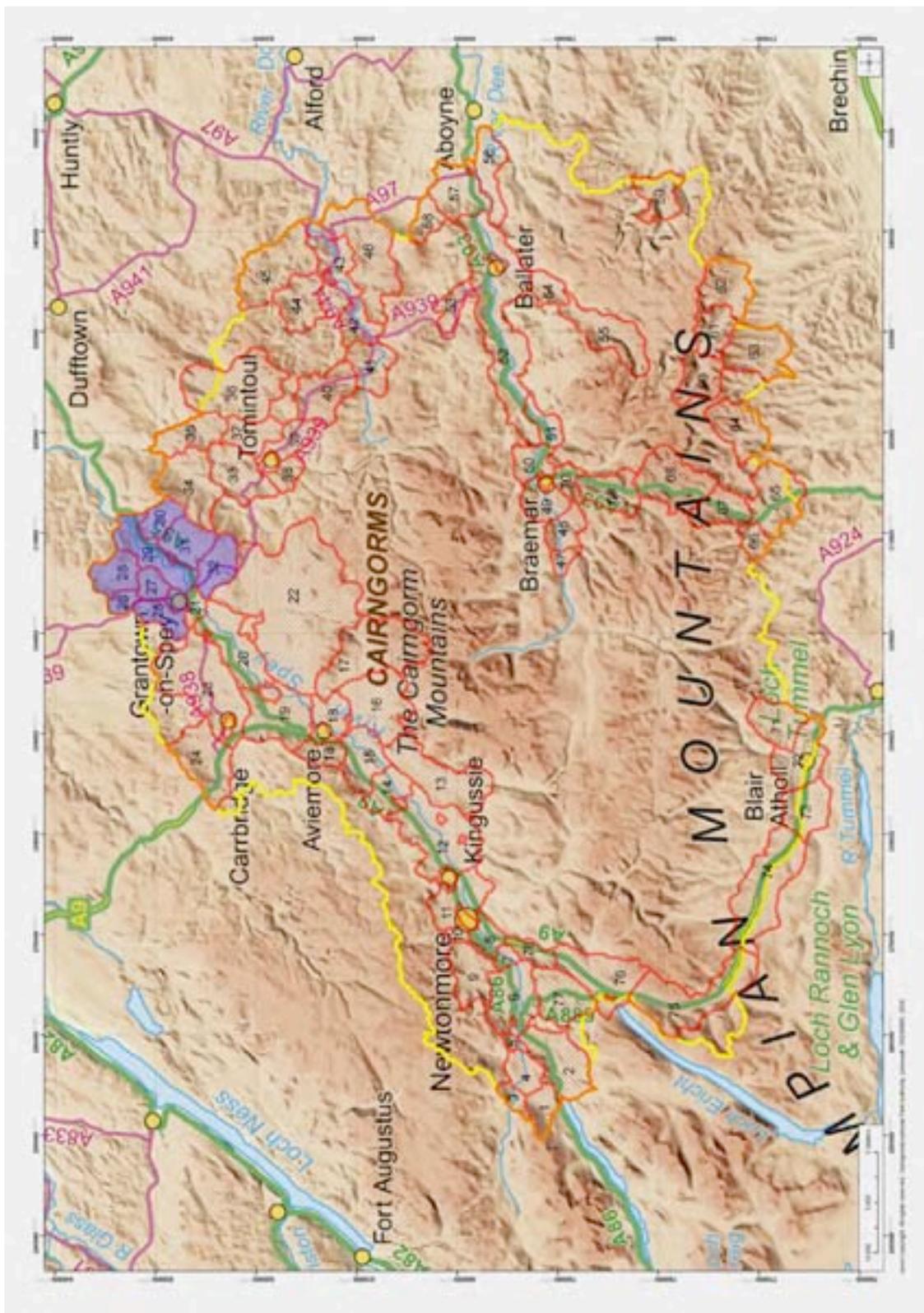


#### **4 LOWER SPEY AND CROMDALE**

This section of the LCA includes Strathspey north east of Grantown on Spey, including the strath as it follows the length of the River Spey, the Haughs of Cromdale and the glens which extend northwards into the Strathdearn Hills. This character assessment is presented as follows:

25. Lower Strathspey: **Glen Beg to Dava Moor**
26. Lower Strathspey: **Glen of the Allt an Fhithich**
27. Lower Strathspey: **Castle Grant and Tomvaich**
28. Lower Strathspey: **Auchnagallin and Blar Mòr**
29. **Lower Strathspey: Strathspey**
30. Lower Strathspey: **Burn of Dalvey Glen**
31. Lower Strathspey: **Haughs of Cromdale**
32. Lower Strathspey: **Tomintoul Road**

The numbers relate to the character areas identified on the following map.



4.1 Lower Strathspey: **Glen Beg to Dava Moor**



#### 4.1.1 *Landscape Character*

- These elevated, eastern orientated slopes and shallow valleys are part of the more complex surrounding landscape of undulating terrain, ridges and occasional steep sided gulleys which extend across the lower slopes of the Strathdearn Hills north of Grantown on Spey
- Undulating valley floors and better drained slopes are covered by relatively thick glacial deposits and are contained by low hills to the west, but slope downhill to lower Strathspey to the east
- Conifer woodland extends downhill from containing ridges and hills, often fragmenting into shelter woods and more extensive scattered broadleaved woodland between the individual farms
- More extensive broadleaved woodland in upper Glen Beg is established on steeper slopes and along watercourses between grazed fields
- The pattern of rectilinear, late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields is still very evident on better drained slopes, although in places the fields are reverting to rough grazing or disappearing under regenerating woodland
- The valley floors are often poorly drained, with previous pasture and fields sometimes reverting to wetland punctuated by loose clumps of woodland or even individual trees
- Across the whole area are dispersed late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century farmsteads, located on slightly higher ground or at the edge of drier farmed land, often surrounded by improved fields.
- Some of these farms have now been replaced with new houses occupying the same sites, and several have also been abandoned, especially where access is difficult
- There is a row of more recent housing, associated with small fields which may have been former small holdings, along the base of the glen, parallel to the A939
- Access, apart from the A939 which skirts the eastern edge of this area, is limited to narrow public roads and a network of farm tracks
- The embankment and structures associated with the former railway line which continues north over Dava Moor are a feature in the floor of the glen

#### 4.1.2 *Landscape experience*

- The area is elevated and 'upward facing', and as a result feels relatively detached from Grantown which lies in the strath below
- Views from these elevated slopes focus east to the Hills of Cromdale and are panoramic, as there is very little topographical containment

- More enclosure, created partly by woodland and partly by the embankments of the railway line, is experienced when travelling along the lower slopes on the A939
- The arrival into the Park from the north along the A939 is reinforced by the sense of enclosure created by the low wooded hills which form the southern edge of Dava moor

#### 4.1.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area offers panoramic views to the east and south. The backdrop to these panoramas are hills from more distant, mountainous character areas. Travelling into the Park from the north, the sense of arrival is further emphasised by the contrast between the enclosed woodland and small scale field pattern of this character area relative to the wide, open expanse of moorland across Dava Moor.

4.1.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

This area is strongly influenced by the agricultural improvements of the late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> centuries, which have informed the distribution of farms and shapes of the fields. However, former fields are in places reverting to wetland and new houses are replacing small farmsteads.



*Improved fields interspersed with areas of birch woodland on steeper slopes and along burns at the top of Glen Beg*



*Houses on farm sites set on higher, drier ground above pasture which is reverting to wetland*

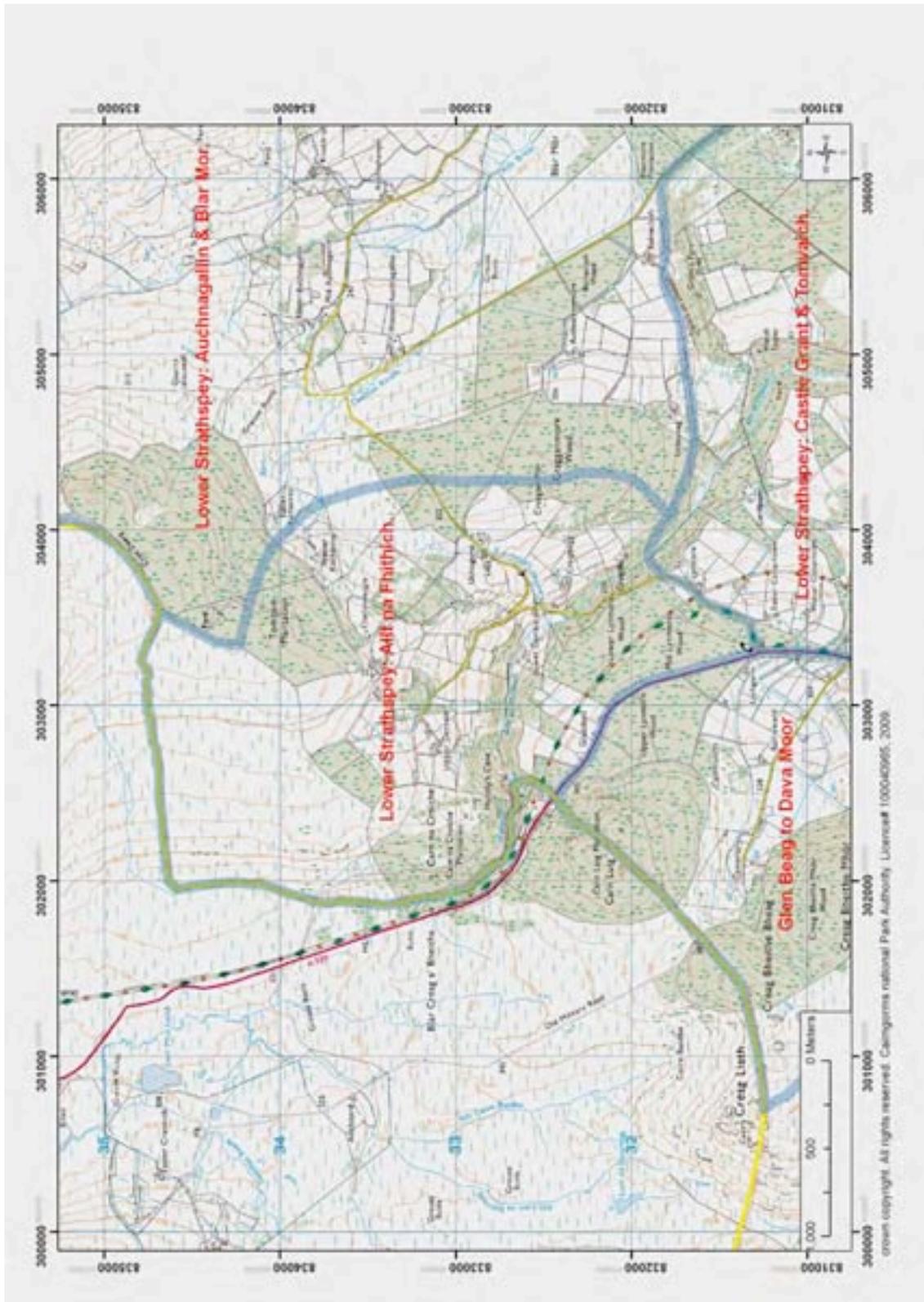


*Farms located on upper slopes, and conifer woodland extending down from the containing hills*



*From across these elevated slopes there are panoramic views east to the Hills of Cromdale*

4.2 Lower Strathspey: **Glen of Allt an Fhithich**



#### 4.2.1 *Landscape Character*

- Convex shaped slopes, locally overlain with glacial till rise above a complex land form of knolls, ridges and uneven terraces which leads down to the deep, narrow, sometimes rocky gorge of the fast flowing Allt an Fhithich – a former channel for glacial meltwater
- Open to the south, this landscape is backed by steeper, forest-covered slopes to the north, and is a complex mixture of interlocking farmland and woodland
- Diverse woodland, including dense broadleaves along the steep sided gorge, modest scattered birch woods between the fields and more extensive conifer woodlands across the upper slopes and ridgelines, adds to the overall visual complexity of the landscape
- The improved, rectilinear-shaped, late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century fields are relatively small
- These grassland fields are enclosed by ruined dykes which are now being replaced by fences
- Elevated farmsteads are clearly placed at the brow of the convex upper slopes, evenly spaced at a similar height above long sweeps of pasture, or sited directly above the river gorge on hummocks or raised terraces at the very base of the hill slopes
- Several abandoned farms have been renovated for residential use
- The narrow public road winds sinuously through this complex terrain, up and down the steep slopes and around the ridges, linking a network of farm access tracks
- The cliffs at Huntly's Cave are regularly used by practising climbers

#### 4.2.2 *Landscape experience*

- The tight interlock of topography, fields and woodlands reinforce the intimate scale and the complex topography along the lower slopes
- The small scale of the landscape is readily experienced from the narrow winding roads, which weave around the topography
- The views from the upper slopes are orientated southwards, where there is no topography to obstruct fine views to the Cairngorms
- Despite its relative proximity to Grantown, this area is relatively secluded, an impression which is reinforced by the narrow, often steep roads with light traffic

#### 4.2.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

The lower slopes of this character area are confined and self contained, while the upper slopes offer views of 'borrowed landscapes' well to the south of this character area.

#### 4.2.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

This is a diverse landscape of complex topography where there is a strong contrast between the elevated upper slopes with their panoramic views and the intimately scaled landform and pattern of fields and woodland reaching down to the steep sided gorge of the Allt an Fhithich. The complexity of this landscape is experienced on the narrow roads which wind between the hummocks and ridges.



*The more complex land form around the narrow gully of the Allt an Fhithich*



*High up farms are located at the brow of the convex slope, above pastures*



*From the upper slopes there are fine views to the south. A fence replaces a dyke in the foreground*



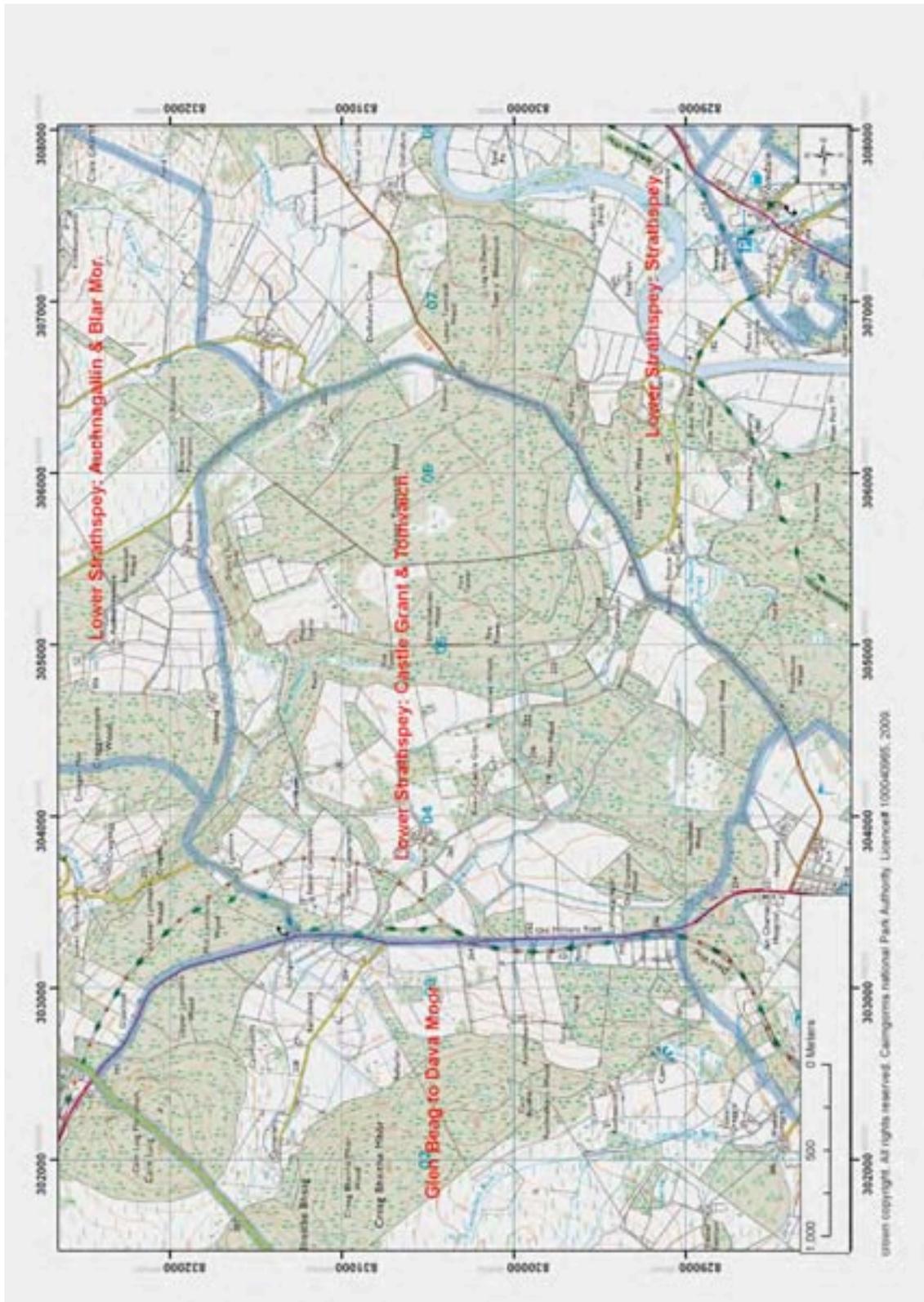
*Upper pastures on convex shaped slopes above the wooded river valley*



*Narrow roads wind through the complex landform*



**4.3 Lower Strathspey: Castle Grant and Tomvaich**



#### 4.3.1 *Landscape Character*

- This area of very low, rounded hills and a lower storey, undulating terrain of glacial-fluvial deposits separates Strathspey from the pass which extends up onto Dava Moor from Grantown on Spey
- The undulating terrain and long, low ridges with often interlocking land forms, creates a landscape of relatively small scale, hidden areas tucked in around the smooth, rounded hill slopes
- The Allt na Fhithich cuts through the middle of this area, the gorge, a former melt water channel, through which it cuts forming a dramatic feature to the north, before relaxing into a more gentle river valley as it extends south
- Extensive pine and broadleaved woodland, and smaller conifer shelter woods, alternate with large, regularly shaped 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields and occasional policy woods to reinforce the complexity of the landscape
- There are frequent stands of mature pine and broadleaved woodland associated with the wider policies of Castle Grant, while parkland provides the immediate setting for the castle. The designed landscape includes centuries of historic land use focussed round this ancient, fortified site
- Castle Grant, re-designed in the mid-late 18<sup>th</sup> century, is located on a long-established, elevated site and is visible from a number of surrounding hill sides
- The outer policies of the estate can be traced along a stone wall, which encircles a large part of this character area, and is reinforced by formal architectural features, such as stone gateposts and gatehouses at key entrances, all of which were added in the mid-late 18<sup>th</sup> century re-design
- While many of the buildings in the interior of this area are associated with Castle Grant, there are several houses and farms on the periphery
- The area is only accessible on private roads and vehicle tracks, as well as access tracks used by walkers, especially through the woodlands

#### 4.3.2 *Landscape experience*

- There is a sense of privacy experienced in this area, in part because of the undulating land form and extensive woodland, which hides much of the area, and in part because of the long estate wall, surrounding the long established estate policies and in part limiting access
- The sense of enclosure and small scale of the landform is reinforced by the hummocky terrain and the extensive woodland

4.3.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is relatively self-contained, especially from within, although it is overlooked by adjacent, more elevated character areas, especially from the north and west

4.3.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

This area is strongly influenced by the unifying sense of seclusion or privacy, including the extensive woodland and the subtle but containing landform and estate style architectural features, including the encircling stone wall.



*Large fields, here subdivided by a wall, on gently undulating terrain set within woodland*



*The complexity of the glacial-fluvial deposits within this character area, and the pattern of fields within woodland*



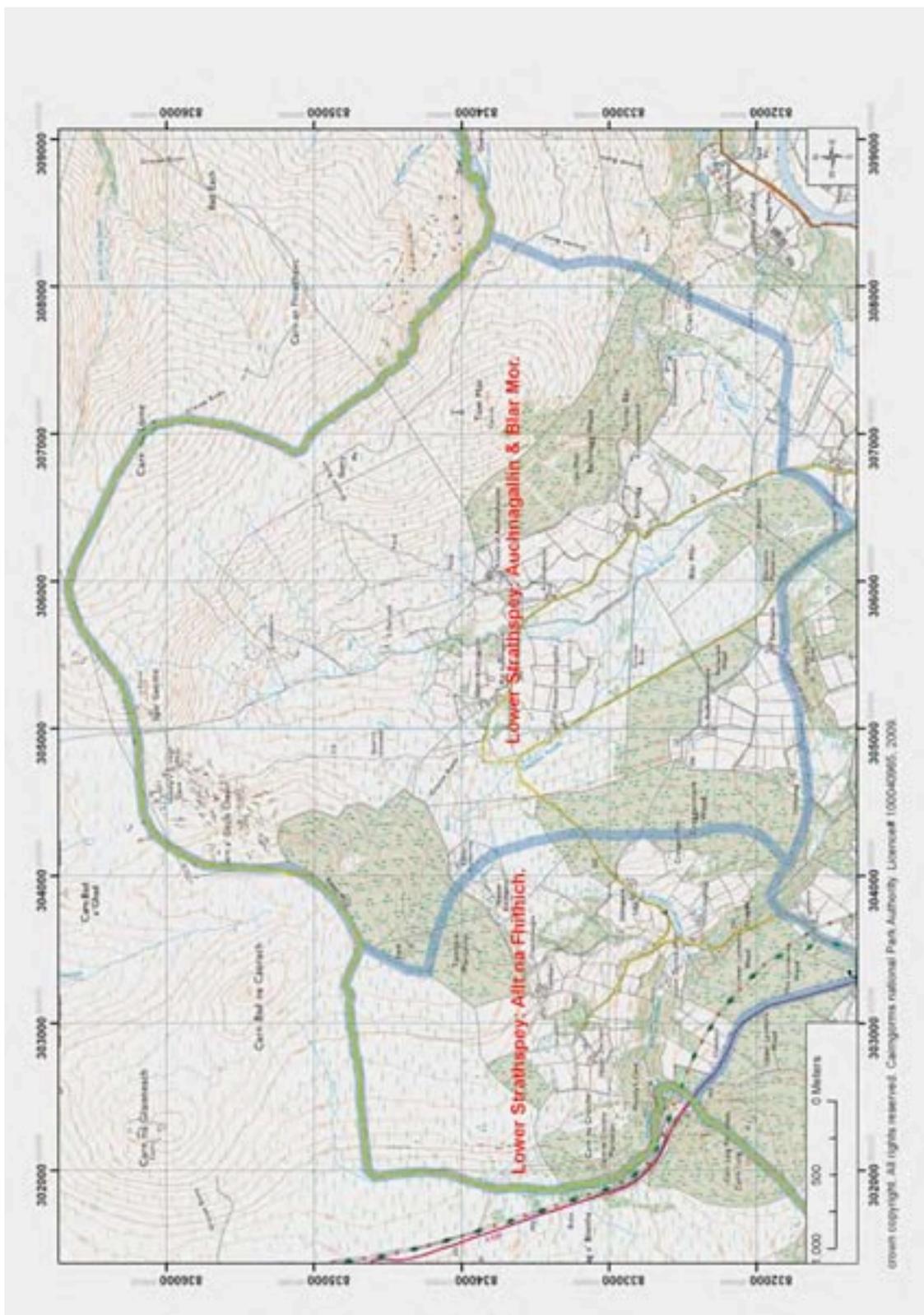
*Stands of mature pine are located across the area*



*A gatehouse – one of the most obvious architectural features which also reinforces the sense of 'privacy'*



4.4 Lower Strathspey: **Auchnagallin and Blar Mòr**



#### 4.4.1 *Landscape Character*

- This wide shallow bowl, which spills open into Strathspey to the south, is contained by low ridges with occasional, subtle summits
- A band of slightly hummocky, better drained glacial-fluvial deposit straddles the wide basin, below which lies an expanse of lowlying wetland, and above which rise steeper, heathery slopes
- Late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields, subdivided by walls, extend over these drier and less steeply graded gravelly deposits. Many of the walls are now neglected, and the field pattern is disappearing
- Occasional patches of bright green improved grazing sit across the elevated moorland to the north
- Conifer woodland extends along the length of the ridges to the east and west of this basin, while open moorland extends north, merging with Dava Moor beyond the Park
- Pockets of birch woodland, many of which are mature, large, well formed trees, are associated with watercourses or scattered in loose clumps across the farmland
- Some young conifer trees as well as birch and willow are seeding onto the lowlying Blar Mòr, an expanse of wet heath and rush which sits on peat
- There are also extensive areas of wet unimproved grazing on lower lying land at the mouth of the basin, where it meets with Strathspey
- Settlement, largely of late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century farmsteads is dispersed across the accessible pasture on the band of well drained gravelly deposit and avoids the wetter land to the south and north of this band
- Hedges, dominated by hawthorn, have been recently planted around many of the fields and along the roadsides, replacing field dykes or enclosing more expansive areas of unimproved grassland
- The narrow public road skirts around the wetter lowlying moor linking the farms

#### 4.4.2 *Landscape experience*

- The wide shallow basin and low relief of surrounding ridges creates a sense of openness which is reinforced by the expansive views south to the Cairngorms from elevated roads and settlement
- Despite its relative proximity to Grantown, this area is relatively secluded, an impression which is reinforced by the narrow roads which limit traffic

4.4.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is inter-visible with the Hills of Cromar. The openness and relative simplicity of the land form of this glen provides a marked contrast to the containment and complexity of the land form in the adjacent Glen of the Allt an Fhithich.

4.4.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The large stature of the birch trees is a striking feature of this glen, as is the relative naturalness of the Blar Mòr. There is a strong and clearly visible relationship between the band of well-drained, gravelly glacial deposit and the location of the settlement and fields.



*The field pattern, marked out by dykes, with conifer woodland above*



*Wetland of Blar Mòr, with woodland beginning to encroach*



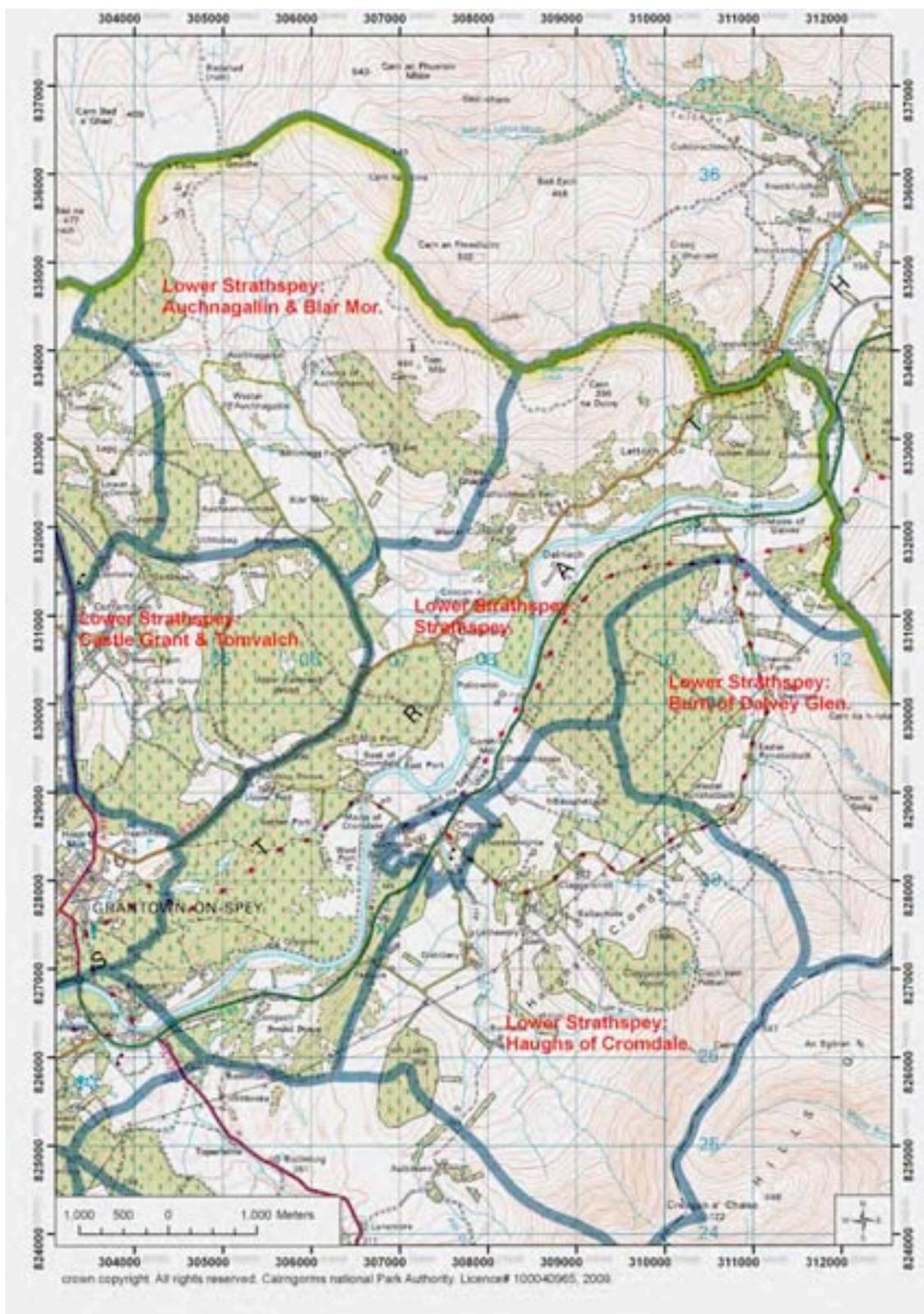
*Rough grazing with birch woodland in the foreground, and fields and farms on the band of better drained land*



*Woodland scattered across the improved grassland with a new hedge in the foreground*



### 4.5 Lower Strathspey: Strathspey



#### 4.5.1 Landscape Character

- The River Spey forms a rhythmical series of wide meanders along this part of Strathspey, having worked glacial-fluvial deposits to create a sequence of bow-shaped flats within the bends of the river, each contained by elevated terraces or sloping hillsides
- The strath is at this point much narrower than Strathspey south of Grantown, and is framed by steep hillsides, with several prominent summits, between which side valleys extend into the Hills of Cromdale to the south east and the Strathdearn Hills to the north west
- North west of the River Spey, extensive, hummocky fluvial deposits and river terraces are largely hidden from view under conifer woodland
- The sides of the strath, and even some of the river flats, are also densely wooded, with extensive areas of commercial conifer forest, including pine, and occasional large broadleaved woodlands
- In addition, a network of linear woodland features, such as riparian woodland, shelter woods and woods associated with the steep banks of terraces, criss-crosses the farmed land
- Relatively regularly shaped, late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields are confined to the most level areas of land, including the river flats, some well-drained glacial-fluvial terraces and gentle slopes associated with mouths of the side valleys
- The farmed land is largely grassland, but includes arable crops and some areas of wetland and rough grazing, with scattered birch woodland occasionally encroaching onto the less grazed land
- Large 'forest' trees, such as oak and ash, and occasional policy woodland associated with lodges and larger farms add to visual diversity
- Settlement, with the exception of the village of Cromdale, is dispersed, with large farms even on the lower river flats as well as the upper terraces, and lodges with associated estate buildings and infrastructure placed on elevated sites, overlooking the river
- Cromdale is located on a well-drained terrace beside the mouth of a side glen, at the confluence between the Burn of Cromdale and the Spey and close to a crossing point of the Spey
- The A95 tends to occupy the elevated terraces on top of steep banks above the river flats east of the River, but travels close to the Spey, constrained by the hills on the eastern side of the valley
- The B9102 follows a course generally much more distant from the Spey to the west, loosely following a break in slope at the edge of the strath

- The pine woodland, especially Anagach wood, is well used for informal recreation, and the Speyside Way follows the line of the strath, although it is almost entirely set within woodland

#### 4.5.2 *Landscape experience*

- A pronounced sequence of enclosed forest followed by open, relatively level farmed terraces is experienced when travelling on the elevated roads, although views are in part screened by regenerating woodland
- The elevated A95 also offers occasional glimpse views of the river and lower terraces, but frequently views are obscured by roadside woodland

#### 4.5.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is largely self-contained, although there are occasional glimpses into side valleys from elevated viewpoints. It provides a narrower, more densely wooded contrast to the more open Strathspey south of Grantown.

4.5.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The rhythmic spacing and distinct shape of the bow-shaped river flats is a particular feature of this part of the Spey, the rhythm of which is partly complemented by the alternating sequence of farmed open space and enclosed woodland experienced when travelling along the roads.



*The network of linear woodland features criss-crosses the farmed land along the strath floor*



*The low lying river flats are sometimes farmed, or, as in this case, are reverting to wetland and woods*



*Settlement is located on the farmed land, here on a pronounced river terrace*



*Riparian woodland along the river, and conifer woodland across the steeper hill slopes*



#### 4.6.1 *Landscape Character*

- This relatively narrow, north/south winding valley sits between the steep sided, concave spurs which form the formidable north-western face of the Hills of Cromdale and the concave slopes of Tom an Uird Hill
- The glen floor is a narrow strip of fluvial-glacial deposit which slopes down to the burn, while there are more gentle gradients across the glacial till on upper slopes. It may well be an ancient meander of the River Spey, and it has not been greatly affected by glacial erosion
- The hill of Tom an Uird is entirely covered with conifer forest, which also extends in sporadic blocks down to the glen floor, creating shelter woods between farms and fields
- In addition, there are occasional small woodlands adjacent to the road which further enhance shelter
- The relatively flat, bulky face of the Hills of Cromdale is divided by a series of deep valleys cut by watercourses to form dry ridges which are covered in heather which is actively burnt to maintain grouse moor
- Small fields sit on both the sides of the burn, sheltered in the narrow glen, and occupying better drained land
- The broadly rectilinear, late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields are larger on the more expansive flanks of hillside at the mouth of the glen
- Crops include re-seeded grassland and unimproved grassland, but several have also reverted to heather and wetland, or have been planted with conifers, creating a diverse mixture of colours and textures
- Late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century farmsteads are frequently and relatively evenly dispersed along the narrow public road. Many, but not all, are still in use, and broadly retain their original compact architectural style
- The narrow public road sits relatively high up the west side of this narrow glen, linking the farms

#### 4.6.2 *Landscape experience*

- This area is secluded, 'hidden' away from the main roads and is not densely settled
- The survival of the well defined, pattern of the late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century distribution of regular fields and farms, as well as the period architectural style, creates a landscape of relative historic integrity

4.6.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This area is relatively self-contained, although the wide sweep of the Hills of Cromdale is a strong presence.

4.6.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

The pattern of compact, late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century farms and their associated relatively small fields along the length of the glen is a consistent and unifying characteristic. The small scale of the glen, fields and farm buildings contrasts with the looming presence of the Hills of Cromdale.



*Small fields along the Dalvey Burn, partially enclosed by the conifer woodland extending down from Tom an Uird*



*Small farms close to the road*



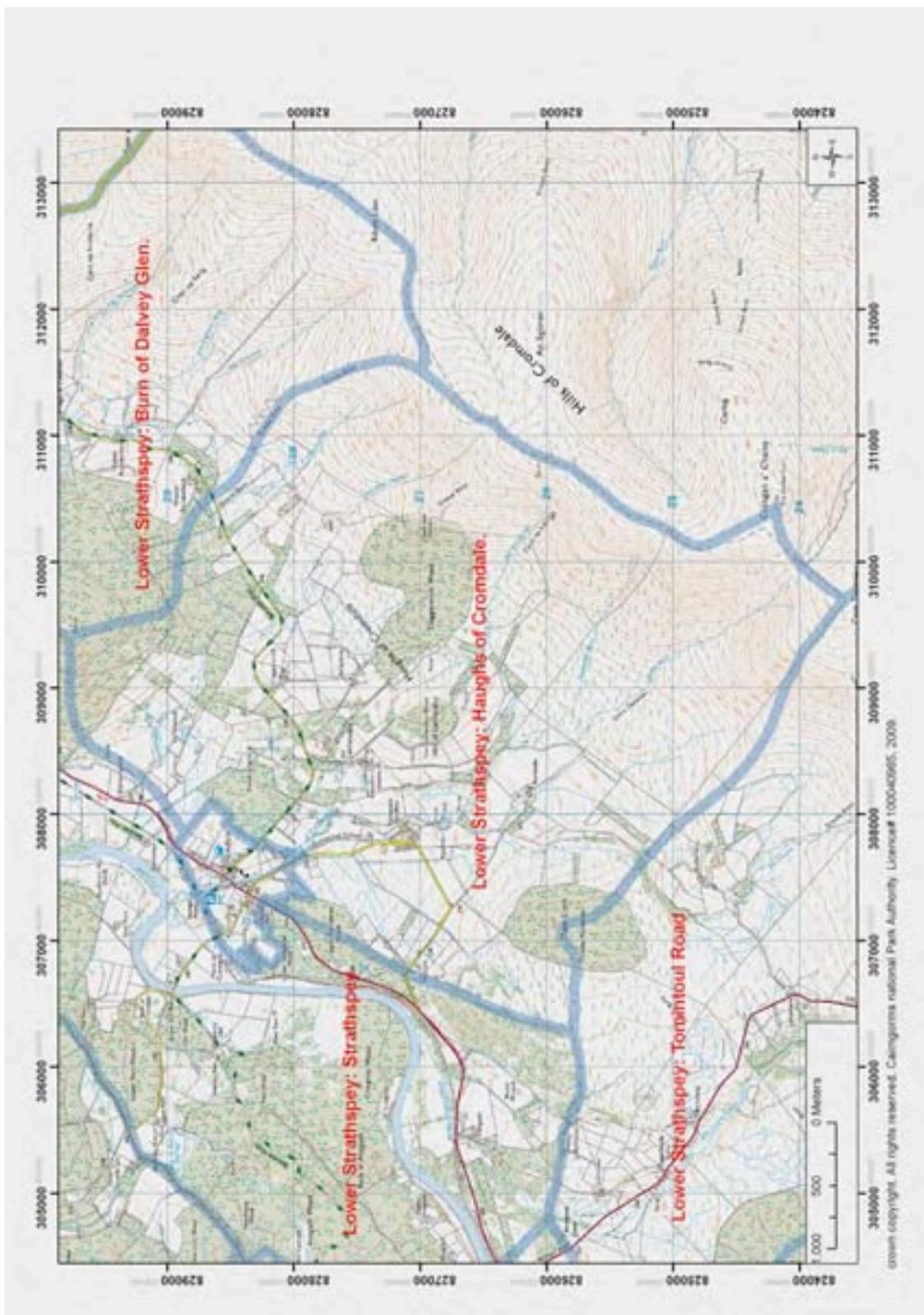
*Fields fringe the edge of the moorland along the base of the Hills of Cromdale*



*The narrow road sits above the burn, overlooking the small fields*



**4.7 Lower Strathspey: Haughs of Cromdale**



#### 4.7.1 *Landscape Character*

- These two shallow side glens extend at right angles from the main valley of Strathspey in a south easterly direction, towards the lower slopes of the smooth, rounded ridges of the Hills of Cromdale
- The glens are wide bowls, containing glacial till, flanked by low ridges and hills and drained by a series of small burns which flow into wet, boggy low lying basins at the mouth of each glen. They may well be an ancient floor of the River Spey
- Conifer woodland occupies some of the low hills and ridges, but the steep, north west facing slopes of the hills of Cromdale are actively managed heather grouse moor
- There are occasional conifer shelterbelts on the farmed land, and broadleaves, largely associated with Lethendry, where there are also remains of a castle and designed landscape
- The late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields are large and regularly shaped, located on drier sloping ground above the wetland, in a wide band along the sides of the glens
- Grassland dominates, but there are also some arable crops, as well as signs of reversion to unimproved grassland and wetland on the less well drained slopes.
- Settlement is in clearly defined clusters at Feabuie and the distillery, associated with drier ridges, although more recent development has strayed onto wetter land
- The village of Cromdale, adjacent to the Burn of Cromdale, sits where the side glens meet Strathspey
- Farms, including occasional abandoned farm sites, are dispersed across the drier slopes, often located above the pastures, overlooking the glens, with areas of pre-medieval/prehistoric farming even higher up-slope along the 300m contour
- These slopes were the location for the Battle of Cromdale – the closing confrontation between Jacobite and Government troops in the first rising of 1689-90
- The public roads are narrow, and skirt the edges of the wetland, linking the main settlements on slightly higher ground

#### 4.7.2 *Landscape experience*

- This dramatic, steep, north western face of the Hills of Cromdale provides a formidable backdrop

- The sparse woodland across the floors of the glens combines with the wetland to emphasise an open character, which is further reinforced by the lack of high enclosure to the north west
- The reversion of fields to wetland creates an impression that the land is in transition, and slowly reverting to a more natural character

#### 4.7.3 Relationship to adjacent character areas

This area is strongly influenced by the Hills of Cromdale, which are a powerful presence, and in contrast, the area is relatively open to the north, where views extend to the more distant landscape of the Strathdearn Hills.

#### 4.7.4 Assessment of distinctiveness

The formidable backdrop of the Hills of Cromdale, as well as the sense of a landscape which is undergoing change – particularly reverting to a more natural, wetland dominated valley floor – are dominant characteristics.



The formidable flanks of the Hills of Cromdale rise above fields subdivided by occasional conifer shelterbelts



Wetland across lower lying slopes and the bottom of the basin, and views north across Strathspey to the Strathdearn hills



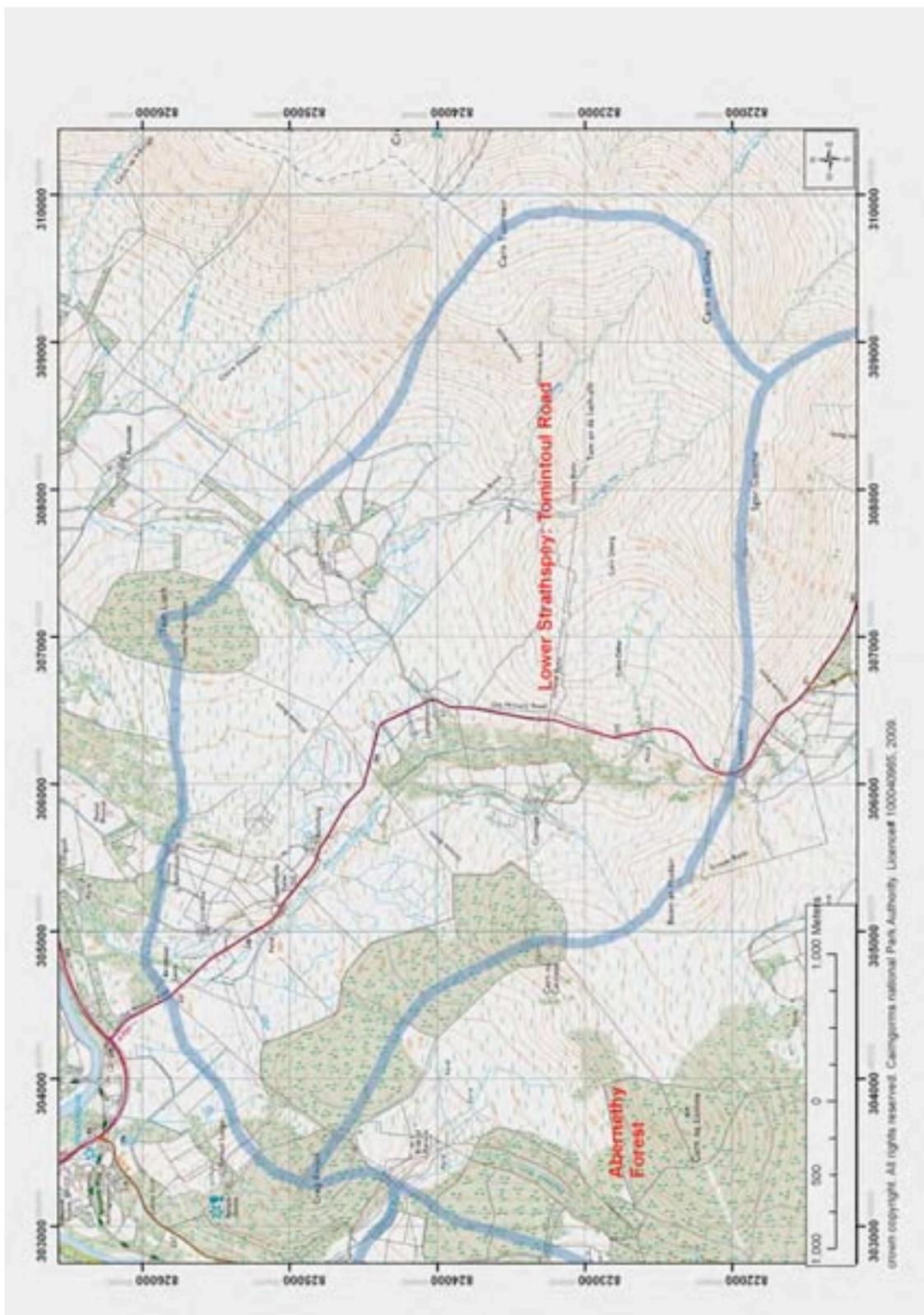
Settlement occupies very subtle ridges of higher land above the wetland



Arable crops, as well as grassland, are grown on drier slopes in this area



4.8 Lower Strathspey: **Tomintoul Road**



#### 4.8.1 *Landscape Character*

- This shallow basin faces north west, elevated above a steeply incised gorge with low ridges to the east and west providing subtle containment, and the steep flanks of the Hills of Cromdale forming a dramatic enclosure to the south
- This an older valley, which has been left elevated above Strathspey by glacial erosion deepening the trench of the main strath as the ice flowed from Grantown northwards across Dava Moor
- The side slopes are gentle and elevated, with occasional, small, drier ridges sitting slightly above shallow bowls of poorly drained wet heath
- The gorge of the Allt Choire Odhair becomes steeper and more incised towards the watershed where it has incised a well defined and dramatic steep sided pass, a former melt water channel, at Lynebreck,
- The upper reaches of the gorge are hidden within dense broadleaved woodland
- Conifer woodland is located on some of the low summits which contain the bowl, reinforcing the subtle enclosure
- There is widespread woodland regeneration, extending up tributary watercourses from the Allt Choire Odhair, and across the moorland at the head of the glen
- In addition, there are a few small stands of Scots pine, largely associated with farm buildings, which form slightly overgrown shelter woods
- Late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century farmsteads with associated straight-edged improved fields are located on free draining ridges along the upper edge of the river valley, although Aultcharn is perched at a higher level
- Each patch of fields is bright green, a contrast to the heather moorland
- The two lane A939 sits east of the gorge, set back from the immediate edge, partially following the line of the old Military road

#### 4.8.2 *Landscape experience*

- There is a dramatic sense of arrival when reaching the narrow pass at Lynebreck, when travelling in either direction along the A939
- The sense of ascent and descent up and down the A939 through this basin is emphasised by the continuous, even gradient of the road
- There are panoramic views over Strathspey and north to the Strathdearn Hills when descending the A939
- Outwith the deep, steep-sided river valley, the shallow glen seems open and expansive

4.8.3 *Relationship to adjacent character areas*

This shallow glen is a threshold between the expanse of Abernethy and the rounded, convex slopes of the hills to the south and the approach to Strathspey to the north.

4.8.4 *Assessment of distinctiveness*

Settlement is largely limited to the individual farmsteads, which form a clear pattern sitting within bright green improved fields on drier ridges, contrasting with the heather. There is a strong sense of drama which builds up as a traveller approaches the pass at Lynebreck, and the views either north or south are suddenly revealed.



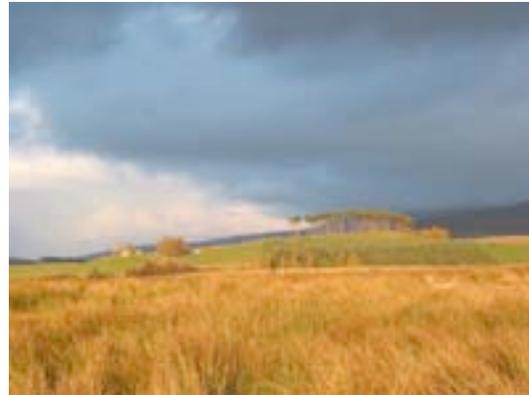
*The wide shallow basin of the valley, with the Hills of Cromdale in the background*



*The dense broadleaved woodland in the gorge*



*Extensive conifer woods across the upper slopes to the west of the gorge*



*The farm at Aultcharn, on a drier ridge, with a shelter wood of pine above late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century improved fields*



*Regenerating pine in the foreground of the view north at the dramatic pass at Lynebreck. Green fields perched on the edge of the gorge in the middle distance*