



#### *Key Characteristics*

- Flat peninsular farmland – very distinctive ladder fields, estuaries, salt marsh and mudflats, sand and boulder coves, shelving coastal rocks, vertical cliffs.
- Coast becomes increasingly dramatic towards Loop Head with high cliffs, arches, stacks and rocky inlets. More sheltered bays are typically on the southern side of the peninsula.
- The presence of the sea is always apparent and the character of the land reflects the mood of the weather and the storminess of the seas.
- The area is remote and feels remote and detached, with peaceful rural unspoilt qualities.
- Settlement is more concentrated along the southern peninsula, increasing again towards Kilkee.
- Kilkee is a designated ACA (Architectural Area).

*Typical Photograph: Ladder Fields Loop Head Peninsula*



*Landscape Character Types, Historic Landscape Types and Habitat Types*

LCTs	HLTs	HLTs codes	HTs	HT codes
Peninsular Farmland	Enclosed Land 2	EL2	Hedgerows	WL1
Farmed Estuarine Farmland and Islands	Enclosed Land 3	EL3	Marsh	GM1
Coastal Plain and Dunes	Enclosed Land 4	EL4	Exposed rocky shores	LR1
	Rough Ground 1	RG1	Broadleaved woodland	WD1
	Rough Ground 2	RG2	Scrub	WS1
	Rough Ground 3	RG3	Improved agricultural grassland	GA1
	Designed Landscape	DL	Estuaries	MW4
	Extractive Industry Quarry	EIQ	Sea inlets and bays	MW2
	Settlement 1	S1	Muddy sandy shores	LS3
	Water Bodies 1	WB1	Sea caves	LR5
	Water Bodies 2	WB2	Shingle and gravel shores	LS1
	Extractive Industry	EI	Rocky sea cliffs	CS1
	Coastline and Coastal Intertidal	CI	Shingle and gravel banks	CB1
	Devotional and Ritual	DR	Upland blanket bog	PB2
			Dry calcareous and neutral grassland	GS1

*Landscape Character Area Extent*

The Loop Head peninsula is almost an island and extends from Doonbeg and Poolnasherry Bay to Loop Head in the far west.

### *Geology and Landform*

This area is underlain by Namurian sandstone and shale, with bedrock derived till the dominant surface geology. There are significant pockets of peat deposits, notably within the Sragh Bog complex. The coast is increasingly dramatic towards Loop Head with high cliffs, arches, stacks, rocky inlets and more sheltered bays typically on the southern side of the peninsula. The folding of the rocks into synclines has created spectacular coastal forms such as The Bridges of Ross and sweeping slabs near Castle Point. The southern part of this LCA is more sheltered and contains estuaries, salt marsh and mudflats.

The peninsula is largely flat with distinctive long low ridges and hills close to the coastline both to the north and south e.g. Rehy Hill, Oldtown, Moveen Hill. This peninsula rises to 100m at Loop Head.

### *Land cover and Ecology*

Gleys are the predominant soil type and have been well managed within this area to produce quite good pasture. There are pockets of brown earths with Loop Head itself containing a patch of podzols. Again peat deposits are concentrated around the Sragh Bog area.

Land cover is largely grassland with sheep and cattle grazing. There are stretches of natural coastal grassland along the inaccessible northern coastline. Vegetation in the area is very sparse, the only trees being sculptured into leaning windswept shapes. These lean distinctively away from the prevailing westerly winds.

This area has a number of SAC designations, including Loop Head, which contain important colonies of seabirds and contain a number of swards of botanical interest, Tullaher Lough and Bog (also known as Sragh Bog) is an unusual example of raised bog within the county.

### *Historical & Human Influences*

Around Moanmore and Tullaher Loughs there are large areas of rough ground, some of which is undivided (RG1). It is largely formed of open peat moor and devoid of monuments. However, given its proximity to a heavily settled coastline, it is probable that it has been extensively used throughout history. Peat cutting and, possibly, seasonal pasture are likely, and low elevations (23m AOD) make it a distinct possibility that this area was settled prior to colder wetter conditions starting in the Bronze Age. The area west to Kilkee is heavily studded with ringforts and there are numerous cillíns, graveyards and holy wells. From the Bronze Age on this area has supported a large population. The enclosing fields are either the more common mixture sinuous and straight boundaries (EL2) or, in discrete areas, long thin fields

sometimes called ladder farms (EL3). The latter may be enclosed common fields.

Poulnasharry Bay (EI) was historically a very productive food source and the centre of it is described as 'Oyster Hole' on late eighteenth century maps (Pelham). Similar to the other estuaries, the mudflats are a distinct historic landscape dotted with preserved, low-lying remains of fish traps etc.

The Atlantic coastal resources (CI) were slightly different but flat fish could be expected in sandy bays and seaweed collection allowed the development of an extensive roadside settlement as at Coosheen.

Towards its tip, Loop Head peninsula has predominantly long rectilinear fields EL3, which may be nineteenth and twentieth century enclosures of previously common fields. Those west of Kilbaha, for instance, were perpendicular to a road built after the 1787 Grand Jury map and must postdate its construction. There is open ground at the head itself and large areas of similar straight edged fields that line the Shannon estuary. Promontory forts dot the headlands and views to and from them add to the visual amenity of the area. A battery at Kilcredaun attests to a later period of defence.

Small traditional cottages and farms are scattered across the area. These are typically painted white. A distinctive layout of dwellings is quite common, with the cottage and a shed, usually corrugated, forming an L shape and affording shelter from the wind. The majority of the scattered settlement is on the more sheltered southern side of the peninsular. Roads are straight and narrow and fields are generally enclosed within banks in dryer areas or on embankments in wetter areas. Fishing is part of the economy of the area, with small harbours and quays and some fish farming on the southern side.

Consultees identified a number of valued features within this LCA, including the old ferry at Cammoge Point and the Caves at Kilkee. These are known as the amphitheatre and at low tide one can access a cave known as the Pink Cave, which is full of sea anemones. The mobile church, known as the Ark, was also considered to be of significant value. Sragh Bog was also identified as an area of particular value due to its diverse flora and archaeological remains. The dunes at Doonbeg and the Blue Pool at Donegal Point were also identified by consultees as being of importance.

#### *Landscape Condition and Sensitivity*

The area is in good condition and is increasingly intact as one travels west. Traditional settlement patterns and the distinctive ladder fields remain largely unaffected by modern development and agricultural change. Both farm buildings and land appear to be well maintained and some larger modern farm buildings are apparent within the landscape.

The area is relatively free from tourist related development with a few scattered car parks and picnic areas scattered along the coast, and a concentration of holiday development at Kilkee, the main settlement in the area. Here, caravan parks, amusement arcades etc indicate that this is a long established coastal resort.

Large-scale development would be very evident due to the flat open nature of the area with expansive skies. Traditional small-scale housing development of scattered white painted cottages could be accommodated. The area would be particularly vulnerable to pressures such as windfarms, masts etc.

Extensive views are afforded from the sheltered southern coast over to Kerry and along the western seaboard from Loop Head and along the northern coastline.

The natural grassland at Loop Head is classified as visually sensitive and vulnerable under the county development plan. The whole of this coastline is also designated as an area of high amenity under the same plan.

#### *Forces for Change*

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- Insensitive tourism development
  - Large scale development
  - Agricultural change and removal of field boundaries
  - Vertical development such as windfarms and masts
  - Dereliction of traditional cottages – particularly in the Doonbeg vicinity
  - Depopulation
  - Wind farm and forestry applications close to Sragh Bog
  - Increasing pressure from new development, for example residential and tourism development at White Strand at Killard
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#### *Principles for Landscape Management*

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- Careful planning and siting of new tourism facilities is needed to maintain the integrity of largely unspoilt landscape
  - Advice should be available on boundary, siting and design of new developments including expansion of Kilkee
  - Encourage uptake of REPS and/or enter management agreements with farmers
  - Develop principles for repopulating rural depopulated areas
  - Restore existing derelict structures and buildings
  - Settlement plans should seek to ensure conservation and enhancement of the existing character and quality of settlement particularly in Kilkee and retain the local centre within walking distance of residential development
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