



# THE OCHIL HILLS

## THE GEOGRAPHY OF A SPECIAL PLACE

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*Prepared with the support of Friends of the Ochils*

2017

# THE OCHIL HILLS

## THE GEOGRAPHY OF A SPECIAL PLACE (THIRD EDITION)

*AN ANALYSIS OF THE PHYSICAL, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ASPECTS  
WHICH MAKE THE OCHIL HILLS - “A SPECIAL PLACE”*

*"... five square feet of Scottish hillside would take a man a lifetime to describe, and even then how lame,  
how empty ...,"*

*Robert Louis Stevenson*

## PREFACE

The Ochil Hills, are a familiar horizon and popular recreation area for the people of Central Scotland. They also provide a range of “ecosystem services” - collecting rainfall and regulating runoff to several flood-prone rivers; providing economic benefits through hill farming, forestry and renewable energy; creating wildlife habitats and reminding us of Scotland’s culture and history.

The Ochils have always been subject to change but in recent years these changes have accelerated. There is more rain, more flooding, changed subsidies, fewer sheep, more cattle, more fences, more forests, more wind turbines, bigger pylons, more people, more cars, more bikes, more litter, more development pressures. These societal changes are reflected in the decisions of the three planning authorities - Clackmannanshire, Stirling and Perth and Kinross. The impact of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union is yet to be determined.

This document seeks to provide some background information about the Ochil Hills and to raise awareness of their values, benefits and challenges as they face these changes.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author acknowledges the help of many people and organisations. Much research about the Ochil Hills has been published in the Annual Reports of *The Forth Naturalist and Historian* between 1975 and 2016. Other sources are listed at the end of this document. Many individuals have been generous with their time and expertise, particular thanks go to the Committee and members of *Friends of the Ochils* for their patient and unstinting support.

Drew Jamieson, June 2017.





*FIGURE 1: Notional boundary of the Ochil Hills (Google Earth)*

## KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- A discrete upland area highly visible from a large part of Central Scotland and clearly contrasting with the surroundings lowlands of Strathearn, Strathallan, the carselands of Stirling and Clackmannanshire and the basin of Kinross.
- A distinctive landscape of high relative relief, rising from almost sea level in Clackmannanshire to the highest summit in Central Scotland – Ben Cleuch (721m) - over a short distance.
- Diverse land-use and habitats – farming, forestry, water supply, recreation, renewable energy - closely associated with key Scottish historical, cultural and industrial events.
- A landscape characterised by high open plateaux and the juxtaposition of hill, glen, field and forest, farm and village and with a distinctive “sense of place” recognised by local communities as - *The Ochils*.
- A popular recreation area providing healthy open air activity for a large part of Central Scotland but coming under increasing pressure from recreation and development. Half of Scotland’s population live within an hour’s drive of the Ochils.
- Provides opportunities for landscape improvement, recreation management, community involvement, job creation and integrated planning.



*Grey recumbent tombs of the dead in desert places,  
Standing stones on the vacant wine-red moor;  
Hills of sheep, and the howes of the silent vanished races,  
And winds, austere and pure:..*

Robert Louis Stevenson “*Songs of Travel*”. 1895



## ”AMANG THE OCHILS”

The Ochil Hills are a familiar sight across much of Central Scotland. They give the backdrop to those great national landmarks, the Wallace Monument and Stirling Castle. They are the hills that greet the visitor travelling north, by train or car, towards Stirling – the first real hills – a preview of Scotland’s northern mountains. The Ochils massif rises dramatically from the flat farmlands of the carse and their southern face provides a steep, sometimes craggy, backdrop to the conservation villages of Blairlogie and Muckhart and the Hillfoots towns of Menstrie, Alva, Tillicoultry and Dollar. Northwards from these Hillfoots towns run a series of deeply-incised glens, each with its very special attractions, and its own character.



*Dumyat - in the western Ochils*

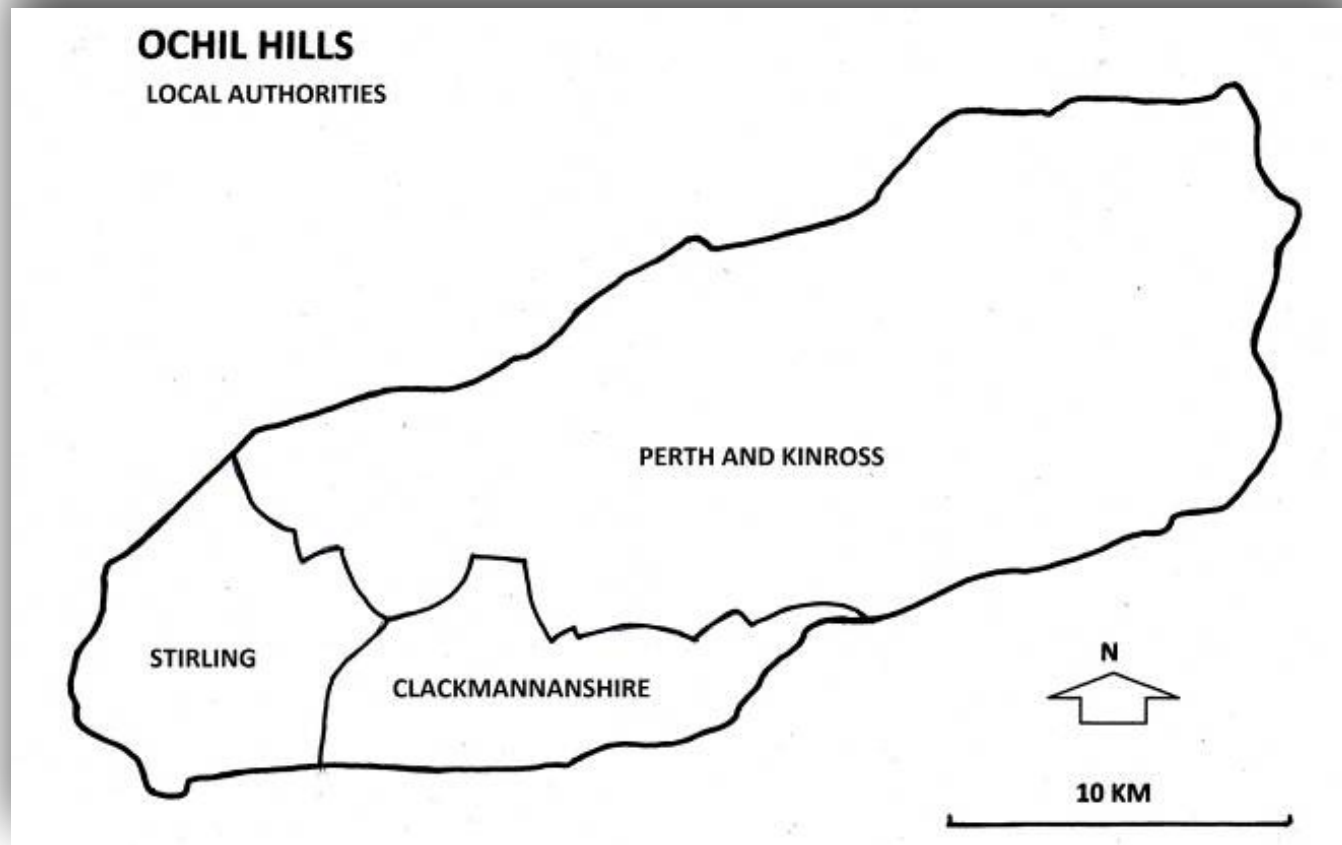
While the western Ochil Hills are the most spectacular, the full range of hills recognized by local communities as “*The Ochils*”, extends north and east, across the deep Glen Devon, and on towards the rivers Earn and Tay. The eastern Ochils are lower in altitude, with broader valleys, but providing a characteristic juxtaposition of hill, valley, farm and forest within a well-defined upland area towards Glen Farg.



*Eastern Ochils - near Dunning*

Although the geological structure of Old Red Sandstone lavas, continues into north-east Fife, the hills lose much of their presence and cohesion in this area. A reasonable boundary for the Ochil Hills is shown in Figure 1, bounded by roads, and stretching from Dunblane in the west to Glen Farg in the east. The Ochils lie within the boundaries of three local authorities – Stirling, Clackmannanshire and Perth and Kinross - (Map 1) with separate responsibilities for planning, recreation and other services within the Ochil Hills.





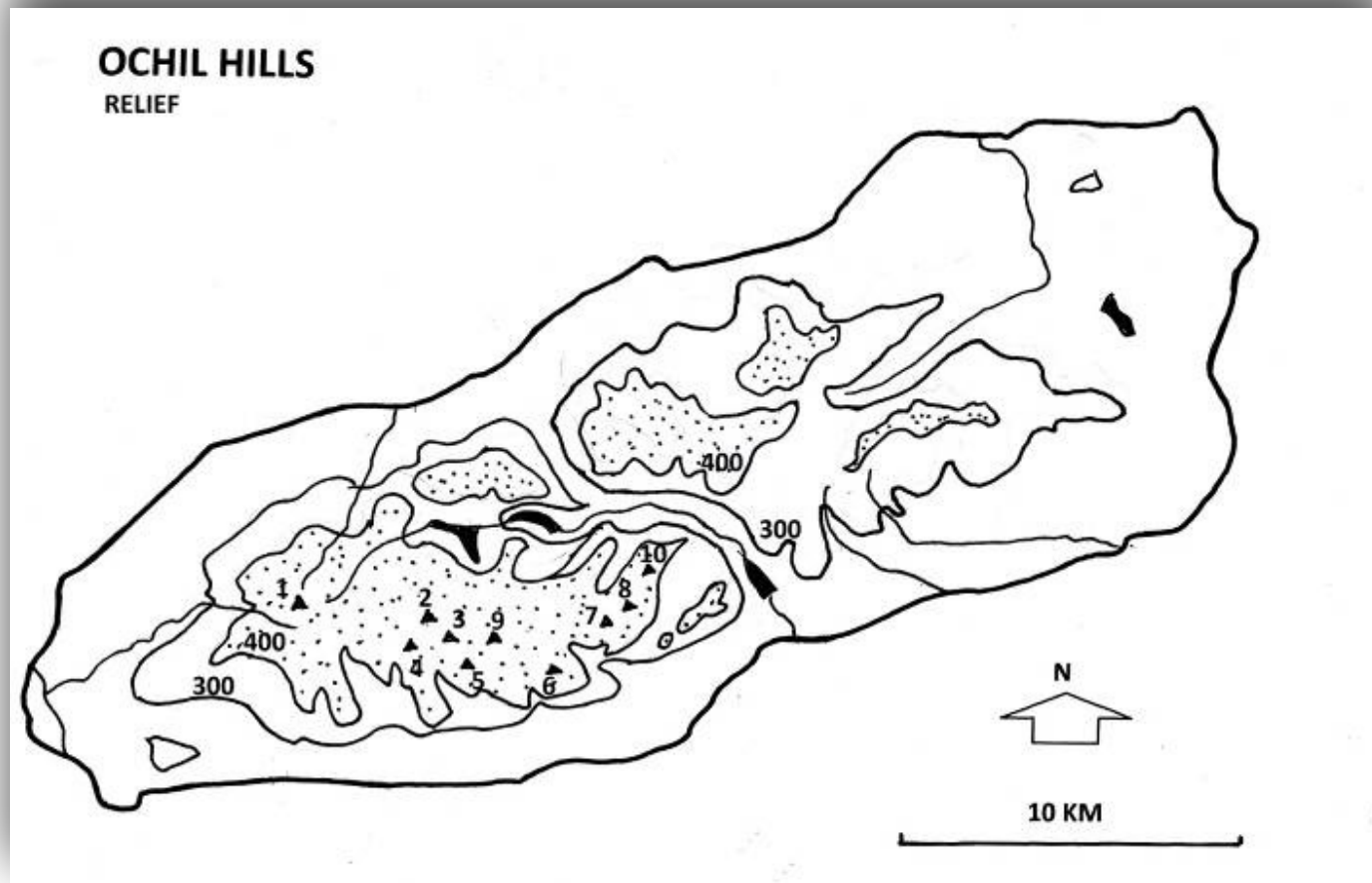
*MAP 1: Local Authorities*

## NATURAL HERITAGE

**The Physical Landscape.** The Ochil Hills are formed from volcanic rocks of the Old Red Sandstone age – the Ochil Volcanic Formation – which erupted some 400 million years ago, from an ancient volcano, or volcanoes, probably located to the south of the present hills and now buried under the younger rocks of the Midland Valley. The main lava flows are of basalt and andesite with inter-bedded pyroclastic conglomerates of rocks and ash. The total thickness of the combined sequence is estimated at 2500 metres and the layers of rock slope, or dip, towards the north and east. The dramatic southern escarpment of the Ochils marks the line of the Ochil Fault, where the southern part of the earth's crust dropped some 1100 metres, protecting the Coal Measures from erosion and safeguarding the Clackmannanshire coalfield. Since their initial formation the Ochil rocks have been subjected to multiple processes, at different times, of erosion, uplift, faulting, submergence, deposition and glaciation. Each of those processes has had some effect on the present shape of the land.

Map 2 shows a simplified version of a complex physical landscape of the Ochils. Carved by water and ice out of Old Red Sandstone volcanic lavas, tuffs and agglomerates, the Ochils form a shallow asymmetric dome with their highest point in Ben Cleuch (721 m) – the highest summit in Central Scotland. The plateau falls away to the west and particularly to the north and east to modest altitudes of less than 300 metres on the Perth and Kinross side of the range. The plateau is deeply incised by streams (burns) particularly on the southern slopes. These glens form dramatic features on the face of the Ochils and provide recreational access from the Hillfoots towns and villages.

There are 60 hills in the Ochils over 300 metres high (984 feet) with a drop all round of at least 30 metres. The hills can be divided into three groups: *Western Ochils* – west of the A832 through Glen Eagles and Glen Devon (containing the highest summits), *Eastern Ochils* – east of the B934 from Dunning to Yetts o'Muckhart, and the *Northern Ochils* – wedged centrally between these two roads. Map 2 shows the main summits in excess of 600 metres. Most of the water features are man-made reservoirs but the open water adds considerably to the interest and diversity of the landscape, particularly in the Glen Devon area.



*MAP 2: Simplified Relief (Contours At 300 And 400 Metres)*

**Summits over 600 metres:** 1. Blairdenon. 2. Ben Buck. 3. Ben Cleuch (721m). 4. Ben Ever. 5. The Law. 6. Kings Seat. 7. White Wisp. 8. Tarmangie. 9. Andrew Gannel Hill. 10. Innerdownie.

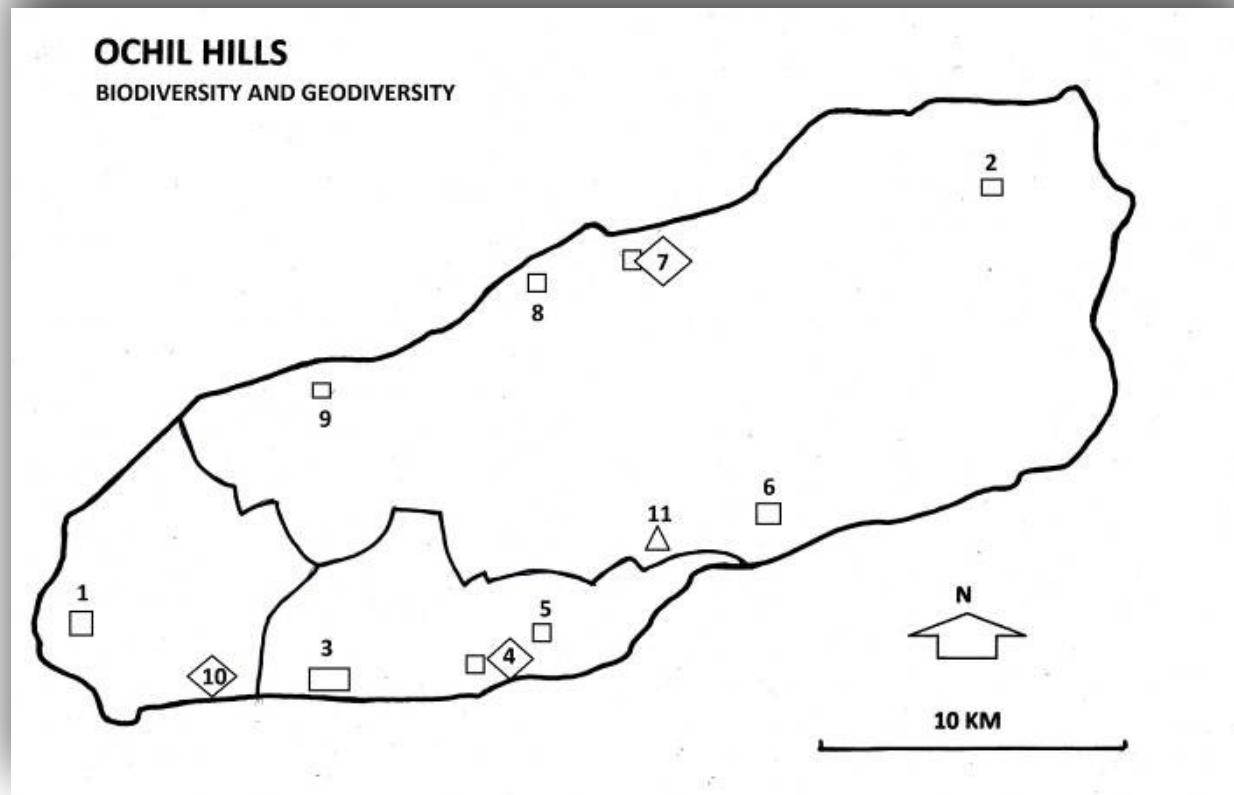
**Natural Diversity.** As a result of generations of man-made modification, most of the original habitats of the Ochil Hills have been degraded through woodland clearance and grazing. Many of the species have been reduced or eliminated. Nevertheless, the Ochils still retain some key species and habitats and have the potential for considerable enhancement.

There are nine Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within the study area: Kippenrait Glen; Pitkeathly Mires; Craigleith and Myreton; Mill Glen, Tillicoultry; Dollar Glen; Glenqueich,; Craig Rossie; Kincardine Castle Wood and Quoig's Meadow. Two of the sites – Kippenrait Glen and Pitkeathly Mires – are also designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) under the European Union Species and Habitats Directive. There are a further four Geological Conservation Review (GCR) sites - Dumyat, Tillicoultry and Craig Rossie and a locally-designated geodiversity site at Glenquey Moss, part of the post-glacial "Lake Devon". (Map 3).

The Clackmannanshire Biodiversity Action (BAP) describes the main habitats of this part of the Ochils as: *"acid grassland, upland heathland, blanket bog, some exposed rock and small patches of calcareous grassland. Of particular interest is the 10km of exposed linear rock along the south of the Ochils, which supports a variety of rare plants and animals .....and the glens which provide sheltered areas that are quite inaccessible and are therefore at less risk of disturbance, enabling a variety of species to thrive."* The Tayside Partnership BAP also has action plans for wet grasslands, hedgerows, tree-lines, stone dykes and farm steadings which are all relevant to the Ochil Hills.

Blanket bog is a UK Priority Habitat. In the Ochils, Alva Moss (300 hectares), Menstrie Moss (5 hectares) and a smaller area at Maddy Moss, should act as water storage and "carbon sinks" but are showing significant erosion. This may have impacts on flood risk, carbon emissions and biodiversity. Glenquey Moss has characteristics of both blanket bog and raised and also has significant geodiversity interest. Acid Grassland is the predominant habitat in the uplands and can include other UK Priority sites - Upland Heathland and Upland Flushes, Fens and Swamps. The Ochils also support key species such as the Sticky Catchfly plant and Northern Brown Argus butterfly, together with a number of bird species in the Red List of the "Birds of Conservation Concern" including the black grouse, ring ouzel, skylark, linnet and twite.





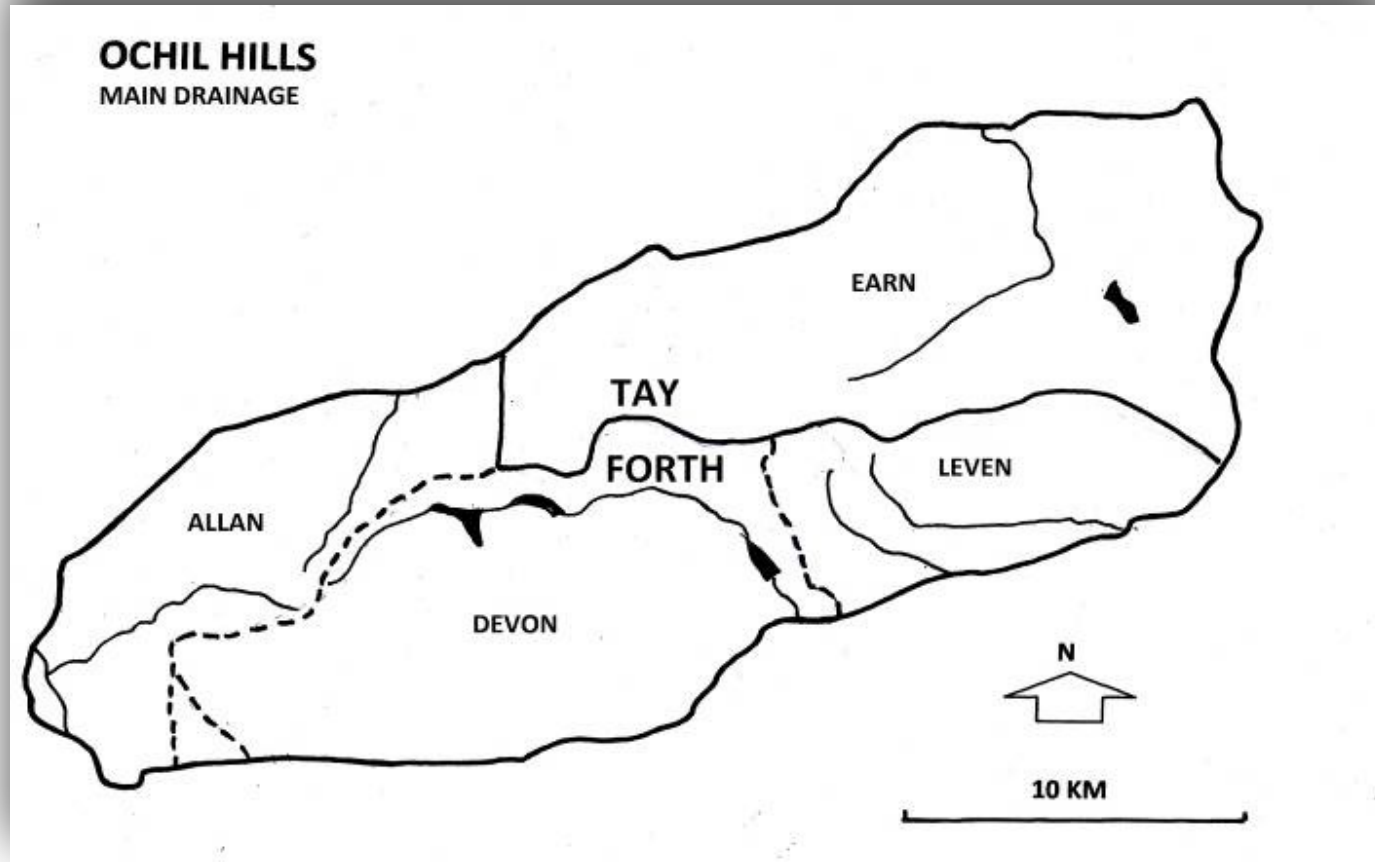
*MAP 3: Biodiversity And Geodiversity Sites.*

**SSSIs** - 1. Kippenrait Glen, 2. Pitkeathly Mires, 3. Craigleith and Myreton, 4. Mill Glen, Tillicoultry, 5. Dollar Glen, 6. Glen Queich, 7. Craig Rossie, 8. Kincardine Castle Wood and 9. Quoig's Meadow. **Special Areas of Conservation:** 1. Kippenrait Glen and 2. Pitkeathly Mires. **Geological Conservation Review Sites** : 4. Tillicoultry, 7. Craig Rossie, 10. Dumyat. **Locally designated geodiversity site** – 11. Glenquey Moss and site of post-glacial Lake Devon.

Both Tayside and Clackmannanshire BAPs identify “water”, in the shape of streams and burns, as important habitats both for fish and as corridors for other animals and birds. The rivers and burns habitat consists not only of the watercourse itself - the “wetted channel”, but also the bank and associated land or riparian zone. The Ochils act as a watershed between the major rivers - Forth and Tay. (Map 4) They are drained by the headwaters of four tributary rivers – the River Earn to the north, leading into the Tay; the rivers Allan and Devon leading to the Forth in the south and the South and North Queichs feeding Loch Leven and ultimately the Forth estuary through the River Leven in Fife. In recent years, flooding has become more frequent in the Hillfoot villages and Milnathort. The rivers and burns support brown trout *Salmo trutta*. The Allan, Earn and Devon also carry the migratory version, the sea trout, and the Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar*; a UK BAP priority fish species.

A number of initiatives are underway to enhance the biodiversity of the Ochils, including the Ochils Landscape Partnership, the Woodland Trust’s “Rewilding Glen Devon” project and the River Forth Fisheries Trust.

- The *Ochils Landscape Partnership* was a £2.26 million pound programme of 22 projects over three years to 2015. The projects designed to improve the environment and amenity of the “Hillfoots” with benefits for biodiversity, including clearance of non-native invasive species, planting of native tree species and works enhance the enjoyment of the Ochils countryside.
- In the *Rewilding Glen Devon Project* Woodland Trust (Scotland) is recreating native woodland of oak, ash, birch and juniper to restore the landscape and wildlife of Glen Devon with three new woodlands at Glen Sherup, Glen Quey and Geordie’s Wood, near Muckhart.
- The *River Forth Fisheries Trust*, and the Tay equivalent, have management plans which provide scientific frameworks for the conservation and enhancement of populations of all freshwater fish species found in the Forth and Tay catchments.



*MAP 4: River Catchments.  
Major catchments – solid line. Minor catchments – broken lines*



**“REWILDING GLEN DEVON”**

*Woodland Trust (Scotland) planting of native woodland in Glen Quey*



## LAND USE

In 2011 the Scottish Government published its Land-use Strategy for Scotland. This set out a long term vision towards 2050. The Second Land Use Strategy was published in 2016 and covers the period 2016-2021. It sets out key principles for sustainable land use to deliver multiple benefits, - the “Ecosystem Services Approach” - and encourages making best use of assets to support primary activities, including carbon storage. Map 5 shows the approximate distribution of open hill grazing, enclosed agricultural land and forestry/woodland in the Ochils.

The predominant land use is hill-farming, mainly of sheep, with a limited number of cattle, on the rough pasture of most of the hill ground. The enclosed lower ground around the periphery of the hills and in the valleys supports improved pasture and arable. The densities of livestock and the mix of arable crops varies according to European Union and national government support mechanisms and the state of the market. The EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been progressively changed over recent years with a higher proportion of farm subsidies being directed toward environmental management, habitat creation and biodiversity. Across Scotland, both cattle and sheep have declined in numbers since the EU “headage” payment system was discontinued in 2003. This has encouraged reductions to stocking levels in upland areas with consequent effects on the nature of the grassland and associated biodiversity. Some of the more marginal agricultural land around the periphery of the hills and in the more agricultural eastern part may have the potential to grow biofuels, particularly willow trees.

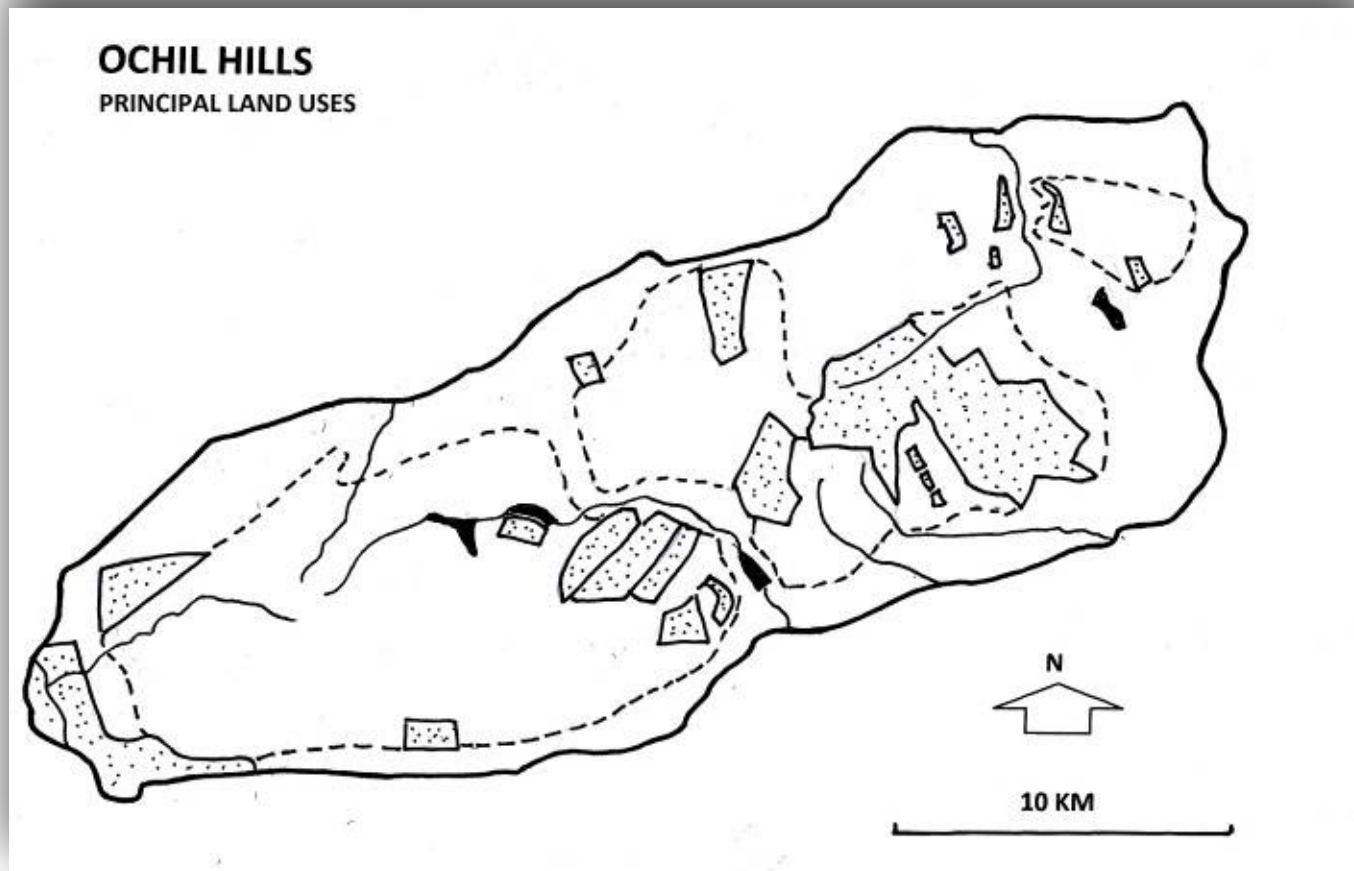
Over the years an increasing amount of the upland has been given over to commercial forestry, particularly in the eastern Ochils, but a recent initiative by the Woodland Trust (Scotland) has seen the creation of new woodlands in the Glen Devon area to re-create the native species and structure and biodiversity of the original forest cover of the Ochils. The Scottish Government published its *Scottish Forestry Strategy* in 2000, with incentives for increasing forestry and woodland planting. Local authorities have prepared *Forest and Woodland Strategies* which identify different areas which are designated as – Preferred, Potential, Sensitive or Unsuitable – for woodland planting. Within the Stirling and Clackmannanshire parts of the

Ochils most of the ground is assessed as either Sensitive or Potential. Only the tops of the hills are listed as Unsuitable. In the Perth and Kinross strategy substantial areas are identified as Potential, with some Preferred areas, mainly in the river valleys. In 2011 the UK Government published its *UK Forestry Standard Guidelines 2011* to maximise sustainable multiple-use forestry in response to climate change. Some of the areas planted with commercial forests have the potential to produce biomass from brashings and thinnings.

The new Jerah Forest was planted in 2015 on a 1,000 ha former sheep farm on the borders of Clackmannanshire and Stirling, using 1.3 million trees of 16 different species. The new forest is designed not only to produce a productive timber crop but also to create amenity woodland and to tackle climate change. Jerah Forest is expected to sequester 183,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> in its 40-year rotation. The Scottish Government is committed to creating 100,000 hectares of new woodland and forest by 2022 and the reduced profitability of grazing will further encourage the expansion of woodland and forestry in the Ochil Hills.

There will be opportunities to enhance and expand areas of existing native woodland and to create other small-scale deciduous woodlands while some of the old-established conifer plantations are being re-designed and re-structured to conform to current design standards. There is also a need to retain and replant existing specimen trees and shelter-belts, in those key locations where they contribute significantly to the landscape and cultural history of the hills.

The recent referendum decision to leave the EU will likely have a significant impact on rural land use within the Ochil Hills.



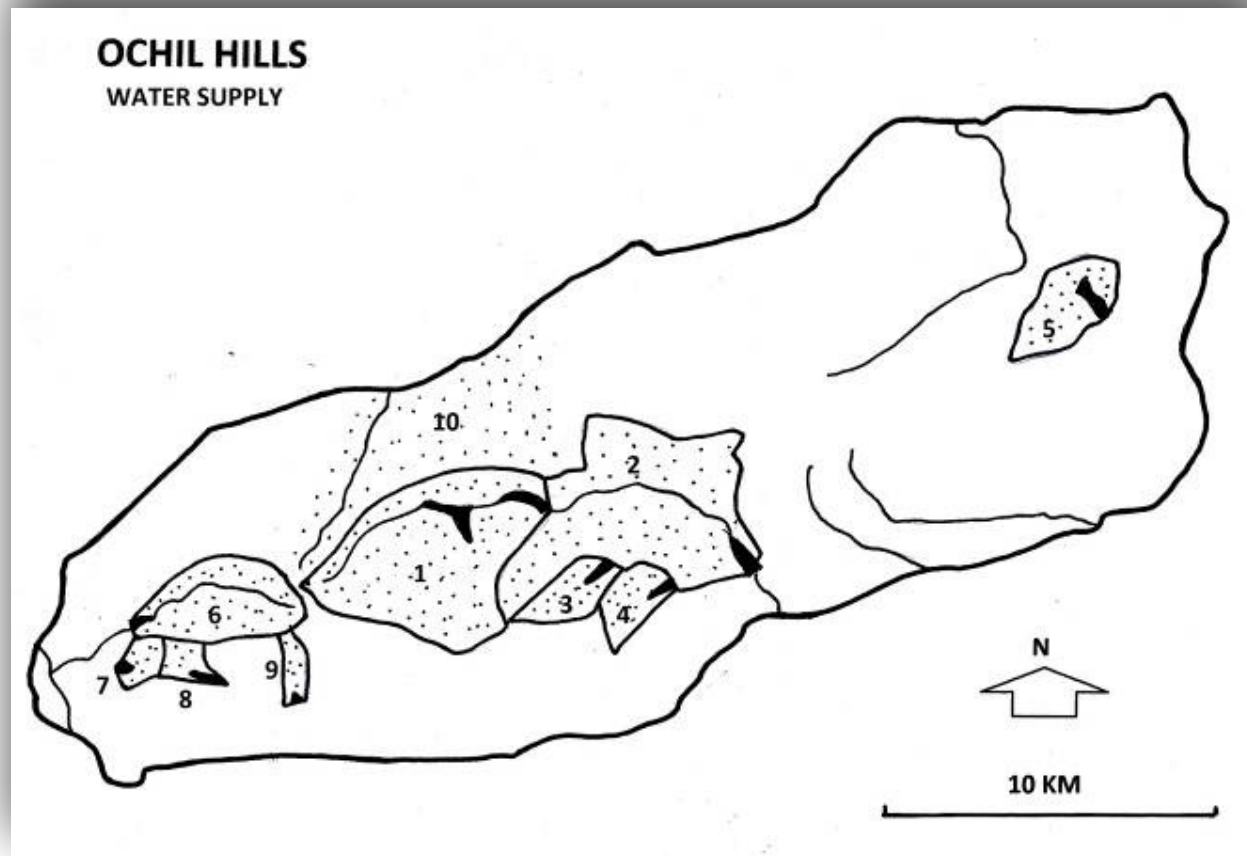
*MAP 5: Generalised land use - Farming and Forestry.  
The approximate boundary between hill grazing and enclosed land shown as broken line. Forestry shown stippled.*

**Water Resources.** The high rainfall and benign chemistry of the Ochils geology has long provided a source of wholesome water. The hill burns provided drinking water and, later, water-power for the woollen mills of the Hillfoot towns, to start the Industrial Revolution in Scotland. The valleys provided easy sites for building reservoirs. Upper Glendevon, Lower Glendevon, (also known as Upper and Lower Frandy), Glensherup, Glenquey, Castlehill and Glenfarg - are public drinking supply sources managed by Scottish Water. Waltersmuir (Wharry) and Cocksburn are redundant and Lossburn and Balquharn are private supplies. Ground water from aquifers under the northern slopes of the Ochils supplies the distillery and the “Highland Spring” bottling plant at Blackford. Map 6 shows those parts of the Ochils used as water-supply catchments, together with an indication of the groundwater abstraction area. A significant number of farms and dwellings still take their water supply from springs and surface burns. The catchments of the supply reservoirs, together with catchments of the Water of May and the River Farg, are designated as Drinking Water Protected Areas under EU legislation. There is potential for small-scale hydro-electric development, particularly at the outflow from the reservoirs but also in the small, steep burns on the south face of the Ochils which originally provided water power for the woollen mills.

**Wind Energy.** Windfarms have been, and still are, the most controversial developments in the Ochils and there is a desire to avoid the cumulative impact which might turn the Ochils from the present “landscape with windfarms” into a “windfarm landscape” in the future. Three windfarms are already operational – Greenknowes, Burnfoothill/Frandy and Lochelbank - and more are at the planning stage. Two of the planning authorities - Clackmannanshire and Stirling - have already adopted Supplementary Guidance, including Spatial Frameworks, for wind energy developments.

**High Voltage Power Lines.** A new high-voltage power line (Beaully-Denny) to carry renewable energy from the north of Scotland to the south of the UK, has been another controversial issue. After a Public Inquiry the existing power line from Sheriffmuir to Blairlogie was upgraded with much taller pylons in 2015.





*MAP 6: Water Supply.*

*Catchment areas of the 9 reservoirs and the area of groundwater abstraction. 1. Upper Glendevon. 2. Lower Glendevon. 3. Glensherup. 4. Glenquey. 5. Glenfarg. 6. Waltersmuir (Wharry). 7. Cocksburn. 8. Lossburn. 9. Balquharn. 10. Groundwater abstraction.*

## CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Ochils share a long and distinguished history of human settlement, from the hunter-gatherer peoples who followed the retreating ice-sheet northwards through to the post-industrial revolution and the climate change responses of today. Throughout the area there is a wide distribution of historic and prehistoric sites, with several Scheduled Ancient Monuments, areas of Historic Environment and Listed Buildings. There are multiple hill-forts on the northern summits, several medieval castles and two Designed Landscapes at Invermay and Airthrey.

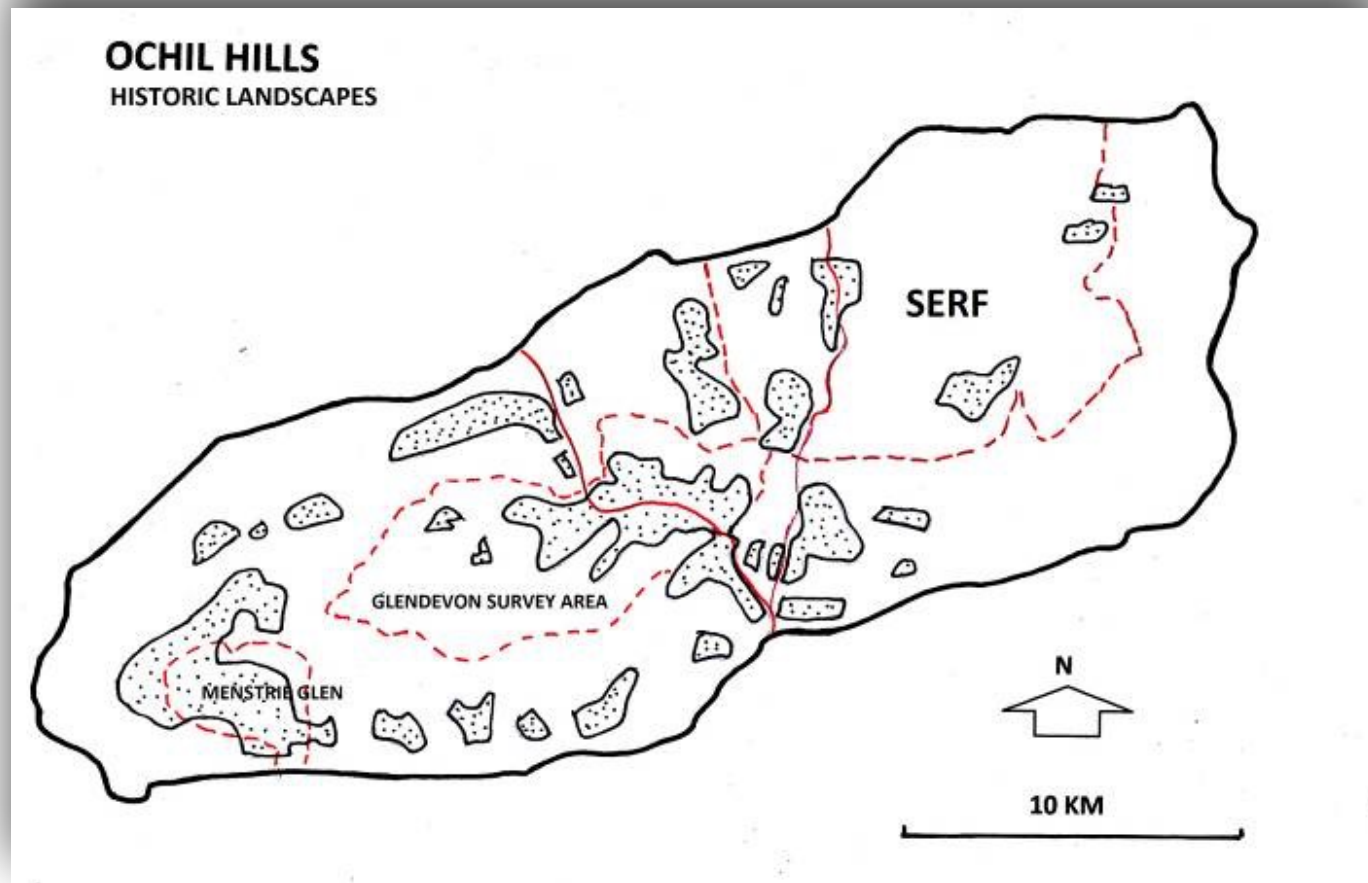
**Prehistory.** Early signs of human presence are seen in the many standing stones and cairns in and around the hills. Pictish hill forts on Ben Effrey and Rossie Law, near Auchterarder, and Culteuchar, overlooking Bridge of Earn, correspond to comparable forts at Castle Law, near Menstrie, and Castle Craig at Tillicoultry. At Forteviot and Dunning, the Strathearn Environs and Royal Forteviot (SERF) project has already established much information about early settlement and land use in the northern Ochil Hills. In the fields surrounding the village of Forteviot there is a most remarkable concentration of prehistoric monuments, most of which are thought to be Neolithic in date but including a possible Pictish Royal Palace.

**Medieval.** Stretching between the medieval royal palaces of Stirling and Scone, the Ochil Hills have seen the ebb and flow of Scottish history which has left its mark upon the landscape in various ways through defensive castles, military roads and battlefields. Forteviot's own royal status is underscored by its exceptional collection of early medieval sculpture, including the unique arch from a church (now in the National Museum of Scotland), fragments of several Pictish crosses and the magnificent Dupplin cross, now in St Serf's, Dunning. Glendevon Castle is a 15th-century tower house. Other fortifications include the medieval castles at Menstrie, Dollar, Gleneagles and Kincardine. The site of the Battle of Sheriffmuir (1715) lies within the hills and the battlefields of Stirling Bridge (1297) and Bannockburn (1314) are visible from Dumyat, framed by the iconic structures of Stirling Castle and the National Wallace Monument. Sheriffmuir battlefield has been included in the first tranche of battlefield sites listed by Historic Scotland.

**Historic Farming Landscapes.** Nationally-significant historic farming landscapes are found throughout the Ochil Hills, with well-documented examples at Menstrie Glen, Glen Devon, Dunning and Forteviot. These record and illustrate the farming landscapes and communities which lived in the Ochils throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries – until the lowland clearances made way for sheep grazing and the start of the Industrial Revolution. The Strathearn Environs and Royal Forteviot (SERF) project and the Menstrie Glen study describe some of the early agricultural landscapes. Beneath the marks of modern agriculture can be traced a relic pattern of farming and rural settlement which, with interpretation, tell the story of former communities and lifestyles. Whole hillsides and valleys show the remains of ridge-and-furrow, “run-rig”, cultivation up to heights not contemplated in modern times, with ruined farmsteads and high shielings from a time when cattle grazed the hills and were moved up to higher pastures in summer, in the practice of transhumance. Map 7 shows a summary of the key features of historic settlement.

**Drove Roads.** The Ochil Hills formed a barrier between the Highlands and the Lowlands, particularly in the business of moving cattle from the Highlands, through Crieff, to the primary market at Falkirk Tryst. Distinct and specialised drove roads developed to get the cattle herds and sheep flocks through or around the Ochils. Haldane (1997) gives a comprehensive story of droving and the drove roads of Scotland during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and identifies the two main routes from north to south via Glen Devon, through the middle of the hills, and by Sheriff Muir, skirting them to the west.

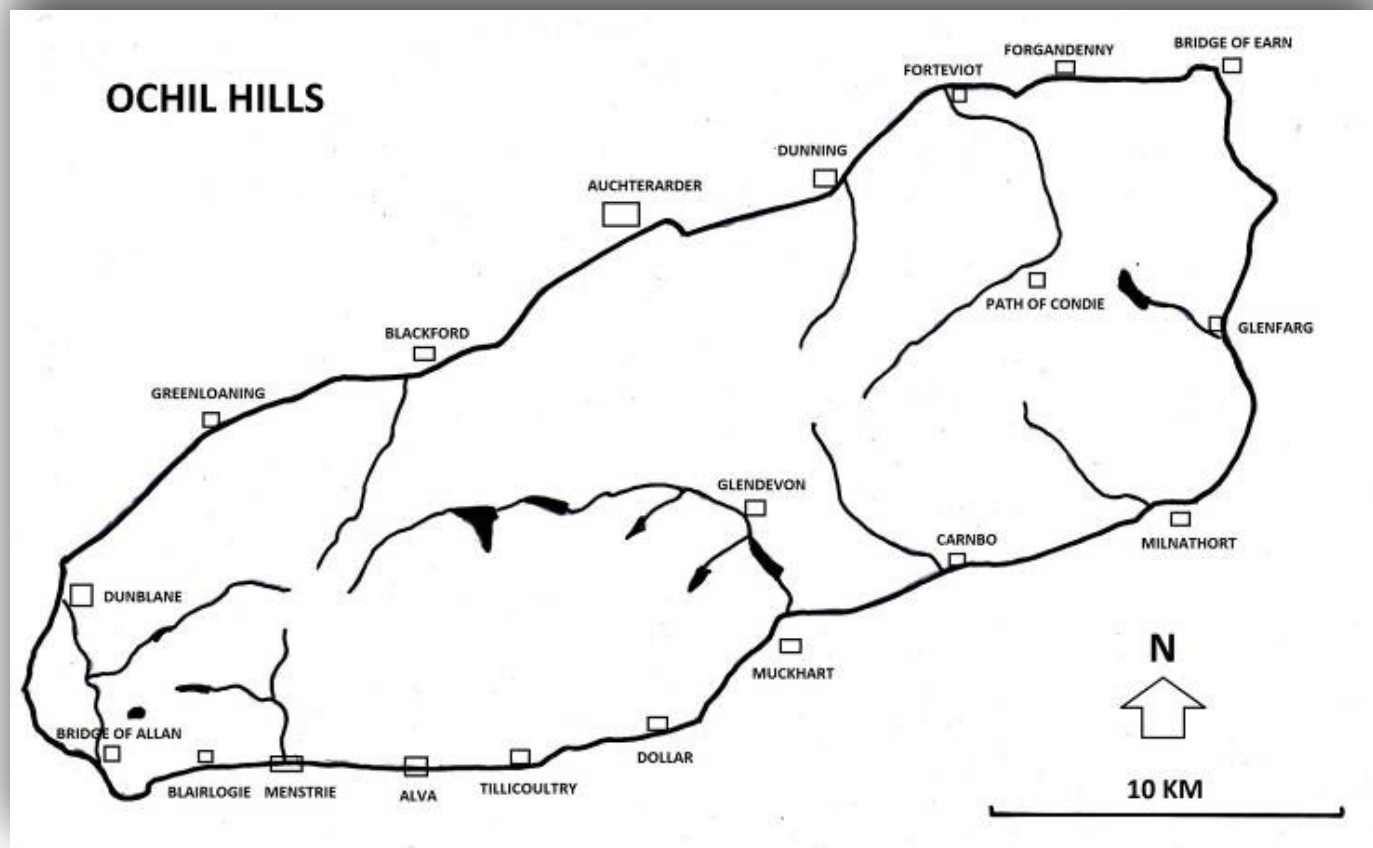
**Communities.** The Ochil Hills are surrounded by a string of historic villages from Greenloaning to Bridge of Earn on the north side and from Milnathort to Bridge of Allan and Dunblane to complete the circuit. The villages of Glenfarg, Glendevon and Path of Condie lie within the area. (Map 8) The modern settlement pattern in the more agricultural, eastern part of the Ochils is one of dispersed farms and other rural dwellings connected by a network of minor roads and farm tracks. In the higher, western part of the hills, the only dwellings within the hill-mass itself are the two isolated farms of Backhills and Frandy Farm in the upper Devon valley, while the only village, Glendevon, is strung out along the main through-routeway – the A823. Seventeen Community Councils have an interest in the Ochil Hills. (Map 9)



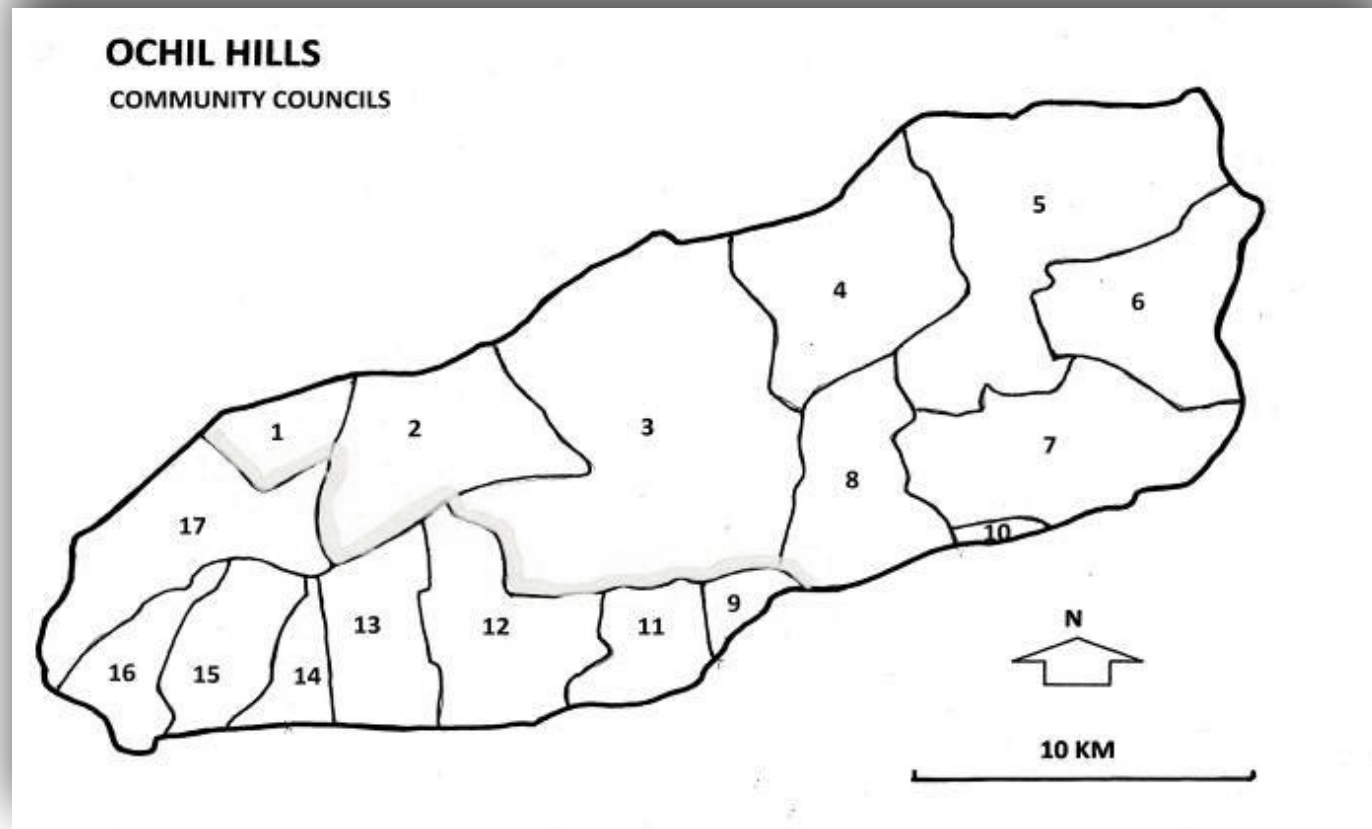
*MAP 7: Historic landscapes.*

*Showing the study areas in Menstrie Glen and Glen Devon and the Strathearn and Royal Forteviot (SERF) Project area. Historic agricultural landscapes shown stippled.*





*MAP 8: Principal settlements*



*MAP 9: Community Councils*

*1. Braco and Greenloaning. 2. Blackford. 3. Auchterarder and District. 4. Dunning. 5. Earn. 6. Glenfarg. 7. Milnathort. 8. Fossoway. 9. Muckhart. 10. Kinross. 11. Dollar. 12. Tillicoultry, Coalsnaughton and Devonside. 13. Alva. 14. Menstrie. 15. Logie. 16. Bridge of Allan. 17. Dunblane.*

**The Literary Landscape.** The Ochils have their own literary heritage. Robert Burns visited Harviestoun twice in 1787 and wrote a poem to “Peggy” Chalmers beginning: *Where, braving angry winter's storms/ The lofty Ochils rise/ Far in their shade my Peggy's charms/ First blest my wondering eyes;.....*

Robert Louis Stevenson spent holidays in Bridge of Allan from 1853 and developed ideas for his novels there. *"I shall never forget some of the days at Bridge of Allan. They were one golden dream"* A popular local trail, Darn's Walk is mirrored in his work *Kidnapped* and an old mine audit on the walk is believed to be Ben Gunn's Cave in *Treasure Island*. There is view that Stevenson's *"Hills of Home"* refer as much to the Ochil Hills as to the Pentland Hills.

“Hugh Haliburton” was the pen-name of James Logie Robertson (1846–1922), a literary scholar and author. He was born in Milnathort in 1846 and followed a teaching career in Edinburgh. His writings include *Ochil Idylls and Other Poems*, (1891) and *Horace in Homespun* (1900). Through his *Ochil Idylls* he is perhaps the best interpreter of the landscape and culture of the rural eastern Ochils at the end of the 19th century. He was inspired by the landscapes of Carnbo, Glen Devon and Glen Eagles, the Water of May, Struie, Balvaird Castle and the Wicks of Baiglie. He celebrates the Ochil Hills: *“Heaven keep the Ochil rampart free/ That rises green amang us!/ What better randyvoo could be/ If fate and folly dang us?.....*

A R B Haldane (1900-1982) was another writer who was inspired by the Ochil Hills. He wrote vividly about the hills and burns around his home at Foswell House, near Gleneagles. Although best known for his seminal work, *The Drove Roads of Scotland* (1952), he described his part of the Ochils in chapters of his angling books *By Many Waters*(1940), *The Path by the Water*(1944) and *By River, Stream and Loch* (1973).

Rennie McOwan has based many of his popular stories in the Ochil Hills and, at a more vernacular level, the newsletters of the Community Councils are a fund of literature and history about the hills.

## ENJOYING THE HILLS

From the days of simple picnics up Menstrie Glen, visits to Alva Glen “illuminations” and Sunday drives across Dunning Glen, the Ochils have been a place of “re-creation” for the people living within travelling distance of their slopes (Map 9). Access to the hills for walking is excellent with paths leading out from most of the surrounding villages which also provide some form of car parking, refreshments and even accommodation. Traditional drove roads moved cattle from Crieff to Falkirk Tryst and crossed the Ochils in the west, from Greenloaning to Stirling Bridge, and through Gleneagles and Glendevon to cross the Forth at Kincardine. Ancient rights of way cross the Ochils - from Tillicoultry to Blackford, Dollar to Glendevon and Glendevon to Dunning. The King’s Road runs behind Dumyat from Sheriffmuir to Menstrie.



Within the open hill areas and the higher tops an informal network of paths created by walkers and shepherds connect the main summits. The most popular routes, with the most visitor pressure, tend to be Dumyat and Ben Cleuch. A survey of visitor numbers for the Dumyat area was commissioned by *Friends of the Ochils* and reported as written evidence to the Beaully-Denny Power Line Public Inquiry in 2007. Several guide books, including foreign language guides, have been published detailing specific routes for walking. The Ochils are also popular for hill running and recent years have seen the expansion of mountain biking on both surfaced tracks and hill paths. A combination of mountain biking and increased walking has led to a deterioration of some more sensitive hill paths.





The burns and reservoirs of the Ochils provide opportunities for trout fishing. The hill burns have traditionally provided free access to fish for wild brown trout while permits are available on Cocksburn, Glenquey, Castlehill, Glensherup and Lower Glendevon reservoirs, some of which are stocked with rainbow trout. The River Devon below Castlehill Reservoir is managed by the Devon Angling Association. Edinburgh University operates a pony-trekking facility in Glendevon and informal riding takes place throughout the area.



While much of today's tourism is still sight-seeing by car, bicycle or on foot there are a number of specialised tourist activities to note:

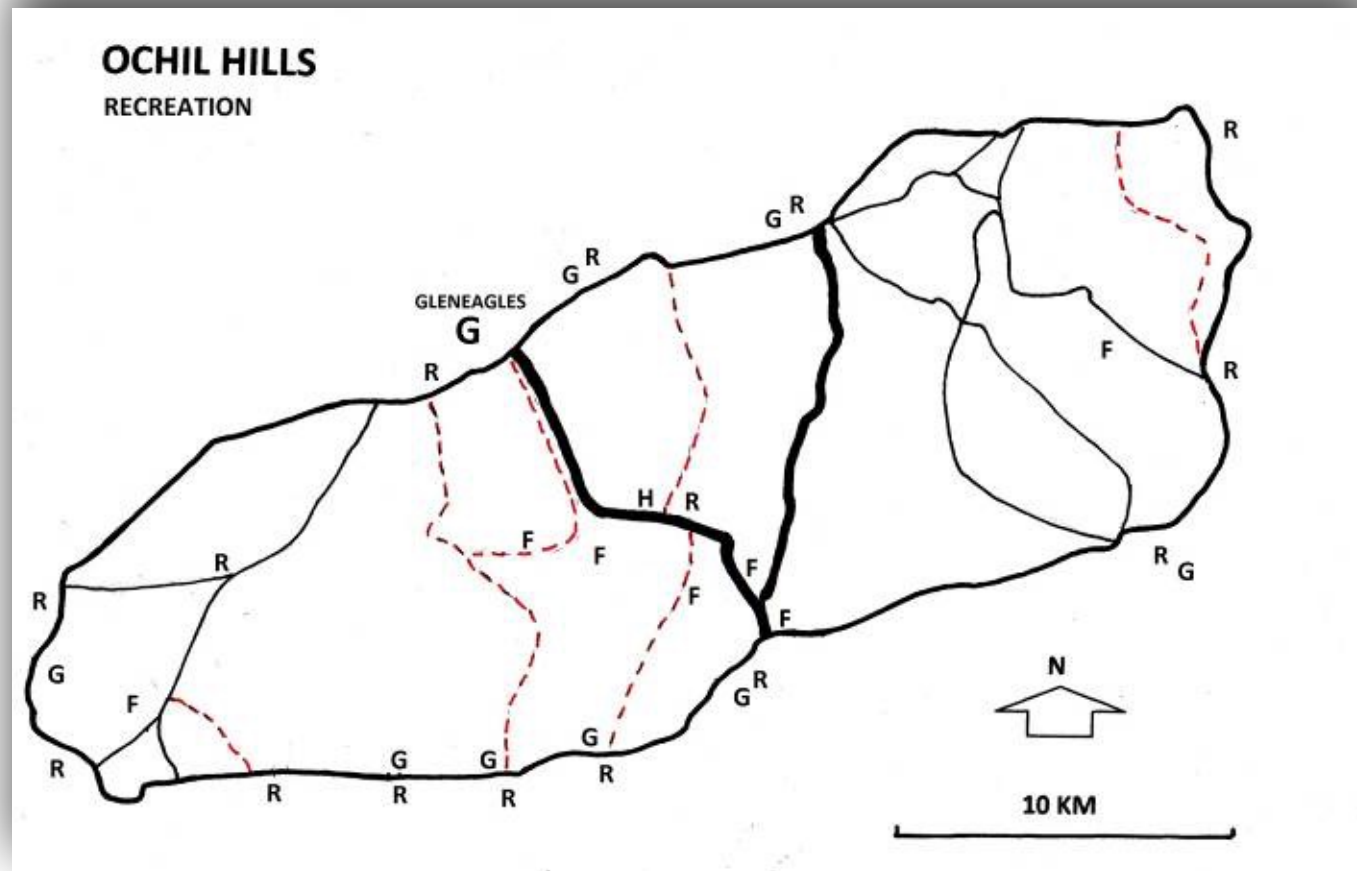
- **Golf Tourism.** In 1910 Donald Matheson, General Manager of the Caledonian Railway Company, was on holiday in Strathearn. His railway line ran through the valley and, as it was the era of 'Grand Hotels' he was so impressed by the surrounding countryside - presumably with the backdrop of the Ochil Hills - that he conjured up the vision of a large country house hotel, built in the style of a palace which would provide leisure in the form of golf to the travelling public.



Perhaps this concept can best be described as "guests will travel on our trains, to stay in our hotel, to play golf on our courses". The Gleneagles Hotel's was opened in 1924 to fulfil this vision and was the venue for the 2014 Ryder Cup. While Gleneagles may represent the top-end of the golfing market, most of the villages and towns around the Ochils have local golf courses which cater for visitors.

- **Retail Tourism.** Retail tourism can attract high levels of “footfall” to selected venues around the Ochils, such as Sterling Furniture and Sterling Mills at Tillicoultry and Eaglesgate (now closed) at Blackford. The attractive landscapes of the Ochil Hills feature in all their marketing.
- **Adventure Tourism.** This is a growing area of tourism in Scotland where the recreational assets of the Ochils may provide business opportunities. The River Allan is amongst Britain's top 100 white-water rivers according to Storry's guide book, *British White Water: Guide to the 100 Best Canoeing Rivers*. The 15 km, 6-hour, walk across the Ochils, from north to south, by the Drovers’ Road, from Auchterarder to Dollar, was a feature in the Programme of Events of the Crieff and Strathearn “*Drovers Tryst Festival*”.
- **Eco-tourism.** Eco-tourism is a relatively new concept, but it offers opportunities to benefit the local community, safeguard wildlife and still allow visitors to experience some of the most varied landscapes, often during the ‘shoulder months’ of the main tourism season when many species are easier to see. The Ochils offer visitors stunning scenery, wildlife and the unique historical heritage.

The main refreshments within the hills are the hostelries at Sheriffmuir in the west and Glendevon in the centre. However most of the villages around the hills can provide refreshments of some sort and there is a range of visitor accommodation from campsites and log cabins to 5-star hotels within close proximity to the Ochils.



*MAP 10: Main Features of Recreation And Access.*

*Surfaced roads = solid line. Historic footpaths = broken line. F= Trout fishing. G= Golf courses. R= Refreshments.*

## **ISSUES OF LANDSCAPE, BIODIVERSITY AND RECREATION**

The Ochils will always need a viable and sustainable rural economy, with existing land-uses of sheep farming, cattle raising, forestry, water supply, field sports and tourism. Most of the characteristic landscapes which are so much valued are the result of generations of farmers and graziers. From the close-cropped turf of the high tops, to the woollen-mill towns of the Hillfoots, the physical and social landscapes of the Ochils have been “shaped by sheep”. Despite the beauty and inspiration of the hills, over the years, some of the landscape features and the wildlife habitats of the Ochils are not as good as they once were - nor as good as they could be in the future. Some of the issues include:

- Areas of blanket bog and peat-lands are eroding – with loss of “carbon-sink”, increase in run-off and a threat to biodiversity.
- Native woodlands are now confined to small areas – with loss of biodiversity and landscape quality.
- Specimen trees and shelter-belts are dying and not regenerating – with loss of landscape quality, biodiversity and historical context.
- Historic farming landscapes are being lost – with loss of social history context and landscape value.
- Drystone dykes are in disrepair – with loss of landscape value and social history context.
- Blanket afforestation has hidden landscape and historic features – with loss of landscape value and historical context.
- Historic commercial forestry schemes do not meet current design standards – resulting in poor “fit” in the landscape.

- Some commercial forestry practices do not meet current guidelines – resulting in soil erosion, landscape degradation and loss of biodiversity.
- Increased recreational use creates issues of footpath damage, car parking, litter, and visitor information – resulting in diminished visitor experience.

There are already many examples of “good practice”, within the Ochils, and elsewhere, to address these problems:

- To protect existing blanket bog and peat-lands from further erosion and restore damaged areas.
- To protect the remaining native woodlands from further loss and to encourage the planting of new native woodlands in suitable locations at appropriate scales.
- To retain and replant existing specimen trees and shelter-belts, in those key locations where they contribute significantly to the landscape and cultural history of the hills.
- To repair and restore drystone dykes in selective key locations where they contribute to the landscape, cultural history or visitor experience of the hills.
- To modify existing blanket plantations to current design standards, diversified with native trees and clearings to create more diverse habitat and protect iconic features and views. To ensure new commercial plantations conform to modern design standards.
- To provide well-designed, small-scale car-parking; a repair and maintenance programme for popular hill paths, appropriate litter management and guidance on positive visitor information.

There are additional, more strategic, issues affecting the hills.

- *Increasing “Industrialisation”*. With new, larger electricity pylons and several wind farms already established or proposed within the Ochils. At what stage will an Ochils “*landscape with wind-farms*” become a “*wind-farm landscape*”?
- *Fragmented Planning Framework*. The main part of the Ochil Hills range is split between three local planning authorities and a number of agencies and stakeholders each with their own plans and strategies. The diversity of planning policy and procedures does not help to create a cohesive vision for the hills. It makes consultation and representation difficult and reduces the ability of the general public to influence planning decisions. New planning proposals and legislation could provide an incentive for local authorities to create a more cohesive system

Some of these issues are related to land use and land management, others to visitor management, but the strategic issues are related to the statutory planning system and developments within a much-loved physical and cultural landscape. Recent contentious development pressures have included - the Beaully-Denny power line; the Glenquey Moss quarry; the new Jerah Forest and various wind farm projects. There has to be a case for a rationalized and coordinated planning system across the Ochil Hills, so that the whole hill range can be planned as a geographical, cultural and historical entity.

## LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION AND PLANNING

*Multiple Agencies.* The only single organisation that looks at the conservation and management of the Ochil Hills as a single entity is the charitable and voluntary organisation - *Friends of the Ochils*. Otherwise, across the Ochil Hills, responsibilities for planning and management are currently divided between a large number of statutory and non-statutory organisations, each operating under different legislation, strategies and plans.

The Ochil Hills lie within the boundaries of three planning authorities – Perth and Kinross Council, Stirling Council and Clackmannanshire - each with its own Local Development Plan with policies which affect parts or all of the Ochil Hills in differing degrees. In addition, Scottish Natural Heritage has two offices with interests in the Ochils; Forestry Commission Scotland has two Districts covering the Ochils and the Scottish Rural Payments Directorate operates two regions – Forth and Tayside. The Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) operates only in the Stirling and Clackmannanshire parts of the Ochils. Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) is organised on river catchments, with two River Basin Management Plans –Tay and Forth, and three Flood Risk Local Plan Districts – Tay, Forth and Forth Estuary. A large number of individual landowners, tenants and land managers all manage their own particular properties. While there is already a degree of inter-authority consultation on specific issues, such as flood-risk management, in a time of significant change, it would be beneficial if they worked more closely together for the economy, landscape and ambience of the Ochil Hills as a geographical, cultural and historical entity.

*A Common Vision.* The Ochil Hills are therefore subject to, at least, two Forest and Woodland Strategies, three Biodiversity Action Plans, three Flood Risk Management Strategies and three Local Development Plans with Supplementary Guidances for landscape and renewable energy. The diversity of planning policy and procedures does not help to create a cohesive planning vision for the hills. It makes consultation and representation difficult and reduces the ability of the general public to influence planning decisions.



Recent and possible future changes to planning policies could help to develop a more coordinated vision for the Ochils:

- *Local Landscape Designations.* Local Landscape Designations were developed by Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Scotland in 2006 as a recognition of locally-valued landscapes, replacing and expanding on the roles of the previous Area of Great Landscape Value. They consulted on revised guidance in early 2017. Designation of an area serves three main purposes:

***Accolade.** Designation recognises that a specific area has special importance. Celebrating these values raises awareness amongst communities and stakeholders;*

***Policy.** The designation process provides a useful opportunity to engage communities in identifying policy priorities and objectives. Landscapes continually evolve. This change is managed better if the values of a landscape are better understood. Designation helps to highlight landscape values that are important to communities, and inform this process*

***Management.** Identification of specific geographic areas provides a useful means to concentrate effort and direct resources for management.*

Stirling and Clackmannanshire councils designated their parts of the Ochil Hills as Local Landscape Areas at an early date and, in 2014, Perth and Kinross Council followed suit. For the first time in its history the majority of the Ochil Hills, (excluding small parts) now have a consistent protective landscape designation and are recognised by all three local authorities as a Local Landscape Area. However, each planning authority still has slightly different policies and priorities for managing development within their own Local Landscape Areas which could still lead to confusion. There is however an opportunity for the planning authorities to consider how to create a more coordinated vision for the landscape of the whole Ochil Hills range.

- *The Second Scottish Land Use Strategy 2016-2021* (LUS2) contains three proposals which could be relevant to the Ochil Hills - Regional Land Use Partnerships, Regional Land Use Frameworks and a “Strategic Vision for the Uplands”.

*A Regional Land Use Partnership and Framework*, by definition, could develop better integration of land uses and better understanding of the issues of the Ochil Hills by bringing together local people, land users and managers into a regional partnership. It could also provide a framework for such landscape-scale projects as peatland restoration, natural flood management, native woodland creation and the re-design of legacy forests.

*A Strategic Vision for the Uplands*. LUS2 also includes a commitment to scope the potential to develop a “Strategic Vision for the Uplands”, exploring the multiple benefits they deliver and how they can contribute to climate change targets. In this context, LUS2 also recognises the potential benefits of streamlining the array of sectoral strategies - flood risk, biodiversity, forest and woodland - into a single integrated strategic vision for an upland area.

The concepts of Regional Land Use Frameworks and Regional Land Use Partnerships would appear to offer useful ways forward, while the concept of a “Strategic Vision for the Uplands” could go some way to improving the planning and management of all the “Hills of Home”.

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