

Finn Valley LCA 14



Finn Valley LCA is dominated by the River Finn, its tributaries and associated valleys carved from the surrounding uplands. The LCA has 3 distinct areas within that change from west to east following the meandering River Finn through this LCA.

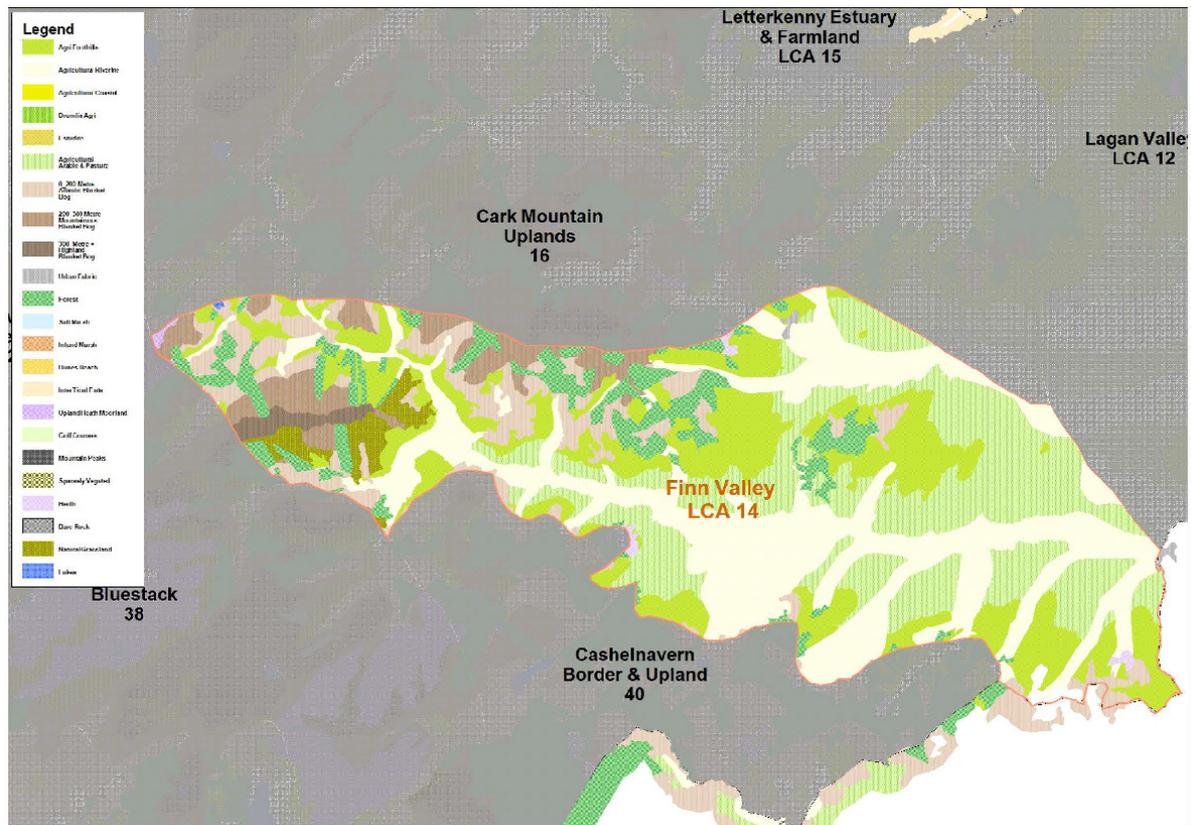
In the west of this LCA the Rivers Finn and Reelan cut through highland bog areas creating 2 steep narrow river valleys that have an interesting rectilinear field pattern of strips extending from the river edge into the upland bog in a 'rundale' fashion.

These smaller rivers converge as the River Finn close to Cloghan into a notably broader and more level valley of larger square agricultural fields overlooked by mountainous areas of upland bog. The landscape eastwards from Ballybofey Stranorlar towards Castlefinn is a fertile agricultural plain alongside the river within a wider gently undulating agricultural landscape of large square fields similar to the adjoining Laggan Valley and Foyle Valley LCAs.

Finn Valley LCA borders Northern Ireland at its eastern extremity and abuts 2 separate LCAs within NI sharing a similar landscape type and character area. The local road network affords multiple physical linkages with the adjoining landscape in Northern Ireland.

The eastern edge of this LCA borders Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Areas Foyle Valley (27) and Derg Valley (20), a continuum of the landscape type of the Finn Valley, namely good quality agricultural riverine lands of semi-improved geometric fields, with scattered farms, farmsteads and one off rural dwellings served by a number of rural villages and towns.

Landscape Character types



Landscape Characteristics

Land Form and Land Cover

- Overall Geology of Quartzite but with small peripheral areas of Schist and limestone.
- The River Finn system flows through high peat covered mountains within the west of this LCA eastwards through a more rolling and then gently undulating agricultural landscape of varying quality, tying this landscape character area together.

Settlements



- **Ballybofey-Stranorlar:** Ballybofey-Stranorlar are two separate towns co-joined by a bridge over the River Finn at a key point along the N15/N13 North South Transport Corridor (part of the wider Atlantic Corridor); collectively they comprise the 3rd largest urban centre in Donegal and function as a service centre in the heart of the

Finn Valley, offering high level retail, commercial, social, cultural and recreational centre facilities.

- **Castlefinn:** Castlefinn is a planned market town characterised by a diamond in the centre surrounded by several NIAH listed and protected structures and accessed from the south over the River Finn by an impressive 18th century 12 arch bridge stone rubble bridge. This bridge was constructed using stones from an earlier castle nearby on the banks of the river that belonged to Sir Neil Garbh O'Donnell prior to 'The Flight of Earls', and from whence the town is named. The Finn Valley railway crossed the south of the town connecting it to Lifford and Ballybofey and the town had until recently an active textile industry. The town retains local level retail, social and community services.
- **Killygordon:** Killygordon is a small crossroads settlement along the main Lifford to Stranorlar road, north of a bridge crossing on the River Finn, located within a fertile rural agricultural landscape. The Finn Valley railway line had a station here from 1863 to 1960

History, Culture and Heritage

- This area has a long history of settlement as evidenced by the many archaeological sites and monuments throughout. There are a number of Recorded Monuments in this LCA. The excellent fishing, fertile river valleys and the fact that the River Finn was navigable towards the Foyle and out into sea made this landscape attractive to early settlers.
- Important vernacular and imposed built heritage including 37 RPS structures and 215 NIAH.
- The eastern portion of this LCA is closely associated with the adjoining LCAs of the Laggan and Foyle valleys and Northern Ireland, in terms of both it's landscape 'type' and it's plantation history and heritage.
- Historic Landscape Characterisation identifies that this area is characterised by a patchwork of straight-sided and surveyed fields, indicating 18th- and 19th-century agricultural improvements and the remains of a windmill at Croaghan, itself a landmark. This landscape is overlooked by Raphoe, Beltany Ring and Croaghan (though only the latter is within this area), and was a major route through history (now taken by the N15 road).

Access and Recreation

- Ballybofey-Stranorlar is in the middle of this LCA and the point where a number of radial routes from this LCA link to the wider County and beyond including the N15 east to Co. Tyrone, N15 south to Donegal Town, N13 north to Letterkenny and Derry and Regional roads west to Glenties, Fintown and Dungloe and north-east to Raphoe.
- Salmon and Sea trout angling is popular within this LCA, particularly along the faster flowing stretches of the Finn west of Ballybofey-Stranorlar.
- Finn Harps football stadium is currently located in the centre of Ballybofey, and a new stadium is presently under construction adjacent to a cluster of other sporting facilities in Stranorlar.
- 18-course Ballybofey Golf Club is situated north of Ballybofey-Stranorlar.

Biodiversity

- Ecologically important landscape containing 1,019ha of Natura 2000 sites (SAC & SPA) and 80.33 ha of pNHA sites as well as the important biodiversity links created by the River Finn and tributaries and other river corridors that flow through this area.
- Tree and hedgerow bound roads and laneways and the overgrown disused railway line all form important biodiversity corridors and linkages.

- Clumps and clusters of native deciduous trees and woodland are dispersed throughout this LCA and of note are the important and historic woodlands of Drumboe and Dunwiley in Ballybofey-Stranorlar.
- Agricultural fields within this are mostly bound by native deciduous hedgerow and trees.
- Forestry plantations are sporadically located on higher lands throughout this landscape character area.

Forces for change

- Linear development along the rural road network
- Renewable energy development (windfarms).
- Afforestation in upland areas.
- Telecommunications and infrastructural development
- Development within the floodplains.
- Windfarm development in Northern Ireland forms part of the views of and from this LCA.
- Expansion and development of the twin towns of Ballybofey and Stranorlar.