

AYRSHIRE REGIONAL CHARACTER AREAS



- ① Arran
- ② Ayrshire basin
- ③ Ayrshire Rim
- ④ Carrick Hills and Valleys
- ⑤ Galloway Uplands
- ⑥ Inner Firth of Clyde
- ⑦ Renfrew Heights
- ⑧ Southern Uplands

Regional Character Areas

Regional Character Areas are recognisable as distinct landscape 'regions' at the broad scale, based on general characteristics such as geology, landform, soils, ecological associations, land cover and historical patterns of settlement and land use . These areas can provide a framework for strategic planning and land use policies, and contribute to the regional characterisation of the Scottish landscape as a whole . We have identified eight Regional Character Areas. It will be appreciated that several of these areas extend well beyond the boundaries of Ayrshire. The Regional Character Areas are as follows :

Arran

Lying in the outer part of the Firth of Clyde, the island of Arran is perhaps the most contradictory of Regional Character Areas . On the one hand, its island status, and popularity, mean that Arran is recognised as a landscape in its own right. On the other hand, as guide books frequently describe, the detailed landscape is very varied, representing Scotland in miniature. In part this reflects the island's geological structure and, in particular, the Highland Boundary Fault which cuts the island in two . The northern part of Arran comprises a dramatic landscape of heavily glaciated granitic peaks and valleys, while the southern part comprises lower and more subdued moorlands . A settled and pastoral fringe runs around the island above the raised beaches and clifflines along the coast. The east side of the island is generally more sheltered, wooded and settled than the more exposed and remote western coast . The island is rich in archaeological sites.

Key landscape issues include :

- development pressures associated with principal settlements ;
- recreation pressures ;
- woodland and forestry management ;
- conservation of distinctive agricultural landscapes .

Ayrshire Basin

The Ayrshire basin comprises the extensive semi-circle of lowland focused on the county town of Ayr. The area is bounded to the north by the Renfrew heights, and to the east and south by the Ayrshire Rim and Carrick Hills and Valleys. The basin varies in elevation, draining from east to west. However, it is the pattern of land use and settlement which provides the area' s distinctive character. Compared with surrounding areas, the Ayrshire basin is heavily populated with a dense network of settlements and roads. The principal land use is dairy farming, resulting in the survival of the framework of hedges and hedgerow trees. The basin is cut by a series of narrow river valleys which have become incised as the land has risen relative to the sea .

Key landscape issues include :

- issues to do with past and future settlement expansion, including :
 - visual effects of past expansion ;
 - nature of the urban fringe ;
 - settlement coalescence ;
 - pressure for expansion of larger settlements ;
 - pressure for expansion of smaller settlements ;
 - issue of settlement capacity and landscape capacity ;
 - building design, materials, siting, layout and orientation ;
- conservation and restoration of rich lowland agricultural landscape including :
 - hedges and other field boundaries ;
 - tree lines, avenues and clumps ;
 - minor roads ;
 - vernacular farmsteads and sympathetic newer structures ;
- coastal pressures including :
 - recreational development pressure ;
 - coastal defense ;
 - climate change .

Ayrshire Rim

Enclosing the Ayrshire Basin to the east and south is the Ayrshire Rim, an extensive area of plateau moorland to the north of the Southern Uplands Fault and extending east into Lanarkshire. The hills are broad and often shallow sloped, comprising areas of moss and blanket bog. Large areas are afforested with coniferous plantations. Settlement is focused in the series of upland river valleys which cut through the hills, often providing a corridor for communication. The presence of coal-bearing rocks is reflected in the history of industrial development, particularly in the south eastern part of the area.

Key landscape issues include :

- conservation of remote, upland character;
- pressures for forestry expansion ;
- pressures for continued open-cast coal working with issues including :
 - site selection ;
 - visual and landscape impact ;
 - effective restoration and viable afteruse ;
- setting of settlements in the landscape, particularly in valleys ;
- building design, materials, siting, layout and orientation ;
- potential for wind farm development ;
- future of declining industrial settlements;
- integration of transport corridors.

Carrick Hills and Valleys

The south west part of Ayrshire comprises a complex area of hills and valleys, forming an area of transition between the higher ground of Dumfries and Galloway and the lowlands of the Ayrshire Basin. Geological factors have had a profound influence on the structure of the landscape. In particular, the Southern Uplands Fault, and a series of lesser parallel faultlines, running from southwest to northeast has determined the alignment of a series of valleys and ridgelines. Valleys tend to be small scale, settled and pastoral in character, while intervening hills comprise moorland and forestry. The coastline is dominated by a raised beach landscape, punctuated by a series of coastal headlands.

Key landscape issues include :

- conservation of upland character of hills and pastoral, settled character of valleys ;
- appropriate balance of forestry and open land ;
- potential for wind farm development.

Galloway Uplands

The Galloway Uplands, as the name suggests, comprises part of a larger Regional Character Area which extends into Dumfries and Galloway. The area is dominated by an intrusion of granite which has been subject to differential erosion, leaving a series of hills and lochs surrounded by a ring of outer summits. The area is characterised by its relatively rugged and wild topography, although a large part falls within the Galloway Forest Park.

Key landscape issues include:

- conservation of remote, upland character;
- pressures for forestry expansion and concerns about appropriate balance of forestry and open land ;
- maintenance of upland agricultural economy ;

Inner Firth of Clyde

Although comprising only a small part of the study area, the Inner Firth of Clyde comprises a distinctive regional character area, characterized by medium distance views across semi-sheltered water to steeply rising shorelines, often backed by wooded slopes. Many of the coastal fringes are

settled. It is a constantly changing landscape reflecting changing light and weather. The combination of settled and unsettled coastlines, open water, pleasure craft and commercial shipping gives this area a distinctive character.

Key landscape issues include :

- pressure for urban development and expansion in constrained locations ;
- recreation pressures ;
- woodland management.

Renfrew Heights

In the northern part of Ayrshire, between the Firth of Clyde near Largs and Wemys Bay and the Gourock Valley lies a distinctive range of hills, broadening from a narrow point near Ardrossan to a broad area of moorland overlooking the Clyde above Greenock . Largely unsettled, but with a rich legacy of historic sites, these hills comprise the Renfrew Heights.

Key landscape issues include :

- maintenance of a viable upland farming economy ;
- conservation of historic sites ;
- effects of tall structures including pylons .

Southern Uplands

Lying to the south of the Southern Upland Boundary Fault, this Regional Character Area covers a large part of Dumfries and Galloway, but a relatively limited area of Ayrshire. The underlying geology is predominantly Ordovician and Silurian greywackes and shales. The area is characterised by smooth conical peaks with extensive foothills and plateaux. Forestry and upland sheep farm are the principal land uses, though cattle are also found in U-shaped valleys such as that of the Afton Water near New Cumnock.

Key landscape issues include :

- conservation of remote, upland character ;
- pressures for forestry expansion ;
- maintenance of upland agricultural economy ;
- potential for wind farm development .

Landscape Types

The landscape types are as follows:

- raised beach coast
- lowland coast
- coastal fringe with agriculture
- coastal headlands
- coastal valley with policies
- coastal lowland moor
- Ayrshire lowlands
- broad valley lowland
- lowland river valleys
- upland river valleys
- lower dale
- upper dale
- intimate pastoral valley

(Source: <http://www.snh.org.uk/publications/on-line/LCA/Ayrshire.pdf>)