



**REPORT TO: PLANNING AND REGULATORY SERVICES COMMITTEE ON
18 SEPTEMBER 2018**

**SUBJECT: MORAY LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2020- MORAY LOCAL
LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS REVIEW- DRAFT REPORT**

**BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR (ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE)**

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 This report asks the Committee to approve the Moray Local Landscape Designations Review- Draft Report, which proposes a series of new candidate Special Landscape Areas (SLA's) for consultation, with the final SLA's replacing the current Areas of Great Landscape Value (AGLV) and Coastal Protection Zone (CPZ) designations.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III (E) (2) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to the Review and Preparation of Strategic and Local Plans.

2. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committee:

- i) note the candidate SLA's set out in the Moray Local Landscape Designations Review Draft Report which has been issued separately with this agenda;**
- ii) approve the Moray Local Landscape Designations Review Draft Report for consultation; and**
- iii) agree that a report setting out consultation responses be considered at a special meeting of this Committee on 5 December 2018 and thereafter the SLA designations be incorporated into the Proposed Moray Local Development Plan 2020.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) requires local authorities to identify and protect locally designated areas and to clearly explain the reasons for their designation. Local landscape designations are regarded as a valuable tool in the development plan, reflecting the values that communities attach to their local place and the valuable social, economic and environmental asset they provide. Designation informs their future care and management and contributes to our environmental stewardship. Moray's outstanding natural environment, including our coastline, mountains, moorlands and river valleys are recognised internationally and safeguarding our most valued landscapes supports the Council's environmental, economic and social aspirations.
- 3.2 The Moray Local Development Plan (MLDP) 2015 and previous Local Plans identify significant geographic areas of Moray as AGLV designations with supporting policy E7. However, it is understood these designations were made over 30 years ago and have no background documentation to record their reasons for designation, which has resulted in a designation which has limited status in planning terms, with no evidence base to support the designations when challenged. In addition to the AGLV designations, the MLDP2015 includes a CPZ, 5 Countryside Around Town (CAT) designations and an Area of Special Control at Pluscarden.
- 3.3 As highlighted in the Main Issues Report approved for consultation by this Committee in December 2017 (para 2 of minute refers), the pressure on Moray's landscape continues with major road and energy projects, cumulative housing in the countryside, settlement expansion and forestry proposals all impacting or potentially impacting upon landscape quality.
- 3.4 A blank canvas review of landscape has been undertaken, with expert advice commissioned to lead on the field work and evaluation, supported by a Steering Group of Moray Council planners, the Regional Archaeologist and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) staff. The aim of the review is to identify SLA's, their reason for designation and to rationalise the number of landscape related designations for inclusion in the Proposed MLDP 2020.

4. PROPOSALS

- 4.1 The review has been carried out broadly in accordance with the 2006 Historic Scotland/SNH Guidance on Local Landscape Designations, but updated where relevant with the 2017 draft guidance. The draft Study has been issued separately with this agenda. The study was undertaken in two stages.
- 4.2 Stage 1 Evaluation, involving;
- evaluation of all landscapes within Moray resulting in the definition of candidate areas for local designation. This has been informed by the revised SNH landscape character assessment for Moray, the 2017 Wind Energy Landscape Capacity Study and settlement capacity studies, additionally informed by detailed knowledge of Moray's landscapes, which resulted in 32 landscape character units being identified for assessment.
 - a more detailed assessment of candidate areas involving field work to define boundaries and landscape qualities and preparation of Statements of Importance. This has included considering nature conservation

designations, historic environment designations, SNH wildness mapping, core paths and other recreational interests.

- considering consented development to form part of the landscape and visual baseline. The most significant landscape change likely to be associated with such developments is the consented Dorenell wind farm located in the Cabrach area, which is currently designated as an AGLV. Route options for the proposed dualling of the A96 have also been reviewed and any potential effects on candidate SLA's are set out in the study. Cross boundary landscape designations have also been considered particularly where Moray abuts the north coast and Deveron valley SLA's in Aberdeenshire.
- Analysis of all 32 landscape character units and scoring against key criteria, using well-reasoned judgements based on thorough field work and assessment.
- The evaluation focusses on the key landscape character and qualities identified and rates these on a five point scale of high (5), high-medium (4), medium (3), medium-low (2) and low (1) as set out in the table in **Appendix 2**. No weighting has been applied to individual criterion. Landscapes scoring 18 and over are highlighted in Table 2 and it was agreed with the Steering Group that these should proceed to Stage 2 for detailed assessment as candidate SLA's.

4.3 Stage 2 evaluation, which involved;

- Considering the higher scoring landscape character types identified during the Stage one evaluation resulted in the following 13 candidate SLA's being defined, see plans in **Appendix 1**;

The Culbin to Burghead Coast
The Burghead to Lossiemouth Coast
The Lossiemouth to Portgordon Coast
The Portgordon to Cullen coast
Lower Spey
Cluny Hill
Spynie
The Pluscarden Valley
Quarrelwood
River Findhorn and Wooded Estates
The Spey Valley
Ben Rinnes
Deveron Valley

- #### 4.4
- Draft Statements of Importance for each of the proposed candidate SLA's have been prepared, explaining the boundaries selected for the candidate area and summarising the reasons for designation. A fuller description of the character and special qualities of the candidate SLA's is provided with the reasons for designation which should be used to inform any decision on development which may adversely affect the designated landscape.

5. **NEXT STEPS**

- 5.1 Further refinement is required to the proposed boundaries and this will be an important aspect of the consultation, especially when considering whether towns and villages should be included within candidate SLA's. The policy supporting the type of development acceptable within the SLA's will be set out in the Proposed MLDP2020 when reported to the special meeting of this Committee on 5 December 2018. The policy is likely to be similar to the current policy for the CPZ, restricting the types of development acceptable and promoting the highest standards of design and siting.
- 5.2 It is proposed to consult on the candidate SLA's from late September through to the end of October which will include press releases, direct mailing to consultees, community groups, developers, social media and a drop in exhibition event. All responses will be collated, analysed and reported back to the special meeting of this Committee on 5 December 2018, with the final SLA's included in the Proposed Plan.
- 5.3 The current AGLV's, CPZ and Pluscarden Special Area of Control will be deleted from the new LDP and replaced by the SLA's to rationalise the suite of environmental designations. The candidate SLA's at Quarrywood and Cluny Hill will form part of the CAT designation around Elgin and Forres respectively.

6. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

SLA's will be an important designation, safeguarding Moray's outstanding landscapes from inappropriate development. Moray's quality of environment is a vital aspect of supporting and facilitating the Council's priority for economic growth, attracting investment and visitors.

(b) Policy and Legal

SLA designations will form part of the statutory LDP.

(c) Financial implications

Commissioning expert landscape advice to identify candidate SLA's has cost £10,000. The cost has been minimised as Council officers have carried out field work, digital mapping and graphics work on the project. The project has also been supported through considerable expert input by working in partnership with the Regional Archaeologist and staff from SNH.

(d) Risk Implications

The current AGLV designation continues to fail to achieve its objectives to safeguard Moray's most special landscapes from inappropriate development, which brings a high level of risk.

The new SLA designation with supporting policy reduces risk of Moray's landscape quality being eroded.

(e) Staffing Implications

Work on identifying SLA's forms part of the review of the MLDP and has been undertaken within current staffing, with expert advice procured as required.

(f) Property

None.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

None.

(h) Consultations

The Corporate Director (Economic Development Planning & Infrastructure), the Head of Development Services, the Legal Services Manager (Property & Contracts), the Equal Opportunities Officer, Paul Connor (Principal Accountant), the Moray Access Manager, the Development Management Manager and Lissa Rowan (Committee Services Officer) have been consulted and their comments incorporated into the report.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 Moray's outstanding quality and diversity of landscapes contributes significantly to quality of life and brings significant economic investment through tourism and business.

7.2 The current AGLV designation has very limited value in planning terms, as the individual designations are not supported by any evidence base setting out their special qualities. Moray's landscape is under considerable pressure from national and regional infrastructure projects, settlement expansion and housing in the countryside.

7.3 A review has been undertaken to designate candidate SLA's, which will be subject to public consultation with the final SLA's being incorporated into the Proposed MLDP2020.

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Background Papers:
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