

**LANDSCAPE/SEASCAPE ASSESSMENT OF THE FIRTH OF CLYDE
SECTION 2 – FIRTH OF CLYDE OVERVIEW**

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2 FIRTH OF CLYDE OVERVIEW

The reports for each Seascape Area begin with an overview of key issues which are widely applicable and relevant considerations when managing change within that seascape area.

This overview takes a 'Clyde-wide' perspective. It discusses themes which recur across the whole of the Firth to such an extent that they have been identified as 'Clyde-wide' issues. This strategic summary focuses only on seascape and coastal issues which are important in terms of the whole Firth and its experience, and does not aim to provide a completely comprehensive list of all activities and places of interest.

The topics covered in this overview are:

- The diversity of seascape and inter-visibility
- Maritime activity
- The diversity of coastal topography and geological features
- Settlement pattern
- Industry
- Lighting and 'dark skies'
- Archaeology
- Woodland and forestry
- Isolated, remote and secluded coast
- Detailed design of the hard coast

2.1 The diversity of the seascape and inter-visibility

The Clyde is unique in the Scottish coast in terms of the amount and expanse of sea broadly contained by the mainland, which curves from Ayrshire to the Mull of Kintyre. While the sea is open to the Irish Sea to the south, and there are even glimpse views to the Atlantic from the southern Ayrshire coast¹, much of the sea is contained by this sweep of land.

The long curvature of the mainland, the presence of substantial offshore islands and the varied degree of enclosure across the Firth promotes considerable visual inter-visibility between coasts across varied stretches of water. Areas of sea are frequently 'shared' by two or more coastlines.

The maps of seascape areas (Figures 2 and 3 in Section 1), illustrate the diversity of the expanse of the sea across the Clyde – it varies from the vast expanse experienced in the Outer Clyde to the narrow channels of the Kyles of Bute or the upper reaches of the Argyll sea lochs.

The overall complexity and variety of seascape areas results in experience of a huge variance in the scale of the sea when traveling through the sequence of open sea, sounds, straits and lochs that make up the inner channels. This is experienced both as constant changes in scale and enclosure, and in the way views are constantly revealed, unfolding in sequence.

¹ See Section 9: Outer Firth of Clyde

This is reflected in the number of times the assessments refer to ‘transition areas’, ‘thresholds’ or ‘gateways’ between different coastal character areas. Frequently, there is a change from a more open stretch of sea to a narrower loch, or vice versa, and these ‘threshold areas’ are sensitive to poorly sited development which would distract from this important experience, or be difficult to accommodate due to the abrupt change of scale.

A further attribute of the complexity of the seascape in the Clyde is that there are several areas where there is a conjunction of seascape areas, where the sea seems to radiate outwards from an intersection. Examples include the conjunction of the Inner Firth of Clyde, the Upper Firth of Clyde and the mouth of Loch Long, or where the West Kyles of Bute opens into the Sound of Bute, the mouth of Loch Fyne and the upper reaches of the Kilbrannan Sound. The radiating sea, extending suddenly away from the junction in all directions, can be disorientating, especially when encountered after the relatively intimate scale of a narrow sea channel.

2.1.1 *Inter-visibility and views*

The inter-visibility of the coasts ensures that numerous landmark features are visible far beyond their own coastal character area, including built structures, such as the chimney at Inverkip, the cranes at Port Glasgow and Hunterston and lighthouses, for example at Toward Point and Skipness Point. One of the most widely recurring features across the southern extent of the Clyde, however, is Ailsa Craig. At times it is difficult to believe that this granite outcrop is located so far offshore. The reflectiveness of the sea appears to sharpen the clarity of light across the wider reaches of the Firth, so that the fine detail of the cliffs of this rocky outpost seem at times to be extraordinarily well defined despite the great distances involved.

The quality of light and the changeable weather conditions is easily perceived because of the contained sweep and consequent inter-visibility of the whole Firth. It is often possible to see different weather fronts crossing into the Firth from any direction. The changing play of light influences visibility, as distant profiles change from simple silhouette to detailed form and back again often within a short space of time.

The diversity of seascape and topography also contributes to the diversity of views. The enclosure of the mainland and presence of islands contributes to the amount of inter-visibility. In addition, however, because of the broad south west/north east alignment of many of the sea channels, there is also a prevalence of long views ‘framed’ by land masses, either through enclosed sea lochs or along the wider channels of the more open reaches of the Firth. Looking north, the views tend to focus on high hills, while looking south, the views are often channelled to the mouths of lochs, and to wider stretches of sea, even to very distant land masses, such as the Northern Ireland coast.

In this context, it is important to highlight the importance of Arran, which is central to the Firth of Clyde, and to which much of the surrounding seascape provides a setting. While the whole island is widely visible, the iconic, serrated silhouette of the northern peaks crops up continuously in views from as wide afield as the southern

coast of Ayr, Kilcreggan on the Inner Firth and from the middle reaches of Loch Fyne.

2.2 Maritime activity

Maritime activity varies considerably over the whole stretch of the Firth. Shipping activity includes commercial container ships, ferries, fishing boats and MOD vessels. There is also a considerable amount of recreational boating, including yachts and motorboats. The Clyde also supports sea kayaking, jet skiing and recreational diving.

In addition to the movement of boats, there are fin fish farms and shellfish farms along stretches of the Argyll coast, within Loch Fyne, the Kintyre coast of the Kilbrannan Sound and Loch Striven. These fish farms generate their own boating activity.

The busiest seas are the junctions of major shipping lanes, and the Upper Firth and the Cumbraes seascape area, which merges with the Inner Firth, Loch Long, Lower Firth of Clyde (East), and Rothesay Sound, is probably the busiest stretch of them all. These 'navigational junctions' are characterised by almost constant activity, with sailing boats tacking through the channels, ferries criss-crossing regularly, container ships working their way slowly through the main sea lanes and often motor boats zipping across the water from one settlement to another.

In contrast, the quietest stretches of water tend to be the 'dead end' lochs, with little commercial activity and few sailors venturing to the heads of Loch Fyne, Loch Striven, Loch Long and Gareloch. While there is some fish farm and MOD activity in these lochs, they are less appealing for yachting and there are no large commercial harbours.

2.2.1 Recreational boating

The Firth of Clyde hosts numerous anchorages and marinas, including Scotland's largest marinas at Largs and Inverkip, the new Holy Loch and Portavadie marinas, and well-established anchorages at East Loch Tarbert, Tighnabruaich and at the mouth of Gareloch, where moorings and pontoons at Rhu and Rosneath create a 'sea' of masts. There are also a number of sailing schools and outdoor centres which offer water-based activities. Loch Goil and to some extent Gareloch and Loch Fyne, are also used by recreational motorboats.

Yachting is exceptionally popular on this varied but relatively sheltered stretch of the Scottish sea. The variety of coast and sea channels, and the opportunity to circumnavigate islands and undertake 'round trip' voyages, as well as the opportunity to head to the outer west coast through the Crinan Canal from Ardrishaig or access the Northern Irish coast and the Irish Sea through the mouth of the Clyde, all increase the attractiveness of this area for recreational sailing.

Water-based transport offers a sea-based perspective of the geography of the Firth. Shores which are far apart travelling by road around the heads of lochs are much closer when travelling on the water. The sense of space, especially in the central channels, is more apparent, as is the sense of height and enclosure experienced when travelling between steep sided hillsides.

But most of all, the character of individual stretches of sea and the relationship between them is clear. Travelling extensively by sea, sailors gain a full understanding of tides, exposure, localised turbulence, changeable and reflecting light, distance and the relationship between one coast or landmark feature and another. Features that may appear dominant from the shore can, from the sea, simply merge into the coast, and the detail of the shoreline can be lost with distance while the hinterland skylines can become far more significant. Sailors also often experience the whole of a loch or seascape area in a way which land-based travellers experience only in fragments.

An increase in popularity of sea kayaking is evident in the number of outdoor centres and activity holidays which promote sea kayaking in this area. In addition, Argyll and Bute Council are involved in delivering a Coastal Communities Fund project which will involve setting up a sea kayak trail which will go from Helensburgh, through the Kyles of Bute and up Loch Fyne to Ardrishaig, through the Crinan Canal and then north to Oban.

The attractiveness of this coast for sea kayaking is its accessibility and diversity. The intricate coasts of small bays and islands offer shelter and contrast with the excitement of taking to the more open sea to paddle to one of the islands, round the Mull of Kintyre or even to Ailsa Craig. A particular strength of the area is to be able to plan 'round trips' over several days, around the islands, or along the coasts of the larger lochs. For sea kayakers, while long views are important, they are best placed to experience the coast at close hand, so that the detail of the shoreline, the views 'up' at towering cliffs and along bays contribute significantly to their experience.

Cruise boats also pass through the Clyde and dock at Greenock, where passengers disembark for excursions, and the most famous visitor attraction, the paddle steamer *MS Waverley*² still frequents the Firth of Clyde on a seasonal basis. A remnant of the Glaswegian experience of going 'doon the watter' for sea side holidays and day trips, the *Waverley* still calls at jetties and piers on the Inner Firth, Upper Firth and the Cumbraes and at Largs, Girvan and Ayr in the Outer Firth. In addition to its cultural associations, the Clyde steamers were a catalyst for the development of holiday resorts and their associated wooden jetties along the length of the Clyde, some of which are still in use today, for example at Blairmore at the mouth of Loch Long.

2.2.2 *Ferries*

The ferries offer an opportunity for everyone to experience a sea-based perspective of the Firth. They are a particular feature of the Inner Firth, where they are an important element of the transport infrastructure, providing a 'commuter' service for towns such as Kilcreggan and Dunoon.

Ferries also provide links to places which by road are many miles apart, and in some ways can make the Firth seem smaller, as they can 'short cut' long journeys around the heads of lochs and mountain passes. They are frequently used to link relatively remote communities with railheads. The recent pilot summer service from Campbeltown to Ardrossan is an example of this – it is also the first new ferry route to be commissioned in Argyll for twenty years.

² <http://www.waverleyexcursions.co.uk>

Views from the ferries tend to focus along the length of the lochs or sea channels which are being crossed. These tend to be long views, often towards distant visual foci, such as islands or distant landmasses beyond the mouth of a sea channel or hills at the heads of lochs.

The other key experience of ferry travel is the arrival port, which for many people is 'coming home', but for visitors is characterised by a 'sense of arrival'. The quality of infrastructure and built environment therefore should reflect this, giving a good impression of the destination and offering an easy to orientate, accessible entry point. A good example of well-designed infrastructure is at Brodick on Arran, where the fine promenade is accessed directly from the ferry terminal, while in contrast at Portavadie there is still some untidiness about the harbour area.

2.2.3 *Commercial and fishing activity*

The major focus for commercial shipping is the Inner Firth – while huge container boats sail through the Outer Firth, the Lower Firth (East), and the Upper Firth, they tend to be berthing at Port Glasgow or further upriver along the Clyde. There is also industrial activity at Port of Ayr and at Hunterston, the largest iron ore port in the UK. As a result, in several of these locations the coast is characterised by the industrial infrastructure required to support this activity. The gantry cranes are landmark features at Port Glasgow and Hunterston while the cranes at the remaining Ferguson Shipyard at Port Glasgow and the huge Titan Crane at Clydebank (now a visitor attraction) are also reminders of the once thriving ship building industry associated with the Clyde.

A particular feature of the Firth is the shipping of timber. This is most evident on the Argyll coastline, where several harbours (Ardrishaig, Portavadie, Sandbank on Holy Loch and Campbeltown) have a timber storage dock.

The Clyde is trawled, creeled and dredged by fishermen fishing for prawns and scallops. Divers also dive for hand-caught scallops in Loch Fyne. There are remaining fishing fleets at Girvan, Campbeltown, Carradale and East Loch Tarbert. Both of these add significantly to the activity at and around these ports. They add to the bustle on the quayside as well as activity at sea.

The contribution made by commercial maritime activity to the appreciation of the landscape of the sea and coast is largely related to the variety and amount of activity both off-shore and on-shore. The larger industrial ports tend to restrict access along the coast, but offer the opportunity to see huge vessels manoeuvre their way up the sea channels and into close fitting berths. In addition to maintaining sea based activity, the smaller fishing ports and busy anchorages support shore-based businesses, so that boat repair yards, chandlers and sailmakers add considerably to the maritime character of these harbour towns.

2.2.4 *Diving*

Diving occurs throughout the Firth of Clyde, including all the Argyll lochs, the Kyles of Bute and in the wider sea channels³. Loch Fyne is a major focus for diving. Its appeal combines the presence colourful underwater life and wrecks, including those of two Clyde puffers. Arran is also promoted as a base for exploring underwater sea life. The main shipping channels, especially the Inner Firth and the Upper Firth of Clyde and the Cumbraes, are a focus for wreck diving – there are numerous wrecks, a reflection of the history of busy maritime activity in these seascape areas.

2.3 **Diversity of coastal topography and geological features**

The complexity of the seascape is complemented by the variety of coastal geomorphological features, hinterland topography, land management and settlement pattern.

Hinterland topography ranges from relatively low-lying inland valleys (for example, the hinterland of the sweeping bay of Ayr) to the steep enclosure of the heads of the Argyll lochs at Loch Long, Loch Goil and Gareloch. This range of enclosure also influences the perception of scale across the Clyde – the more contained the water surface, the more intimate is the experience of the enclosed space.

The detail of topography, in terms of geomorphological features, influences both the diversity and experience of the coast. Spectacular headlands, for example on the Mull of Kintyre, at the Heads of Ayr, and Bennan Head on Arran are simply the largest and most prominent examples of a recurring topographical feature. Headlands are often juxtaposed with the gentle arcs of sandy or shingle bays, creating a perceptible rhythm of alternating headland and bay, as in Loch Fyne or on the coast of Arran.

The longest and most sweeping bays are on the Ayrshire coast, at Irvine Bay and Ayr Bay, either side of Troon, and these simple curved arcs of sand and shingle, backed by dune systems, contrast with the long straight rocky coasts found on the Argyll sea lochs. The simplicity of these coasts in turn contrast with the intricate, convoluted ribbon of tiny bays and inlets subdivided by low promontories, skerries and tiny islands which are the key characteristic of more irregular coasts, such as the coast between Carradale and Campbeltown Loch on Kintyre, and along the south west coast of Loch Fyne.

These broad topographical characteristics are further complemented by detailed geological and geomorphological features, which crop up all round the coast. The variety is immense. They include the columnar ribbed cliffs of Drumadoon Point on Arran, lagoons at Ballantrae and at Auchalick Bay in Loch Fyne; tombolos, for example at Barmore Island near Tarbert; tidal spits at Island Davaar on Campbeltown Loch and An Oitir (Otter Spit) in Loch Fyne; and wide expanses of sand and mud revealed at low tide at the heads of Loch Riddon, Loch Gilp and at the mouth of the River Clyde. There are also salt marshes, shingle banks, sand dunes, storm-battered cliff faces, caves and of course, possibly the most common feature, raised beaches or relict sea cliffs, which recur across the Firth, from Ayrshire to Loch

³ <http://www.finstrokes.com/dive-map.html>

Fyne to Kintyre and, of course Arran. This list represents a small number of features which appear along the coast – the point is to emphasise the diversity.

Islands are a key characteristic of the Clyde – of course, the larger islands of Arran, the Isle of Bute, Great Cumbrae and Little Cumbrae are key features in their own right. But smaller islands, such as Holy Island, Inchmarnock, Pladda and Sanda are foci visible beyond their own ‘coastal character area’, cropping up on distant horizons, their profiles framed by a change of light.

Raised beaches and headlands often form important interim skylines when viewed from the sea. Their abrupt edges reinforce their visual presence. In addition, from the more distant sea channels, the hinterland hills are often seen in profile, and these skylines are sensitive to development which might impact on the views from the sea.

2.4 Settlement⁴ pattern

Long stretches of the coast are well settled, especially on the Inner Firth and along the Ayrshire coast within Lower Firth of Clyde (East) and the Upper Firth of Clyde. In some of these locations larger towns and villages merge, or almost merge, to form a continuous settled coastline. In such areas, the shore (as opposed to the coast) is often the most undeveloped stretch of available open space. The shore, especially when the tide is out, may even be backed by dunes or a high sea wall which blocks views inland to the settlement and focuses views out to sea, or to opposite, sometimes distant coasts.

Another feature of settlement pattern, however, is long stretches of coast that are continuously settled, but with only a single line or narrow band of settlement. This is especially a feature of Argyll coasts, for example on Bute within Rothesay Sound, the continuous settlement between Toward Point and Blairmore, including Dunoon, and between Shandon and Helensburgh on Gareloch. Sometimes this is in response to topography – most commonly because there is a narrow flat coastal plain backed by a raised beach that creates a well defined strip of developable land, where houses are typically tucked against the abrupt edge of the raised beach.

In more rural areas, a number of recurring settlement patterns are apparent. The most obvious, for a coastal study, is the association between settlement and sheltered bays. Shelter, provided by headlands, rocky outcrops, islands and woodland, is essential, on this relatively contained stretch of sea. Therefore settlements tend to huddle around the cusp of a bay, or in the direct lee of a headland, with earlier houses often placed close to an accessible harbour area. Settlements over time tend to expand along the coast, and only when the flatter land is developed do houses become built up the hillsides.

A sub category of this settlement type is the planned settlement – with Inveraray and Lochgilhead being the two most obvious examples. These are not necessarily

⁴ The word ‘settlement’ as used in this study refers to all types of settlement which contribute to a recognisable settlement pattern. This term therefore covers single houses and farms as well as towns and villages. The words village, town and farms and single houses have also been used for individual places. This is not the same as the word ‘settlement’ used in planning terms to denote areas identified and allocated as ‘settlement’ in Local Plans.

located to best advantage in terms of access to the sea – the harbour in Loch Gilp, for example, is located at nearby Ardrishaig, where the water is much deeper.

In even more rural areas, settlement frequently has a strong association with burns issuing into the sea. Silt run-off from these burns form alluvial fans, some of which are large and relatively level, and all of which are fertile. These are attractive locations for farms and small settlements, which take advantage of the shelter at the edges of the fans, where there are slight bays created by the alluvial promontories. This settlement pattern is so common throughout the study area, it should be sustained when identifying new sites for development in rural areas.

Several of the settlements are characterised by a 'seaside resort' character. These include Gourock, Girvan, Largs, Millport and Rothesay, all of which have a generally thriving seaside character. The 'resort' character is enhanced by attractive and well used promenades or esplanades and the presence of a variety of facilities – from the boating and paddling ponds at Girvan and Millport, to the icecream parlour at Nardinis in Largs and the outdoor lido at Gourock, all of which reinforce a sense of seaside resort.

These towns have a very particular character which at its best – for example in Girvan – seems to come from the many different ways in which the town and its people engage with the sea. At Girvan, this includes not only a varied and well presented promenade, but also a busy harbour, a boat yard, boat trips to Ailsa Craig, boating pond facilities and play parks.

Other towns, such as Rothesay, Dunoon, Helensburgh and other smaller towns which were once popular holiday destinations, it is the architecture of the 'Victorian villa' which is a key unifying feature. In these locations, there are often still very fine, if in places rather faded or neglected, promenades and green spaces, but the atmosphere is of more formal resort infrastructure.

Several towns were identified as requiring 'upgrading' of the architecture and hard coastal landscape works. These include Ardrossan, Rothesay, Dunoon, Helensburgh, Arrochar, Ardrishaig and Campbeltown. All of these towns have positive architectural features – from the fine sweep of terraced town houses at Rothesay to the cluster of Canal Authority buildings in Ardrishaig – but their architectural integrity is often compromised, either by more recent, poorly designed buildings or by fragmented coast and harbour infrastructure, which is possibly the result of piece-meal development.

Several of these towns in Argyll, have already been earmarked for redevelopment of their waterfront areas under the Argyll and Bute CHORD⁵ scheme.

⁵ Campbeltown, Helensburgh, Rothesay and Dunoon, all of which are on the Firth of Clyde, are set to benefit from major investment to their waterfronts and harbour areas. See: <http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/node/155>

2.5 Industry

In the most urban areas – which are generally within the Inner Firth and the Lower Firth (East) – towns have grown up where there is access to deep waters or sheltered harbours close to the coast. These towns have extensive harbours and infrastructure associated with fishing or commercial port activity. The seabed in these harbours may have been artificially deepened and breakwaters built to accommodate large ships and increase shelter.

There are several locations where the access to deep water has encouraged development in more rural areas. The MOD developments in Gareloch, Loch Long and Loch Striven are example of this, the oil terminal at Tighness on Loch Long, and the iron ore terminal and power stations around Inverkip and Hunterston are further examples, along with now abandoned sites at the torpedo testing site at the head of Loch Long, and yards at both Portavadie on Loch Fyne and Ardyne overlooking Rothesay Sound.

These developments involve considerable modification of the coast and the adoption of large infrastructure, including huge buildings, protected harbour areas and often cranes or other tall structures. Industry often restricts access both to the coast and sometimes to adjacent seas. Within the context of the whole of the Firth, however, the influence of large industry is relatively modest, with the visual impact of tall structures in the Inner Firth and Upper Firth possibly being the most widespread effect on seascape.

The most negative seascape impacts of the industrial development are the restricted access to the coast, thereby limiting opportunities to experience of the coast and sea, and the presence of large areas of abandoned and neglected works. In the Inner Firth, it would appear that sites do not stay abandoned for long, as there is constant redevelopment. In these areas, the new developments generally increase access and improve the built quality of the built infrastructure immediately along the coast, adding well built promenades and coastal paths.

In more rural areas redevelopment takes longer, although at the time of writing this report, there are likely to be proposals for redevelopment of both Ardyne and the torpedo range at Arrochar. The new marina at Portavadie demonstrates what is possible, although even here the redevelopment has only been partial and areas of abandoned part-built housing and modified, but barren, landform still remain. It is important that redevelopment in all areas is comprehensive and promote high build quality.

For the purposes of this study, a GIS layer was produced showing all the coastal character areas where abandoned industrial land was identified between June 2012 and December 2012.

2.6 Lighting and ‘dark skies’

The coast can be a place where ‘dark skies’ are experienced, due to the combination of less developed stretches of coast adjacent to the unlit sea, which reflects the blackness of the night sky, or the moon and its long trail of moonlight. The inter-visibility of the Firth of Clyde, however, means that in many places there are nearly

always views of the pale orange glare of street and road lights, even if on distant horizons.

Nevertheless, there are stretches of coast where the experience of dark skies is intensified by less developed opposing shores. The most accessible seascape areas where dark skies are most likely to be experienced are:

- The Argyll sea lochs of Loch Striven and Loch Long (although MOD development does impinge on this experience) and to parts of Loch Fyne;
- The Sound of Bute (where north Arran and the west coast of Bute as well as the mouth of Loch Fyne are largely undeveloped);
- The Lower Firth of Clyde (West), where settlement is scattered and relatively small on opposing coasts, or at the Mull of Kintyre; and
- The stretch of coast between Ballantrae and Loch Ryan⁶ in the Outer Firth is a further coast where dark skies can be experienced, with lighting apparent from small settlements on only very distant shores

It was noted that large coastal redevelopments, including Portvadie, and possibly proposed redevelopments at Ardyne and Arrochar, are likely to increase the levels of light 'pollution' in rural areas, and redevelopment proposals should specifically be encouraged to limit the amount and type of lighting to retain dark skies in these areas. Lighting strategies for the Argyll and Bute 'CHORD' areas and design briefs for development sites elsewhere should also aim to use 'downward facing' lighting solutions which limit light pollution.

2.7 Archaeology

The coast is a common location for a wide range of archaeology and historical features. *'From the very start of human settlement in Scotland, people have tended to live along the coast. As a source of survival from food to fuel, the shoreline was a key focus for daily life.'*⁷ The coast also offered access to the sea as a (relatively) accessible 'highway', therefore in past times it was likely to have been much more central to life and activities than it may appear today. The coast was the periphery to the sea – not the land.

As a result there are a wide range of archaeological sites around the Firth of Clyde, from neolithic standing stones, iron-age duns and forts, to more recent castles and industrial history⁸.

A most striking characteristic is where the location of archaeological sites is directly related to topography. Examples include the 'twin castles' on the opposing shores of Little Cumbrae Island and Portencross, which 'guard' the entrance to Fairlie Roads, the striking standing stone markers at Largybeg Point on the east coast of Arran,

⁶ See Section 9 Outer Firth of Clyde, Downan Point to Finnarts Bay

⁷ <http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/coastalerosion>

⁸ Detailed assessment of the historic environment of parts of the Clyde have been commissioned by the Firth of Clyde Forum. They include:

GUARD and CRG, *'Coastal Zone Assessment Survey: Firth of Clyde' (Project 1309)*, 2003

CFA Archaeology Ltd, *'Coastal Zone Assessment Survey, Firth of Clyde and Isle of Bute'*, 2004 -

http://www.scapetrust.org/html/clyde2_download.html

which line up between, and are shaped to reflect, the distant profiles of Ailsa Craig and Holy Island; and the recurring presence of lines of duns and forts which sit along the tops of raised beaches, such as can be found on the south, east and west coasts of Arran and the west coast of the Isle of Bute.

Many of the most intricate stretches of coast, which often feature promontories as part of their irregularity of form, are characterised by the presence of duns and forts on rocky outcrops. This is a particular feature of the Lower Firth of Clyde (West).

Industrial archaeology is a key feature of the area. This includes lighthouses, including 'Stevenson' lighthouses, as at Cloch Point, large industrial infrastructure on the River Clyde, but also smaller features, such as Duchess Anne's salt pans⁹ on the north coast of Arran,¹⁰ the timber ponds for storing timber to make ships on the Inner Firth, and the 18th/early 19th century Crinan Canal and its associated buildings at Ardrishaig.¹¹

There are also numerous designed landscapes associated with large houses and castles built along the coast. The most famous of these is Culzean, but it is one of several impressive buildings with extensive grounds and policies along the Ayrshire coast, including Kelburn, Knock Castle, Skelmorlie and Ardgowan. These, and similarly located estates on the Inner Firth, seem to have been instrumental in limiting development along the coast – they are the focus for key areas of undeveloped coast.

In more rural areas, the locations of houses with designed landscapes are similarly carefully selected, combining shelter with panoramic views and often locally interesting geological features. Inveraray Castle, Glenstriven House, Mount Stuart, Brodick Castle, Kilmun Arboretum and both Stonefield and Crarae gardens on Loch Fyne, are only a few of the estates which have taken advantage of the relatively mild climate to establish large fine gardens and associated policies, which, from the sea, are characterised by tall trees as well as prominent landmark buildings.

For the purposes of this study, a GIS layer was produced showing the coastal character areas where designed landscapes contributed significantly to the coastal character.

2.8 Woodland and forestry

In addition to the impact of designed landscapes and policies on the character of the coast noted in subsection 1.7 above, trees have an important role to play in the character of individual settlements, many of which are remarkably wooded. Mature garden trees feature extensively in many of the settlements, especially those which have a legacy of large gardens associated with villas. This is a key feature of the major towns around the Firth of Clyde, and one which should be sustained in future expansion and redevelopment.

⁹ <http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/39803/details/cock+of+arran+salt+pans+and+coal+pits/>

¹⁰ See Section 12, Sound of Bute, coastal character area Sannox to Loch Ranza

¹¹ <http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/39404/details/ardrishaig+pier+square+crinan+canal+office+and+outbuilding/>

Another key characteristic of the area is the presence of woodland. Large commercial conifer forests extend across steep slopes, predominantly but not exclusively, in Argyll, and are very visible from the sea. In some lochs, the conifer woodland is the main hinterland characteristic, and in terms of, views from the sea should be taken into account when preparing felling and replanting plans.

A further operational consideration is the removal of felled timber, which is sometimes offloaded to and from piers and shipped by sea. Given the quantity and age of the conifer crops in the area, it may be that new sites for temporary quays for offloading timber will be required, and these should respect the settlement pattern and scale of development appropriate to the rural stretches of the coast.

It was also noted that there may be opportunities to open up long distance access routes along the less accessible stretches of forested coast, especially along several of the Argyll sea lochs. In these areas, these routes could be 'off shoots' from the Cowal Way.

2.9 Isolated, remote and secluded coast

The coast and sea are often identified with some of the most wild, inaccessible and physically challenging places which can be experienced in Scotland. As a result, the coast (in terms of land based development), is held in special regard in Scottish planning policy. Isolated coasts are singled out within the Scottish Planning Policy (2010) where they are described as:

'Areas subject to significant constraints on new development may include areas at risk from coastal erosion, areas where conservation or enhancement of the natural and historic environment requires development to be limited and locations of value for recreational uses. Areas which are unsuitable for development will include the isolated coast, which is distant from centres of population and lacks obvious signs of development and is of very significant environmental, cultural and economic value. The special characteristics of the isolated coast should be protected, and there is a presumption against development in these areas.' (Scottish Planning Policy, 2011, paragraph 102)

In terms of this sensitivity assessment, isolated coast was identified as an extreme end of a 'sense of wildness' spectrum. Three terms were therefore used to describe the varying degrees of isolation or remoteness experienced in the study area:

2.9.1 Secluded coast

Stretches of coast of any length, and which may be close to centres of population and /or human activity where there are few signs of built development. On the coast, the dominant experience is likely to be of the natural processes of the sea and lack of built development. The immediate hinterland may be dominated by agriculture, designed landscapes or other woodland which limits sense of remoteness. They will not be areas immediately overlooked by significant built development.

2.9.2 Remote coast

Stretches of coast which lack obvious signs of development and have semi-natural qualities, in terms of vegetation pattern or the dominant experience of the natural

processes of the sea and lack of built development. There may be some evidence of farming or designed landscapes in the hinterland, but they would not be dominated by commercial woodland and associated operations. They are likely to be relatively long, more than 1.5km in length, as well as being difficult to access other than by sea or, on land, by foot, bicycle or other non-vehicular mode of transport.

2.9.3 *Isolated coast*

Coast which meets with the Scottish planning policy definition of 'isolated' coast. It is a stretch of coast which is 'distant from centres of population and lacks obvious signs of development and is of very significant environmental, cultural and economic value.' By their nature these areas also tend to be relatively long, more than 1.5km in length, as well as being difficult to access other than by sea or, on land, by foot, bicycle or other non-vehicular mode of transport. They may also be subject to designation or some other measure of significant environmental value.

Six areas were identified as being significantly isolated. These are:

- Coastal character area Sannox to Loch Ranza on the Isle of Arran in the Sound of Bute seascape area¹²
- Coastal character area Sgeir Bhuidhe to Mealdarroch Point in the Loch Fyne seascape area¹³
- The Mull of Kintyre to Carskey Bay¹⁴ coastal character area in the Lower Firth of Clyde (West) seascape area
- Garroch Head to White Port on the Isle of Bute in the Upper Firth of Clyde and the Cumbraes seascape area¹⁵
- The Downan Point to Finnarts Bay¹⁶ coastal character area, in the Outer Firth of Clyde seascape area
- Ailsa Craig was not visited for this survey, but its very remote location, exposure and naturalness would indicate that it is also an isolated coast.

The first four of these areas are very long stretches of undeveloped coast which have a hinterland of semi-natural vegetation which are also difficult to access except on foot or from the sea. North Arran, the Mull of Kintyre and Garroch Head to White Port are also areas which have a landscape designation¹⁷ recognising the visual drama of these coasts.

The Downan Point to Finnarts Bay coastal character area, in the Outer Firth, is an extensive coast having most of the qualities of an isolated coast, except that there are pockets of farmed land which extend close to the coast. Nevertheless, this long stretch of undeveloped coast lies within an area of 'scenic landscape' identified by Ayrshire Council, and should be considered an area of isolated coast.

¹² Section 12 Sound of Bute, subsection 12.7

¹³ Section 11 Loch Fyne, subsection 11.2

¹⁴ Section 10 Firth of Clyde (West), subsection 10.9

¹⁵ Section 7 Upper Firth of Clyde and the Cumbraes, subsection 7.12

¹⁶ Section 9 Outer Firth of Clyde, subsection 9.11

¹⁷ North Arran lies within the nationally important North Arran National Scenic Area, while Garroch Head to White Port and the Mull of Kintyre are designated an Area of Panoramic Quality by Argyll and Bute Council.

There are some additional areas of remote coast. An example is the east coast of the Mull of Kintyre between Machariorch Bay and New Orleans¹⁸, which is relatively close to a road, and set against a hinterland of rough grazing, but which is exposed, with the battered, dramatic cliffs reinforcing the power of the natural forces of the sea.

The islands of Pladda and Sanda Island, neither w of which were visited for this assessment, with their sparse population, semi-natural vegetation and lack of general access, are very secluded and have qualities of remoteness.

But there are yet more areas of 'secluded' coast, where access may be difficult except on foot or from the sea, but the hinterland is characterised by cultivated farmland or forestry, and where there is sometimes scattered development close to the coast. Examples of these areas include Ardmore peninsula in the Inner Firth of Clyde, the west coast of Loch Long north of Ardentinny and around the mouth of Loch Goil, the coast between Otter Ferry and Portavadie on the east coast of Loch Fyne and the shores of Loch Striven.

These secluded coasts can be appreciated as quiet, even tranquil, but many of them will be subject to ongoing forestry operations and cultivation of farmland, or are close to busy seaways, roads and railways, where the noise of traffic limits the qualities of remoteness.

Stretches of secluded coast can be of any length, so that they are perhaps most valuable in areas where much of the rest of the coast is heavily built up, such as along the Inner Firth, in the Upper Firth and the Cumbraes and on the well developed Ayrshire coast.

2.10 Detailed design of hard coast

In the settled areas there are long stretches of hard sea defences. These are sea walls, in the past built of dressed stone and more recently in-situ or pre-formed concrete. There are also sections of loose stone riprap. These are almost invariably topped with railings and form the frontage of pavements, promenades, esplanades, or, where space is very tight, roads.

For many people, these pavements and promenades are the key viewing point for the coast, and the context from which the coast and sea is appreciated from the land. The sea wall, railings, and other associated 'street furniture', such as the paving materials, seats, bins, grass swards and, occasionally, pavilions or shelters, occupy a narrow strip along the coast. The condition of repair and the tidiness of these structures create a considerable impression on the appreciation of the coast from urban areas.

While in some settlements this narrow strip of hard landscape works is well maintained (Gourock, Largs, Girvan, Brodick and Inveraray are examples), frequently railings are in a state of disrepair, paving is irregular, and seats or bins poorly located or in need of paint. In the context of the whole of the Clyde this detail may seem insignificant. But these stretches of hard coast are from where most people are likely to view the sea, and in this context, these details are significant. The condition of this

¹⁸ Section 10 Firth of Clyde (West), subsection 10.11

street furniture reflects on the perceived value placed on the coast and this experience.

In many towns, Scottish Water has built water treatment works along the coast. These have been necessary to improve water quality, and many are tucked below street level and low key in their location. However, the detail of the hard landscape works is largely ubiquitous, with riprap defences and wooden spar railings (which will simply break or become tatty), reflecting a low budget which has paid no attention to the quality of existing hard materials or coastal character. This is an example of how poor quality of design and lack of reference to existing coastal infrastructure results in piecemeal loss of quality and fragmentation of the unity of design which is such an attractive quality along these much-visited stretches of coast.

In some areas there was also a considerable build up of litter along the shore. This was often most acute at the heads of lochs or south-west facing bays. In some urban areas, such as Campbeltown, the amount of litter is possibly exacerbated by the presence of landfill sites on the loch¹⁹. The accumulation of litter along the coast between Helensburgh and Cardross was also noted. In rural areas there were a number of sites where litter was related to aquaculture (e.g. the head of Loch Striven) or camping (e.g. near Lachlan Castle on Loch Fyne).

The repair and reinstatement of railings and paving, painting and maintenance of street furniture and the removal of litter are all aspects of management which are relatively inexpensive but which would collectively make a significant positive contribution to the experience of the coast.

2.11 'Firth of Clyde wide' key issues

The following bullet points summarise the key issues which were identified in the overview of the Firth of Clyde.

- Proposed new developments in the sea and on the coast should take into account the inter-visibility across the Firth, which is reinforced by the amount and expanse of sea broadly contained by the mainland, which curves from Ayrshire to the Mull of Kintyre. The sweep of mainland also curves round major islands, such as Arran and the Isle of Bute, which further increase inter-visibility from the land and sea. The degree of inter-visibility also means that there are a number of recurring features, such as northern Arran and Ailsa Craig, which are focal points from many of the seascape areas.
- Proposed new developments in the sea and on the coast should take into account the diversity of the expanse of the sea across the Clyde, which contributes to the complexity of the seascape overall and to the diversity experienced when moving through the sea channels and around the coast.
- 'Transition areas', 'thresholds' or 'gateways' occur between stretches of sea where there is a dramatic change in scale and a marked sense of arrival. These are highly sensitive to poorly sited development which would distract

¹⁹ It was noted that this part of the coast, including Campbeltown Loch, is 'a litter sink where litter accumulates from the Clyde as a result of wind and tide' (pers. comm. Mark Steward, Argyll and Bute Council, 19th April 2013)

from this important experience, or be difficult to accommodate due to the abrupt change of scale.

- Proposed new developments in the sea and on the coast should take into account the changing play of light that influences visibility, as distant profiles change from simple silhouette to detailed form and back again often within a short space of time, and the clarity of light across the wider reaches of the Firth, that appears to highlight the fine detail of distant land masses.
- The Firth is used by a wide range of user groups. When considering the implications of changes to land use and management, it is important to take into account the experience from the sea. From the sea, the sense of space, especially in the central channels, is more apparent and the character of individual stretches of sea and the relationship between them is clear. In particular, whereas from the land, limited access by road fragments experience of some stretches of loch or seascape area, from the sea each seascape area is much more readily experienced in its entirety.
- The variety of coastal topography and features is extensive, and contributes significantly to experience of the coast. Proposals for the siting and design of development should therefore take into account impacts on any individual features and skylines, as any impacts on one feature may also diminish the experience of the diversity of features as a whole.
- All towns have their own distinct character, and there is an attempt in the individual coastal character area assessments to draw out broad distinctions in character between towns. Notably, some towns have a distinct seaside resort atmosphere, and during site visits it was noted that such areas are very popular – the activity creates a lively atmosphere.
- It was noted that while the presence of fishing and commercial shipping are of economic benefit to some towns, the harbour activity and the supporting businesses, such as boat repair yards, chandlers and sailmakers also add to the vibrant character of these towns – a less tangible but nevertheless important benefit.
- The quality of the waterfronts of key towns should be reviewed. While in some places – notably under the Argyll and Bute CHORD²⁰ scheme – this is already in place, smaller settlements, such as Ardrishaig, Arrochar and Ardrossan could similarly benefit from investment.
- The industry on the Firth of Clyde adds a further dimension to its seascape character. At key navigational junctions and busy sea ways there is always activity on the water, while in the busiest ports, the attraction of watching huge vessels berth and be offloaded adds to the diversity of coastal experience. The massive cranes are landmark features on the Clyde.

²⁰ Campbeltown, Helensburgh, Rothesay and Dunoon, all of which are on the Firth of Clyde, are set to benefit from major investment to their waterfronts and harbour areas. See: <http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/node/155>

Nevertheless, there are several areas of neglected or abandoned former industrial land, and while in some areas (notably in Inverclyde) redevelopment is on going and fast moving, further away from Glasgow these areas can be left to languish. This was notable at some of the Ayrshire towns, and at Ardyne in the Sound of Rothesay, near Arrochar at the head of Loch Long and the part-redeveloped Portavadie on Loch Fyne. Sympathetic and comprehensive redevelopment of these areas should be supported if opportunities arise.

- Lighting is important because the high amount of inter-visibility across the Firth ensures that lighting in one area can easily impinge upon the 'dark skies' experienced elsewhere. Excessive lighting on any new developments, including redeveloped sites and roads, should therefore be discouraged. Lighting plans should form a key part of any development proposals, and planning authorities should aim to reduce 'light pollution'.
- The variety, quantity and 'intactness' of archaeological sites along the coast is impressive. In some areas this features as a landscape characteristic, especially where a number of sites have a consistent relationship with topography. Proposals for land use or land management change should take into account the contribution these features make to landscape character and respect their wider setting and relationship to land form and geographic features, as well as any historic value they may have in their own right.
- Many stretches of sea, especially sea lochs, are contained by steep hillsides which are wooded. Woodland management plans for these forests should take into account views from the sea.
- Six key areas of isolated coast were identified in this study, in addition to significant stretches of remote and secluded coast. These are listed in section 2.9.3. The impressive diversity of character which can be experienced from land and sea around the Firth depends on the contrasts between coasts. It is important to retain the breadth of character, from thriving industrial ports to these most remote coasts. Proposals for development which might impact on the qualities of isolation which characterise these coasts should therefore be discouraged.
- The quality of hard landscape works along the settled stretches of coast reflects on the value people place on the coast and on their impressions of the towns and villages. This is such an important context for experiencing the sea, it is recommended that audits are prepared of the hard landscape works and grass areas along the coast of each settlement to identify where 'street furniture', such as paving, railings, bins, signage and seats associated with the promenades pavements and esplanades require reinstatement, repair or maintenance. These could be community initiatives. Funding to carry out repairs and maintenance would be required to support the outcomes of the audits.