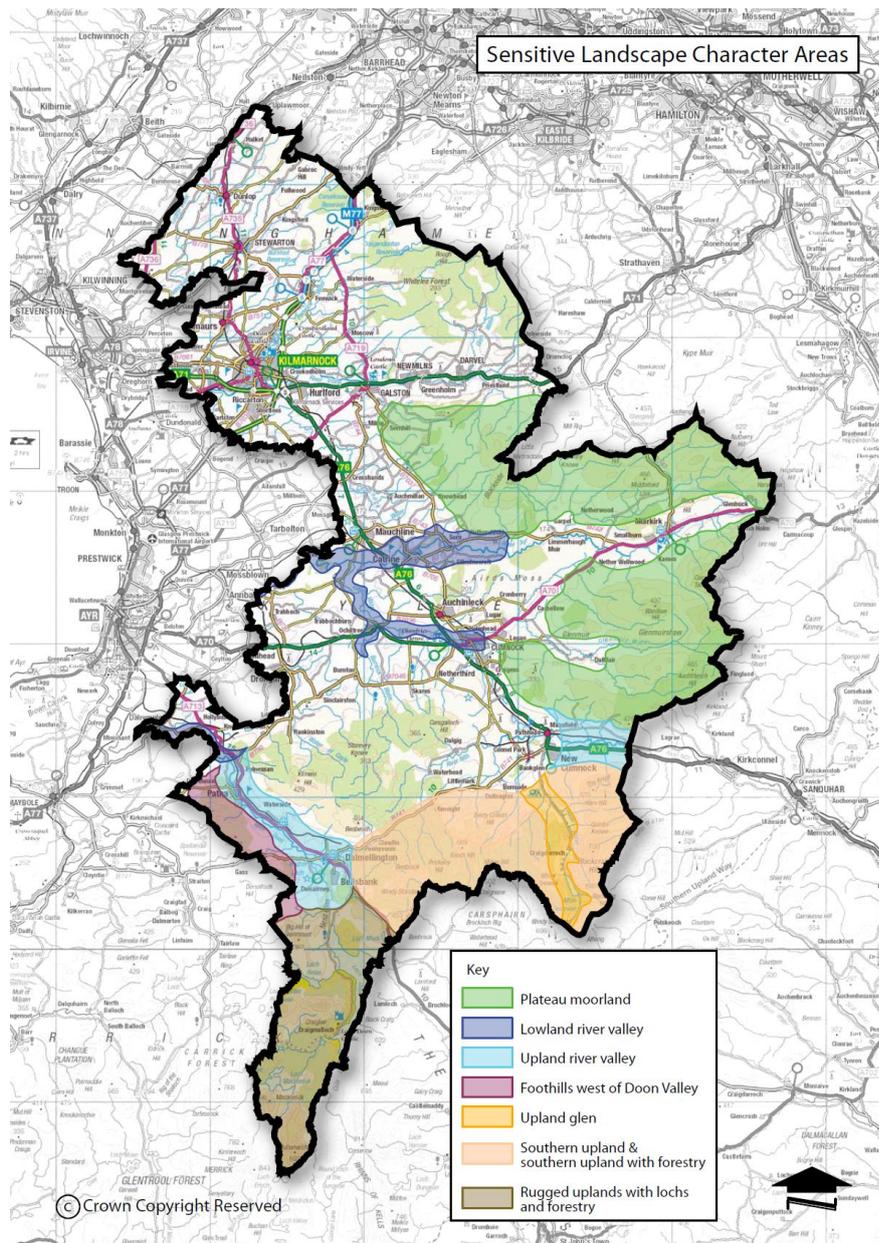
### **3.0 Review of the Sensitive Landscape Area**

As required by SPP, the boundary of the Sensitive Landscape Area has been reviewed to consider whether its extent still remains appropriate. Appendix 1 contains the original assessment that was made of the Landscape Character Areas against the 6 stated criteria. On reflection, the original Assessment is considered to be largely still valid, confirming that the landscape in this area is still of a quality and value to warrant its local landscape designation. For information, table 1 below confirms the landscape character areas that make up the Sensitive Landscape area and outlines their key characteristics and reasons for inclusion within the local designation. These areas are mapped in Map 1 below.

The East Ayrshire Landscape Wind Capacity Study, carried out in 2013, included a field review of the landscape character areas that were identified in the 1998 study. The 2013 study made some changes to the definitions and boundaries of the landscape character types, primarily in relation to the area around Loch Doon. Whilst it is acknowledged that the 2013 study was prepared in relation to one specific land use (i.e. wind energy), it is considered that the more up-to-date interpretation of landscape character is applicable to the review of the sensitive landscape area. Table 1 and map 1, therefore illustrate the landscape character types as they appear in the 2013 study.

On reviewing the boundary of the area, it has been considered that one small addition should be added to the Sensitive Landscape Area. This comprises an area to the south west of Patna, part of the Foothills with Forestry Landscape type. This landscape is considered sensitive, not so much because of its own unique properties, but because of its position between two very sensitive

landscapes. This relatively narrow strip of landscape provides an important part of the backdrop to and setting of the Doon Valley, as well as the Girvan Valley in South Ayrshire, helping to give these areas their special scenic qualities and making them important routes and gateways for Ayrshire’s tourism market. The constrained size of this landscape limits the potential for accommodating development without it having a detrimental impact on the surrounding landscape assets. In line with policy ENV7, its inclusion within the Sensitive Landscape Area does not preclude development, but requires that landscape impacts be given particular focus in the preparation of development proposal. In the case of this area of landscape, the particular sensitivities are focussed on the outer fringes of the landscape area, where certain scales of development could have unacceptable impacts on the setting of surrounding valleys, settlements and heritage designations.



**Map 1: Key landscape character areas that make up the Sensitive Landscape Area**

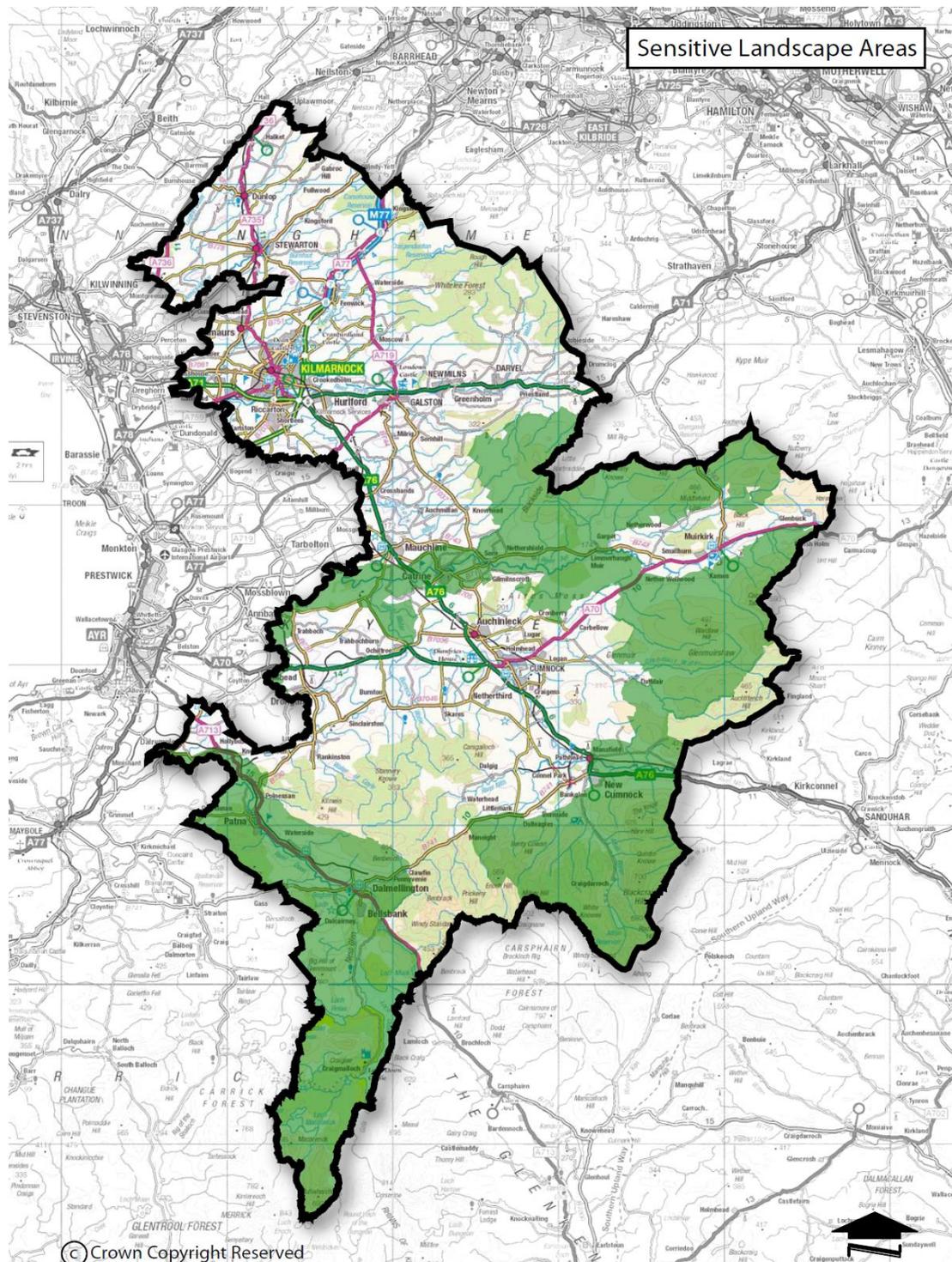
<b>Table 1: Characteristics and Sensitivities of the Landscape Character Areas included within the Sensitive Landscape Area</b>		
<b>Landscape Character Area</b>	<b>Key Characteristics</b>	<b>Why is the area 'sensitive'?</b>
Lowland river valley	<p>The Lowland River Valleys of the Doon, Irvine, Ayr and Lugar Water, are narrow valleys that merge gradually with the adjacent gently rolling Ayrshire lowlands. The valleys are of an intimate scale and offer a diverse landform and range of land cover.</p> <p>The valleys generally have steep sides and a complex pattern of main rivers and tributaries, which are visible and scenic from elevated settlements and roads.</p> <p>The valleys are generally well settled, with riparian woodlands, large estates, built heritage assets and individual trees and small buildings, which contribute to the intimate scale of the landscape.</p>	<p>The lowlands river valleys are interesting and scenic lowland landscapes, with significant natural and built heritage resources.</p> <p>Whilst East Ayrshire has several lowland river valleys, only those relating to the River Ayr and the Doon are included within the Sensitive Landscape Area. Accessible to many settlements, these attractive areas are an important feature within the lowland landscape.</p> <p>Attractive Estates (Sorn Castle and Auchinleck House) and designed gardens and landscapes (Skeldon Estate) are interspersed with riparian woodlands, small field parcels and winding roads. Significant tracts of natural woodland given a sense of naturalness and seclusion.</p>
Upland River Valley	<p>The upland river valleys are relatively broad valleys and are strongly contained by more open expansive uplands, including the plateau moorlands.</p> <p>The upland river valleys contain established settlements and small farm steadings as well as A Roads.</p>	<p>Whilst East Ayrshire contains several upland river valleys, it is the Doon Valley, as well as a small section of the Nith Valley, that is included within the Sensitive Landscape Area.</p> <p>The Doon Valley is an attractive upland valley, which provides a scenic entrance into East Ayrshire. It contains a wide range of landscape features including complex knolly hill patterns in its most upland section, several water bodies and wetlands, landmarks hills and Craigen Gillan Estate.</p> <p>The east side of the Doon Valley has been affected by the coal industry, making the appropriate management of the remaining valley of significant importance.</p>

<p>Upland Glen</p>	<p>Glen Afton, to the south of New Cumnock is classed as an Upland Glen. It is a narrow and strongly enclosed glen, with steep sides that rise to form prominent, encircling ridgelines. The narrowness creates a small scale, intimate landscape.</p> <p>Land cover is diverse with riparian woodland and small walled pastures covering the valley floor and lower slopes, with semi-improved pastures and grass moorland on the upper slopes.</p>	<p>Glen Afton is the only Upland Glen within East Ayrshire, making it an important landscape feature for the area.</p> <p>The high ridgelines are visually prominent and the rugged upland landscape has a high scenic value, attractive to walkers.</p> <p>With only a single track road through the Glen, it provides a relatively remote and tranquil landscape.</p>
<p>East Ayrshire Plateau Moorland</p>	<p>The Plateau Moorland forms an expansive upland plateau of subtly rounded hills, shallow basins and gently graded lower slopes. These are contrasted by higher landmark hills, including Cairn Table and Blacklaw, which have steep slopes and defined ridge summits.</p> <p>Land cover is simple, predominantly grass moorland with some small areas of mixed woodlands, coniferous forestry and small pastures.</p> <p>The landscape is relatively unsettled at its core and whilst there are dispersed farms and houses on the lower slopes at the transition with other landscape types, there are noticeably no settlements within this landscape.</p>	<p>The plateau moorland is intrinsically a wide open upland landscapes. Its unique qualities are due to the landmark hills contained within the landscape, which form an important feature of East Ayrshire's skyline.</p> <p>The open expansive nature of the upland plateau contrasts dramatically to the rolling lowland landscape, and contributes significantly to the diversity of the landscape that can be experienced when travelling through East Ayrshire.</p>
<p>East Ayrshire Southern Uplands and 20 East Ayrshire Southern Uplands with Forestry</p>	<p>The East Ayrshire Southern Uplands is part of a far wider upland area that extends into Dumfries and Galloway. The landscape is large scale and expansive, with grass moorland the dominant land cover.</p> <p>The Southern Upland landscape type effectively straddles the Glen Afton Upland Glen, with the area to the east of</p>	<p>The steep sided, rugged open hills of the Southern Uplands form a dramatic backdrop to the adjacent low-lying upland basin, and form an important part of East Ayrshire's southern skyline.</p> <p>The well defined, steep-sided hills on the eastern edge of Glen Afton, Blackcraig and Craigbranceoch, are important landmark features and provide for some spectacular views.</p>

	<p>Glen Afton forming the defined landmark hills, and the area to the west comprising lower hills with more complex interlocking ridges.</p> <p>The East Ayrshire Southern Uplands with Forestry sits to the east of Dalmellington and again crosses into Dumfries and Galloway. The Uplands form a backdrop of rounded forest hills for the Doon Valley and the relatively simple skyline contrasts with the more dramatic upland scenery to the south. The nature of the landscape is dominated by the presence of commercial forestry.</p>	<p>The Uplands to the east of Glen Afton is an important area for recreation / hill walking.</p> <p>The eastern section of the Southern Uplands with Forestry is included within the Sensitive Landscape Area. This landscape parcel forms an important buffer between Glen Afton and the non-forested section of the Southern Uplands, and helps provide a logical boundary to the Sensitive Landscape Area.</p>
Rugged Uplands with lochs and forestry	<p>This character type lies in the Doon Valley area and forms part of an extensive upland area, which extends into South Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway.</p> <p>The character type is generally remote from settled lowland landscapes and is itself very sparsely settled.</p> <p>The landform features of exposed crags and boulders give a 'Highland' appearance to steep sided granite ridges.</p>	<p>The landscape is unique in East Ayrshire terms, due to its remote and little modified nature.</p> <p>Loch Doon, East Ayrshire's largest water body, adds to the diversity and interest of the landscape.</p> <p>The sparsely settled landscape gives a strong sense of seclusion and naturalness. It has a high scenic value and for this reason is also important for recreation and tourism.</p>
Foothills west of the Doon Valley (New addition)	<p>The gently undulating upland landscape forms a fairly narrow band of low hills lying at the head of the Girvan Valley and on the west side of the Doon Valley.</p> <p>Towards the North, the landscape is simpler with a lower, gentle plateau, whilst the southern part of the landscape contains more pronounced landmark features.</p>	<p>The relatively constrained band of upland landscape, forms an important role in providing the backdrop and setting for the Doon Valley and the Girvan Valley in South Ayrshire.</p> <p>The landmark hills in the southern part of the landscape form the backdrop to Dalmellington and Craigengillan Estate, whilst the more gentle northern section contributes positively to the setting of Patna and Waterside as well as the entrance into East Ayrshire on the A713.</p>

Note. The table describes the landscape character types that make up the majority of the sensitive landscape area. The designation also encompasses small sections of other character types, where these help achieve a more logical boundary.

Table 1 describes the landscape character types that make up the majority of the sensitive landscape area. The designation also encompasses small sections of other character types, where these help achieve a more logical boundary on the ground. Similarly, the landscape character areas in their entirety are not included in the sensitive landscape area; only those parts that are considered sensitive. Map 2 below shows the detailed boundary of the sensitive landscape area, as included in the LDP.



Map 2: Sensitive landscape area

**Appendix 1: Assessment made for the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan relating to the Sensitive Landscape Area**

	Overall Assessment	LOWLAND RIVER VALLEY
<b>1. Landscape as a Resource</b>	<b>Med</b>	Relatively intact, a number of examples throughout Ayrshire.
<b>2. Scenic Quality</b>	<b>High</b>	Small scale, intimate landscapes. Incised valleys with broad-leaved woods have aesthetic quality. Pastoral use in meanders creates distinctive pattern.
<b>3. Unspoilt Character</b>	<b>High</b>	Few large scale intrusions most development is small scale.
<b>4. Sense of Place</b>	<b>High</b>	Valley form helps to create this.
<b>5. Conservation Interests</b>	<b>High</b>	Annex 1 habitat, a number of SWT, SSSIs and other locally important sites. Historic gardens associated with valleys and some historic settlements.
<b>6. Consensus</b>	<b>Med</b>	No formal designation beyond historic gardens recognising landscape value. Valleys well used, however for recreation & their value is generally recognised.

**High\***

**\*Note: Small section of the Irvine beyond Kilmarnock was reassessed and found not to merit a high category through the evaluation.**

	Overall Assessment	UPLAND RIVER VALLEYS
<b>1. Landscape as a Resource</b>	<b>Med/High</b>	No longer intact although some contain very important cultural landscapes. Doon valley is a good example - best representation of this LCT in Ayrshire.
<b>2. Scenic Quality</b>	<b>High/Med</b>	Fairly good. Pastures & enclosures are distinctive and create a pattern. Valleys more intimate than surrounding expanse of moor & in better condition in places - imp. juxtaposition & topography. Nithsdale - misfit river.
<b>3. Unspoilt Character</b>	<b>Low</b>	Long history of mineral development & industry. Spoil heaps (some bings add to character now). Commercial afforestation, transport links and 19th century settlements at odds with character. Field structure deteriorating.
<b>4. Sense of Place</b>	<b>High</b>	Particularly true of Doon Valley.
<b>5. Conservation Interests</b>	<b>High</b>	Cultural landscape at Waterside. Doon Valley SSSIs and some designed landscapes.
<b>6. Consensus</b>	<b>High</b>	Doon Valley is part of RSA, & local plan recognition. Other areas - no formal recognition but value now perceived.

**High\***

**\*Note: Small section of the Upper Ayr Valley was reassessed and found not to merit a high category through the evaluation.**

	Overall Assessment	<b>N: UPLAND GLEN</b>
<b>1. Landscape as a Resource</b>	<b>High</b>	Glen Tig particularly good example. Several examples of this type, so not unique but important in Ayrshire.
<b>2. Scenic Quality</b>	<b>High</b>	High scenic quality clear contrast between valley floor and surrounding highland. Glacial influence distinct & created dramatic land form. Glen App is important gateway.
<b>3. Unspoilt Character</b>	<b>Med/High</b>	Glen Tig particularly unspoilt & intact. Glen Afton associated with intrusive water works & commercial afforestation. Glen App forestry & A77 make significant impact.
<b>4. Sense of Place</b>	<b>High</b>	Valley form and gateway nature create sense of place as does inaccessibility of Glen Tig.
<b>5. Conservation Interests</b>	<b>Med</b>	Glen Tig - SSSI (woodland). Some local wildlife sites. Archaeology important in Glen App, and some in Glen Tig.
<b>6. Consensus</b>	<b>Med/High</b>	Glen App & small part of Glen Tig in RSA. Glen Afton generally recognised as being important, although not formalised.

**High**

	Overall Assessment	<b>R: PLATEAU MOORLANDS</b>
<b>1. Landscape as a Resource</b>	<b>High</b>	Pretty much intact, although several examples reduce uniqueness. Important cultural landscape in Muirkirk area.
<b>2. Scenic Quality</b>	<b>Med/High</b>	Level extensive plateau, basins & soft contoured ridges. Open/exposed - wild quality, can feel bleak. Featureless. Eastern sections - Medium, parts of the south west sections - High, (except for three sections on SAC boundary)
<b>3. Unspoilt Character</b>	<b>High</b>	Limited development, although where it has taken place there has been a significant impact.
<b>4. Sense of Place</b>	<b>Med</b>	Openness can contribute to threatening feeling, not an intimate landscape character.
<b>5. Conservation Interests</b>	<b>High</b>	Large pSPA in eastern area. Annex 1 habitat. Muirkirk SAM & historic landscape. In southern area some important grassland.
<b>6. Consensus</b>	<b>Low</b>	Only a small part of this type is currently recognised for its landscape value & in designated area.

**Med/High** (Dependant on location)

	Overall Assessment	<b>T: SOUTHERN UPLANDS</b>
<b>1. Landscape as a Resource</b>	<b>High</b>	Not completely in tact, becoming more rare due to encroachment of commercial forestry. Little evidence of cultural landscapes.
<b>2. Scenic Quality</b>	<b>High</b>	Rounded summits & 'U' shaped valleys. Glaciated landscape - quite dramatic relief. Extensive uplands areas that are remote. Spectacular views. Few enclosures - exposed & generally open. Less in area adjacent to the Carrick Forest (Med).
<b>3. Unspoilt Character</b>	<b>High</b>	Under pressure from commercial afforestation, although there are parts that are relatively unspoilt.
<b>4. Sense of Place</b>	<b>Med</b>	Forestry reduces this factor. Remoteness creates general feeling.
<b>5. Conservation Interests</b>	<b>Low</b>	Some historical settlements still visible. Some Annex 1 Habitat, wet heath.
<b>6. Consensus</b>	<b>Low</b>	2 areas partly or wholly in RSA, however, 2 areas in EAC excluded. Area around Glen Afton now recognised as having considerable value and general agreement about most westerly area.

**High/Med** (Dependant on location - area adjacent to Carrick forest considered to be Med).

	Overall Assessment	<b>T: SOUTHERN UPLANDS (with forestry)</b>
<b>1. Landscape as a Resource</b>	<b>Low</b>	Not complete, forestry has encroached on all but peaks. More than one area, so not unique. Little cultural interest.
<b>2. Scenic Quality</b>	<b>Med/Low</b>	Peaks still exposed, but forestry cover dilutes the features that created the scenic quality of this type. Relief reduced by land use. Open quality restricted to peaks.
<b>3. Unspoilt Character</b>	<b>Med</b>	Forestry has had significant detrimental impact.
<b>4. Sense of Place</b>	<b>Low</b>	Forestry has reduced this, even on peaks surrounding forestry limits any sense of place (peaks now removed from surrounding landscape).
<b>5. Conservation Interests</b>	<b>Low</b>	As before, although any Annex 1 wet heath/blanket bog very limited in extent.
<b>6. Consensus</b>	<b>Med</b>	1 area completely in RSA, and most eastern area partially included. SW area - no previous formal designation. General concern about overall impact of forestry, now widely expressed.

**Low/Med** (Dependant on location Eastern area better quality & character resulted in Med, whilst more western areas only merit Low).

	Overall Assessment	<b>U: RUGGED GRANITIC UPLAND</b>
<b>1. Landscape as a Resource</b>	<b>High</b>	National resource, especially Arran hills. Three occurrences in Ayrshire, mainland and island - therefore different associations making each example unique. Both are representative of their type.
<b>2. Scenic Quality</b>	<b>High</b>	Highest landscape in Ayrshire. Glaciated features - carved landscape. Arran forms important views from mainland & Kintyre - creates memorable view.
<b>3. Unspoilt Character</b>	<b>High</b>	Loch Doon & Arran some of most unsettled areas in Ayrshire. Some impact of afforestation on lower slopes which impinges on unspoilt nature.
<b>4. Sense of Place</b>	<b>High</b>	Mountainous scenery provides strong feeling of place. Dramatic & very distinctive features. Mountains have an association with water.
<b>5. Conservation Interests</b>	<b>High</b>	Large SSSI on Arran, NNR & Annex 1 habitat. Less nature conservation interest in Loch Doon. A few SMR sites overall.
<b>6. Consensus</b>	<b>High</b>	Arran NSA, RSAs cover both areas.

**High**