


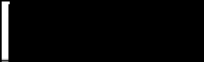
APPENDIX 3

LAND AT AVONTOUN, LINLITHGOW

Landscape Appraisal



Quality Management

	Version 1	Version 2	Version 3	Version 4
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1 Introduction

This landscape and visual appraisal provides an independent assessment of the capacity of the landscape at Avontoun, Linlithgow (see Figure 1) to accommodate a proposed housing development for inclusion as a housing allocation site in the emerging West Lothian Local Development Plan.

This report describes the existing environment (both landscape and visual), an overview of the policy documents relevant to development of the site, and provides a preliminary, high level assessment of the landscape and visual impacts which might arise as a result of the proposed development. A full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) will be required to present an in-depth assessment of the effects of the development once the proposals are worked up at a more detailed level. Recommendations and conclusions are presented in Section 7, proposing environmental enhancement and mitigation measures which could be introduced to mitigate any effects arising from the proposed housing development.

This study involved a desk top review of planning documents, Ordnance Survey (OS) maps, aerial photography and work which had been undertaken in the earlier stages of the project. This desk work was then followed up with site visits in October 2015.

The appraisal is set out as follows:

- Section 2 presents a description of the proposals site and a brief history of the site;
- Section 3 identifies the key policies and frameworks underpinning the development of the proposed site;
- Section 4 provides an overview of the site's landscape character and the wider surrounding area. This section seeks to understand the value attributed to the current landscape, through a search of landscape and landscape related designations which may be directly or indirectly affected by the proposed housing development, and to understand the landscape character of the proposed development site and the wider area which may be affected;
- Section 5 presents the visual character of the proposals site and the surrounding area, identifying the key visual receptors and views which may be affected by the proposed development;
- Section 6 provides a preliminary high level assessment to identify any potentially significant effects that the proposed development might have on the site's landscape and visual amenity and its environs; and
- Section 7 presents the conclusions and findings of the report.

2 The Proposals Site

The proposals site has a history of sand and gravel extraction, and the landscape of the development area is indicative of this. The site is predominantly flat. Earth bunds have been constructed around the edges of the site which enclose, and partially screen, the development area. A minor ridge which runs east-west runs north of the northern site boundary, and marks the location where the landscape drops steeply to the Avon River (see Figure 2). The site covers an area of approximately 14.3hectares (ha) of which 9.2ha is developable.

Today, sand and gravel extraction on the site has ceased, and the landscape of the proposals site has been restored, with recent woodland planting present along the slopes of bunds, and within a lower lying area to the west of the site. A man-made loch is present outwith the site boundary, to the north of the ridge separating the site area from the River Avon. A scrap metal facility is located within the centre of the proposed site boundary.

The site forms part of the Battle of Linlithgow Bridge Battleground which is a Historic Environment Scotland Inventory Battlefield.

2.1 The Proposed Development Masterplan

Within the sites masterplan, the proposals site is divided into three 'sections' – an eastern section, a western section, and a central section which is located in the area currently occupied by a scrap metal facility (see Concept Masterplan). Located adjacent to the south western edge of Linlithgow, the proposals site is bounded to the north by the Edinburgh – Glasgow railway line, to the east by Mill Road (the B8029), and the southern boundary of the site extends along the A706 Mains Road for approximately 650m (see Figure 1). The proposed development would fill in an area of derelict and partly wooded landscape which is currently used for informal recreation and industry, and would extend the urban edge of Linlithgow to the west. It would form a logical extension to the existing urban fabric of Linlithgow, close to a range of established community facilities in the area.

The masterplan indicates areas of new woodland and street planting within the development area to ensure that the development sits within the existing landscape context of the site and its environs (see Section 4). The scheme retains informal paths which are used currently by local residents, and would improve the quality of these as they route through the site to ensure that the site stays open to the public and that safe links are retained to the loch in the north and the River Avon path network (see Section 5) while also allowing connections to the wider area. The additional planting proposed within the site would delineate public and private spaces, as well as setting the new residential development into the wider context. Tree lined pedestrian accesses would form prompts to the wider path network.

2.2 The Landscape Appraisal Study Area

The study area for the landscape appraisal extends to a radius of 2km from the boundary of the proposals site (see Figure 3). This area was selected to provide an overview of landscape and visual receptors which may potentially be affected by the proposed development.

3 Legislation, Policy and Guidelines

3.1 Planning Policy Context

Key planning and other relevant documents include:

- West Lothian Council Local Plan (2009);
- West Lothian Council Proposed Local Development Plan (2014);
- Scottish Natural Heritage Lothians Landscape Character Assessment (1998)¹; and

¹ Ash Consulting Group 1998. The Lothians landscape character assessment. [Scottish Natural Heritage Review](#) No 91

- Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) Stirling to Grangemouth landscape character assessment (1999)²

These documents have been taken account in the landscape appraisal and those policies considered relevant to the proposed development are described below.

West Lothian Local Plan (2009)

The proposed development site sits adjacent to part of the western edge of the Linlithgow settlement boundary, within the Bathgate Hills and River Avon Valley Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV). AGLVs are designated in the Local Plan for their special landscape character and visual appearance and there is a presumption against development which would undermine the landscape and visual qualities for which the areas were designated as outlined by Policy ENV19.

The proposals site falls within part of the site of the Battle of Linlithgow Bridge 1526. Local Plan Policy HER15 states that significant archaeological sites will be protected from development which will have a detrimental effect on the sites or their settings.

West Lothian Proposed Local Development Plan, October 2015 (Currently in Consultation)

The West Lothian Proposed Local Development Plan (the LDP) Proposals Map 2: Linlithgow and Broxburn Area indicates the proposals site as being located within an area designated as a Special Landscape Area (SLA), and a Historic Battlefield: Battle of Linlithgow Bridge (see Figure 3).

The key aims for the Natural and Historic Environment in the LDP are for the protection and enhancement of the natural and built environment and its cultural landscape, the provision of an improved network of linked open spaces which incorporate active travel routes and to ensure that appropriate brownfield sites are redeveloped for appropriate uses. The proposals site is a brownfield site which has a history of mining and quarrying.

Policy DES1: Design Principles requires development proposals to take account of, and be integrated with the local context and built form. They should enhance the environment and be of high quality. With regards to landscape and visual effects, the policy requires the assurance that any proposals would not have significant adverse effects on landscape character, built heritage or on the amenity of the wider area. Provision should be made for integrated and accessible infrastructure, open space, green infrastructure and landscape should be included.

Policy ENV1: Landscape Character and Special Landscape Areas: The proposed development site is located within an area identified as the Avon Valley Special Landscape Area (SLA). The Avon Valley SLA is bounded by the WLC boundary to the north and by the Linlithgow settlement boundary to the north-east. The south-east boundary follows the A706 from Linlithgow to the Westfield roundabout at the A801, a boundary which is shared with the Bathgate Hills SLA to the south-east. It then follows the B8047 westward, skirting the Westfield settlement boundary, and continues along the B8047 to the Council boundary near Avonbridge.

Policy ENV1 presumes against development within SLAs where the development would undermine the landscape and visual qualities for which the SLA was designated.

Policy ENV1 further notes that development will not be permitted where it may significantly and adversely affect local landscape character. If acceptable, a development should respect the character

² Tyldesley, D and Associates 1999. Stirling to Grangemouth landscape character assessment. [Scottish Natural Heritage Review](#) No 124

of the landscape and be compatible in terms of scale, siting and design.

Policy ENV31: Historic Battlefields: Battle of Linlithgow Bridge (1526): There is a presumption against development within a site listed in the Inventory of Historic Battlefields where it would have a significant adverse effect upon the archaeology, character, appearance, setting or the key landscape features of the battlefield. Where it can be demonstrated that the overall integrity of the battlefield will not be compromised and there will be no adverse impact on the features of the battlefield, proposals and developments affecting battlefield sites will require an appropriate level of mitigation and measures which are to be agreed with the Planning Authority. The siting, scale and design of any new development, or extensions to existing buildings, must preserve, conserve or enhance the key characteristics of the battlefield. These may include landscape characteristics, key viewpoints that assist in the understanding of the battle and historic assets.

3.2 Planning and Supplementary Guidance

West Lothian Local Landscape Designation Review (2013)

The West Lothian Local Plan (2009) defines two types of local landscape designations, both aimed at protecting the character and quality of the West Lothian landscape:

- Areas of Great Landscape Value (AGLV); and
- Areas of Special Landscape Control (ASLC).

In 2013, WLC commissioned Land Use Consultants to review the provision of local landscape designations in West Lothian, and to carry out an evaluation of the West Lothian landscape, leading to a new, more robustly justified single tier of Special Landscape Areas (SLA) (which are incorporated in the newer Proposed Local Development Plan (see Section 3.1).

The proposals site is located within the Avon Valley SLA (see Figure 3). It is noted as an attractive river valley landscape, which is also a key recreational resource accessible from Muiravonside Country Park in the neighbouring Falkirk Council area. The Avon Valley is a recognisable landscape of high scenic value. The Avon Valley SLA statement of significance states:

The River Avon forms the historic boundary of West Lothian and has a distinctive sense of place. It flows through an increasingly incised valley from Avonbridge to Linlithgow, passing through a deep rocky gorge around Muiravonside. Steeply sloping, densely wooded valley sides strongly contrast with the open farmland, more prevalent at the western upstream extent, and with the haughs by Linlithgow Bridge downstream.

The valley forms an attractive, enclosed and visually contained landscape. Areas of the valley have a hidden quality, seemingly remote from adjacent settled landscapes and with a strong sense of tranquillity.

The Avon Valley provides the setting for several landmark features including the viaduct at Westfield and the Union Canal which spans the Avon on Scotland's longest and tallest aqueduct. Earlier historical associations include the Battle of Linlithgow Bridge (1526) which took place across the valley, and the remains of a medieval nunnery at Manuel.

The Avon Heritage Trail links these features along the length of the river, allowing an appreciation of the importance of the river corridor and an understanding of its natural heritage. There are numerous opportunities for enjoying the landscape, which is readily

accessible from Linlithgow, and also well-used by visitors to Muiravonside Country Park on the Falkirk side of the river.

The report notes that the SLA is under development pressure around the western fringe of Linlithgow, in the area of the proposed development, and that views along the River Avon could be impacted by proposed developments in this area.

SNH Landscape Character Assessments

SNH has carried out regional landscape character assessments in conjunction with local authorities to provide an assessment of the landscape character of Scotland. The assessments identify the existing and likely future pressures and opportunities which are expected to drive landscape change and assess the sensitivity of the landscape to absorb these changes, while also identifying the areas of the landscape which are or may be under threat by development. Guidance is given to indicate how the different landscape character types³ (LCTs) and Landscape Character Areas⁴ (LCAs) may be conserved, enhanced or restructured over time. The Lothians Landscape Character Assessment covers the area of the proposed housing development study area. Section 4.1 describes these LCTs in more detail.

The Lothians Landscape Character Assessment categorises the proposals site as being located within the Linlithgow/ Queensferry Farmlands LCA which forms an area of the Coastal Margins LCT. The Bathgate Hills LCA (part of the Lowland River Valley LCT) is located to the south of this, within the 2km study area for this landscape appraisal. The landscape character in part of the north of the 2km study area is defined by the Stirling to Grangemouth Landscape Character Assessment⁵ as the Avon Valley Landscape Unit of the Lowland Hills LCT. These landscapes are described in Section 4.1 and these locations are shown in Figure 4.

4 Landscape Character

4.1 Character of the Wider Landscape

The proposals site is located within the Linlithgow/ Queensferry Farmland Landscape Character Area (LCA), which forms part of the Coastal Margin Landscape Character Type (LCT) as defined by the Lothian Landscape Character Assessment published by SNH⁶. It is designated as the Bathgate Hills and River Avon Valley AGLV by the West Lothian Local Plan and has been reclassified as The Avon Valley SLA in the Proposed LDP (see Section 3.1) and lies within the north western tip of the designated area.

Linlithgow/ Queensferry Farmland LCA of the Coastal Margin LCT

The settlement of Linlithgow is situated on slightly sloping ground, focussed towards Linlithgow Loch and Linlithgow Palace which are located in the north east of the settlement. The surrounding

³ Landscape Character Type (LCT): A distinct type of landscape that is relatively homogenous in character. An LCT is generic in nature and may occur in different areas in different parts of the country. Wherever they occur, they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation and historical landuse and settlement patterns and perceptual and aesthetic attributes

⁴ Landscape Character Area (LCA): These are single unique areas which are the discrete geographical areas of a particular LCT.

⁵ Tyldsley, David Associates, 1996. Dunfermline District landscape assessment: A landscape assessment of Dunfermline District, including part of Kirkcaldy District lying in the West Fife Woodlands Initiative Area. Scottish Natural Heritage review. No. 19

⁶ ASH Consulting Group 1998. The Lothians landscape character assessment Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 91

landscape is well tended and has a prosperous character due to the prominence of Estate landscapes⁷. Hedgerows and lines of trees are common field boundaries. In the wider area, several extensive wooded estates have a major influence on the landscape character through the abundance of deciduous trees and mixed woodlands, shelterbelts and mature parkland trees.

Linlithgow Loch is the largest freshwater loch in the Lothians. Other smaller bodies of standing water are scattered across the landscape predominantly associated with the designed landscapes in the area. A long, narrow manmade loch sits between the northern boundary of the development site and the River Avon.

The Union Canal runs approximately 100m to the south of the proposed development site, at its closest point. The canal follows a gently curving path and is a generally unobtrusive feature in the landscape. The River Avon flows in an east – west direction to the north of the site, and lies within the Avon Valley Landscape Unit (LU) of the Lowland River Valley LCT (see below).

The main Edinburgh – Glasgow railway line crosses to the north of the proposals site. The railway, and the line of the dominant M9 motorway which runs approximately 1km to the north of the proposals site, bisect the landscape and form part of a busy transport network. The transport infrastructure interrupts the rural character of parts of the surrounding farmland and estate landscapes.

Avon Valley Landscape Unit of the Lowland River Valley LCT

The area of the Avon Valley LCU lies approximately 350m north of the proposals site. The area of the LCU has a narrow, deep gorge-like character. It is an enclosed, steep sided river valley with a mixed broadleaved woodland aligning the banks of the Avon River. A few traditional small steadings align the valley, and sit alongside other uses such as mineral extraction, waste disposal and derelict land. The river meanders through the landscape, and as it nears the coast, its character changes to more open and shallower with a less well defined corridor.

Agricultural fields lie above the river, on the northern slopes of the upper valley before the landscape reverts back to the Linlithgow/ Queensferry Farmland LCT further north. Fields are bounded mainly by post and wire fences with some stone walls. There is a lack of large and frequent areas of woodland which contrasts to the heavily wooded character of the landscape to the south of the river (and the proposals site).

The Bathgate Hills LCA of the Lowland Hills LCT

The landscape to the south of the proposals site is comprised of gently rolling lowland terrain, interrupted by higher hills and ridges where rocky outcrops are present. This is most significant along the southern fringes of Linlithgow, where strong ridgelines rise to the Bathgate Hills. It is a distinctive landscape, varying in topography between 200m and 300m AOD. Smooth, rounded lower hills contrast with more uneven ground at higher levels. These are incised by frequent minor watercourses which flow to the River Avon. There is a rich diversity of land cover, with frequent woodland blocks and shelterbelts interspersed with fields of improved grassland and arable pasture.

The elevated nature of the landscape provides some extensive panoramic views to the Forth in the north, and to the Pentland Hills in the south. Beecraigs Country Park, located approximately 2.3km to

⁷ Estate Landscape: Policies associated with an important house or castle, developed by country landowners for both pleasure and productive purposes. Generally associated with 18th and 19th Century estates

the south east of the proposals site (outside the study area) provides a key recreational resource to the wider area.

4.2 Local Landscape Character

Within the site boundary, the site is divided into clear 'areas', delineated by changes in level (created by the earth bunds), and variation in land cover. Areas of open, flat land are surrounded by mixed woodland of differing age and quality. In the east, an area of flat ground is overgrown with weeds in parts. Informal pedestrian paths cut through the flat area, providing access across the site from a small car park on the edge of Linlithgow, and which appear to be used for dog walking and other informal recreation. This area is contained by earth bunds that rise to meet the roads which define the site boundary in the south and west. Young woodland has been planted along the slopes of the earth bunds as part of the restoration work associated with the former quarrying activity. These are not yet established and are still protected by tree guards.



Photograph 1: Looking west from the eastern extent of the site along the informal pedestrian path which passes through this area. The recently planted landform bunds, which rise to the A706, are visible to the left of the photograph

A scrap metal facility is located within the centre of the site and occupies approximately one third of the development area. It is comprised of a number of industrial fabrication buildings, and an extensive area of hardstanding in the north for storage of goods, with an area of car parking to the south along the A706 frontage. A residential property sits within the site boundary, directly to the east of the scrap metal facility.

A large area of flat land extends from the scrap metal facility towards Avontoun Lodge House, which defines the western boundary of the site. Earth bunds topped with large trees surround this area to the north and south. Landcover in this area is grassland interspersed with recently planted woodland.



Photograph 2: Woodland planting within a large area of flat land in the west of the development area. Note the earth bund to the back of the image. The A706 runs behind the trees to the left of the photograph and defines the southern edge of the site

Woodland is a dominant feature within, and immediately surrounding the proposals site. It defines the site boundary in all directions, and an area of denser planting is located to the north of the scrap metal facility, within the proposals site. From here, the landform falls away steeply towards the Avon River and the man-made loch which lies to the north of the site.

Earth bunds define the southern and western boundary of the proposals site, constructed as part of historical quarrying works. A mixture of stone wall, post and rail fencing and mixed woodland run along the southern boundary of the site as it aligns with the A706.

5 Visual Character

5.1 Settlements and Residential Properties

The proposals site lies on the south western edge of Linlithgow, defined to the south by the line of the A706. Along the eastern boundary of the proposals site, a small number (approximately six) of residential properties at Avontoun Park would overlook the new housing development (see Figure 5). These semi-detached, double storey properties are separated from the development site by Mill Road (the B8029) and scrubby planting along the road boundary, as well as the new planting on the earth bund, filters clear views from them to the proposals site.

Adjacent to the scrap metal facility, a single residential property is located within the site boundary (see Section 4.2). This is the only property within the proposals site. In the west, Avontoun Lodge House sits outwith the proposals site and denotes the western boundary of the site.

In the wider area, a more recent residential development has been completed at Whitecross, located approximately 1km to the north west of the proposed development site, on the northern side of the

Avon River Valley. The southern edge of this residential area looks across agricultural farmland towards the Avon River Valley and towards the more wooded hills to the south as the landscape rises towards the Bathgate Hills in the south east (see Photograph 4). The proposals site is generally obscured from these views by the extensive woodland which surrounds it.

Scattered properties lie within the wider rural area, however views towards the development site are obscured or filtered by the intervening woodland which is characteristic of the overall landscape.



Photograph 3: A small number of properties at Avontoun Park overlook the proposed development site in the east. Scrub planting along the B8029 filters some of these views



Photograph 4: The southern edge of a recent residential development at Whitecross looks towards the development site (in red) in a south easterly direction. Current views of the site are obscured by woodland and backdropped by the Bathgate Hills in the south

5.2 Roads and Routes

The southern boundary of the proposals site is defined by the A706. This A-road runs from Muirhouse to a junction with the A801 near Torphichen. To the east of the site, Mill Road (the B8029) currently defines the urban edge of Linlithgow, providing access to the M9 in the north for travellers entering Linlithgow from the west.

The B825 provides access to the rural area near Whitecross, running in parallel with the A706, to the north of the Avon River Valley and connecting to the A801 at Bowhouse Roundabout.

The M9 motorway passes to the north of Linlithgow, approximately 1km from the proposals site. It is a major motorway in Scotland, linking Edinburgh with Dunblane. Minor roads provide local access to farmhouses and small cluster settlements within the 2km study area.

The Edinburgh-Glasgow railway line passes approximately 80m to the north of the proposals site boundary. The Avon Viaduct is a prominent feature in views from the surrounding area (see Photograph 7) and the development site would be seen clearly by passengers using the train in views to the south at close proximity.



Photograph 7: The Avon Viaduct on the Edinburgh – Glasgow Railway line passes directly to the north of the proposed development site

5.3 Recreational Routes and Facilities

West Lothian Core Path 6 (WL6) runs to the north of the proposals site (see Figure 5). This 16km long path passes through three local authority areas. As it routes through West Lothian, it largely runs through gorge woodland associated with the Avon River Valley. It lies low in the landscape, sitting below the development site and views to the site are currently screened by woodland.

A number of informal paths following ‘desire lines’ are present across the site, used by local residents walking dogs or accessing the River Avon Heritage Path which links walkers from Linlithgow to the Avon River. A key informal path enters the site at a small car parking area in the east and provides access across the site and connects with the John Muir Way.

The Xcite Leisure Centre is located to the south of the proposals site, on the south side of the A706. The centre provides swimming and other indoor recreation facilities. Outside, a number of sports fields are located to the south of the complex. A planning application for a large outdoor sport facility is to be submitted to West Lothian Council for consideration and would expand into the open agricultural ground to the west of the Xcite complex, extending along the A706 adjacent to the proposals site boundary (see Concept Masterplan).

6 Preliminary Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

6.1 Preliminary Assessment of Landscape Effects

Landscape of the Site

There would be a loss of landscape resource as a result of the proposed development. This would predominantly include large areas of brownfield land, previously used for mineral extraction which are currently used for informal recreation by local residents. It would also include the site of an operational scrap metal facility. The scrap metal site would be removed (and relocated) to facilitate the development of new housing.

The landscape is locally designated as the Avon Valley SLA (see Section 3.1) and, as part of the wider site of the Battle of Linlithgow Bridge, it has a clear local cultural value. There would be direct impacts on these features. It is composed of elements such as woodland which enclose views, and currently screens views of the site from the wider area. Buildings in the wider area are in scale with the landscape. There are a number of buildings within and surrounding the site, particularly to the east at the edge of Linlithgow (see Section 6.2).

The proposed development would affect approximately 9.2ha of the Bathgate and Avon Valley AGLV/ Avon Valley SLA. The SLA designation boundary covers an overall area of landscape of approximately 450ha⁸. In the context of the overall landscape designation (which extends approximately 8km along the Avon River to Avonbridge), and taking account of historical land uses such as mining and quarrying, the landscape quality of the area of land within the proposed development area is not pristine, distinctive or scarce. It is comprised of a high degree of 'made ground', with earth bunds within and around the edge of the site, and flat areas of filled-in quarry. The landscape of the site has been manipulated extensively by man's activities and is not natural in character. It is considered that a sympathetic masterplan design, utilising the existing landform and woodland structure of the site and which supports the qualities of enclosure and tranquillity, could enhance the quality of the landscape of the site and its context in the surrounding area without being detrimental to the overall qualities of the SLA. Opportunities to encourage engagement with the historical associations of the site (The Battle of Linlithgow Bridge) would provide an opportunity to help interpret the cultural associations of the area. The sensitivity of the landscape within and immediately surrounding the area of the proposed development is considered to be medium-low.

There is extensive mature woodland planting along or near the site's boundaries, and areas of recent woodland planting as part of the mining restoration work. It is the intention of the development that the majority of the mature woodland would be retained. This landscape feature is important to the character of the landscape of the site and the wider area. It forms a framework for the proposed housing development to sit within, providing context and would immediately embed the development into its surroundings. The woodland would visually contain the development. More recent planting would require removal to facilitate the development, however it would (in part) be replaced by proposed planting associated with the redevelopment of the site. It is not yet of an age or height where its presence contributes materially to the character of the landscape in the wider area.

⁸ This figure is an estimate based on GIS mapping shown in Figure 3.

Following completion of the development, no additional landscape resource would be lost. An active management plan for the woodland areas and individual trees within the development boundary would ensure that this important feature is enhanced and protected. It is considered that the proposed development, if taken forward sensitively as proposed, could be successfully integrated into the existing settlement at Linlithgow without impacting significantly on the landscape character of the immediate and wider surrounding area.

Wider Landscape Character

By extending the urban edge of Linlithgow to the south west, the proposed development would affect the character of the landscape in the immediate vicinity of the development by introducing a structured housing development into a largely rural area. However, due to the extensive woodland and estate planting in the wider landscape the influence of the proposed development on the character of the surrounding area would be predicted to be minimal. Proposed housing would sit within a framework of established woodland which would screen a high degree of views to the development site and would embed the development into its context.

The land at the proposals site sits within a well-structured, mature landscape setting where clear views to the internal area of the site are limited. This setting limits the influence that the proposed development would have on the character of the wider landscape.

Linlithgow/ Queensferry Farmlands LCA of the Coastal Margins LCT

The Linlithgow Farmlands LCT is characterised for its rolling terrain, rural character and extensive woodland cover. There are a number of medium – large settlements within the area of the LCT, including South Queensferry, Linlithgow, Bo’ness and Grangemouth. The proposed development would extend the south western edge of Linlithgow into a 9.2ha area of brownfield land which has a history of mining and quarrying activity and as such, is a heavily modified area of the landscape.

The proposed development would not remove any extensive areas of the mature woodland which defines the site boundary. In combination with the wider areas of woodland within the landscape, this wooded framework would contain the influence of the new housing on the character of the surrounding landscape.

The development would locally affect a small area of already disturbed landscape. Across the wider area of the LCT the magnitude of change is not considered to be at a level where the effect of the development on the landscape would be significant. Development of housing in this area would not influence the overall character of the LCT to the extent that its defining characteristics would be significantly changed or compromised.

Avon Valley Landscape Unit of the Lowland River Valley LCT

The area of the Avon Valley Landscape Unit which would be influenced by the development at Avontoun is presently influenced by the large settlement of Linlithgow to the east, and the smaller settlement of Whitecross to the north west.

The proposed development would appear as an extension to Linlithgow, occupying an area of landscape to the south of the river and set amongst the established framework of woodland which appears currently in views to the site. This woodland would largely be retained and it is not considered that the presence of the new housing development would influence the area of the Landscape Unit to the extent where its character would be significantly altered.

The Bathgate Hills LCA of the Lowland Hills LCT

The proposed development would not be predicted to impact significantly on the area of the Bathgate Hills LCA. The level of existing woodland in the area of Linlithgow, the development site and the immediate area restrict the influence of the current built up area on the character of the LCA. Views towards the development site from the upper elevations of the LCA are across the wider landscape and out to the Firth of Forth and include views of large settlements such as Bo'ness and Grangemouth. It is considered that a housing development at the proposals site would sit comfortably and unobtrusively within this existing landscape context. It is not considered that the proposed development at Avontoun would adversely affect or influence the character of the Bathgate Hills LCA to a level where the effect would be significant.

6.2 Preliminary Assessment of Visual Effects

As detail of the proposed development is not yet at a level where an informed visual assessment can be undertaken, the following section presents a preliminary assessment of the effects of the proposals on views to the current site, supported by photographs which show the indicative location of the site boundary.

Views from the East

The settlement of Linlithgow lies to the east of the development site. Views from this area currently look towards established woodland planting along the boundary of the development area and towards the Avon Viaduct. As the site area is set down below the road level, views from Mill Road (B8029) look across the top of the site, towards the scrap metal facility located in the centre of the development area. The proposed housing development would therefore sit below the level of existing housing along Mill Road.

Views from properties along Mill Road would change from an open outlook westwards towards the development site, and the scrap metal facility (filtered by trees located along an earth bund) to views of a structured residential area (see Figure 6b). Mill Road would no longer define the western edge of the built up area of Linlithgow, but would instead run through the middle of an extended area of urban settlement.

Properties which are located on this edge do not front on to Mill Road. The majority are semi-detached double storey houses, where upstairs rear windows have clear views towards the development site, partially screened by vegetation along the roadside and within the boundaries of the properties (see Photograph 3). Any further planting within the site boundary would further filter views to the proposed development.

It is considered that there would be a notable change in views from the east at Mill Road and the line of properties which back onto Mill Road, and a significant visual effect would be experienced users of the road network and residents of the area.

Views from the West

Views to the site from the west would be limited to residential properties at Avontoun Lodge House and the surrounding farmland due to the extensive woodland in the area providing a high degree of screening.

Avontoun Lodge House (and associated dwellings) would have some highly filtered views to the development through existing mature woodland. The proposals would introduce residential development into close proximity to these properties, however due to the extensive woodland

framework separating the existing properties from the proposals site, the proposed vehicle access to the development being located further to the east of the development (see Concept Masterplan) and the presence of the earth bund which would separate the proposed development from the existing properties, effects on views from Avontoun Lodge House would be reduced.

From further west, views towards the proposed development would be screened by topography and woodland and the change in views would reduce quickly to none.

Views from the North

As the landscape rises out of the valley of the River Avon, clear views are present towards the area of the development site due to the lack of woodland within the area classified as the Avon River Valley LCU.

Views from this direction look towards a more intimate landscape of Linlithgow and surrounding farmlands (see Figure 6a). Large areas of woodland are the predominant landscape feature in the view, with some farm buildings, industrial buildings and houses glimpsed between plantations. Linlithgow sits low in the landscape, amongst a framework of trees. To the rear of the view, the Bathgate Hills rise up to form the skyline, located south of the development site. The Avon Viaduct is a key feature in views from the north and sits in the foreground of the proposed development site.

The proposed development is expected to sit amongst the existing woodland framework. Due to the change in level between the existing built environment and the site, houses would sit lower in the landscape than the urban area that is currently visible, and would be slightly more screened by vegetation. Views to the development site, including those from the Avon Viaduct and the B825 would be available from the north, and would view the new housing as an extension to the existing settlement of Linlithgow, located within a woodland setting. There would be a noticeable change in views from some areas directly to the north of the development site during and following construction which would be likely to be significant, however over time the development would settle into its context and would sit comfortably within the woodland which currently exists, and also from new planting that which would be introduced as part of the development site landscape plans.

Views from the South

To the south of the site, the landscape rises steadily to the Bathgate Hills. There are some scattered properties located on the hill slopes, some surrounded by the extensive woodland which is characteristic of this landscape. The road network is not extensive across the southern part of the study area.

Where panoramic views are available, they are of an active landscape. Views extend to the Forth, and contain the large industrial site at Grangemouth (see Figure 6a). Scattered settlements, both large and small, are present in the view.

The proliferation of woodland contains a high degree of views in the lower reaches of the hills, particularly along roads, preventing many opportunities for longer distance views towards the site.

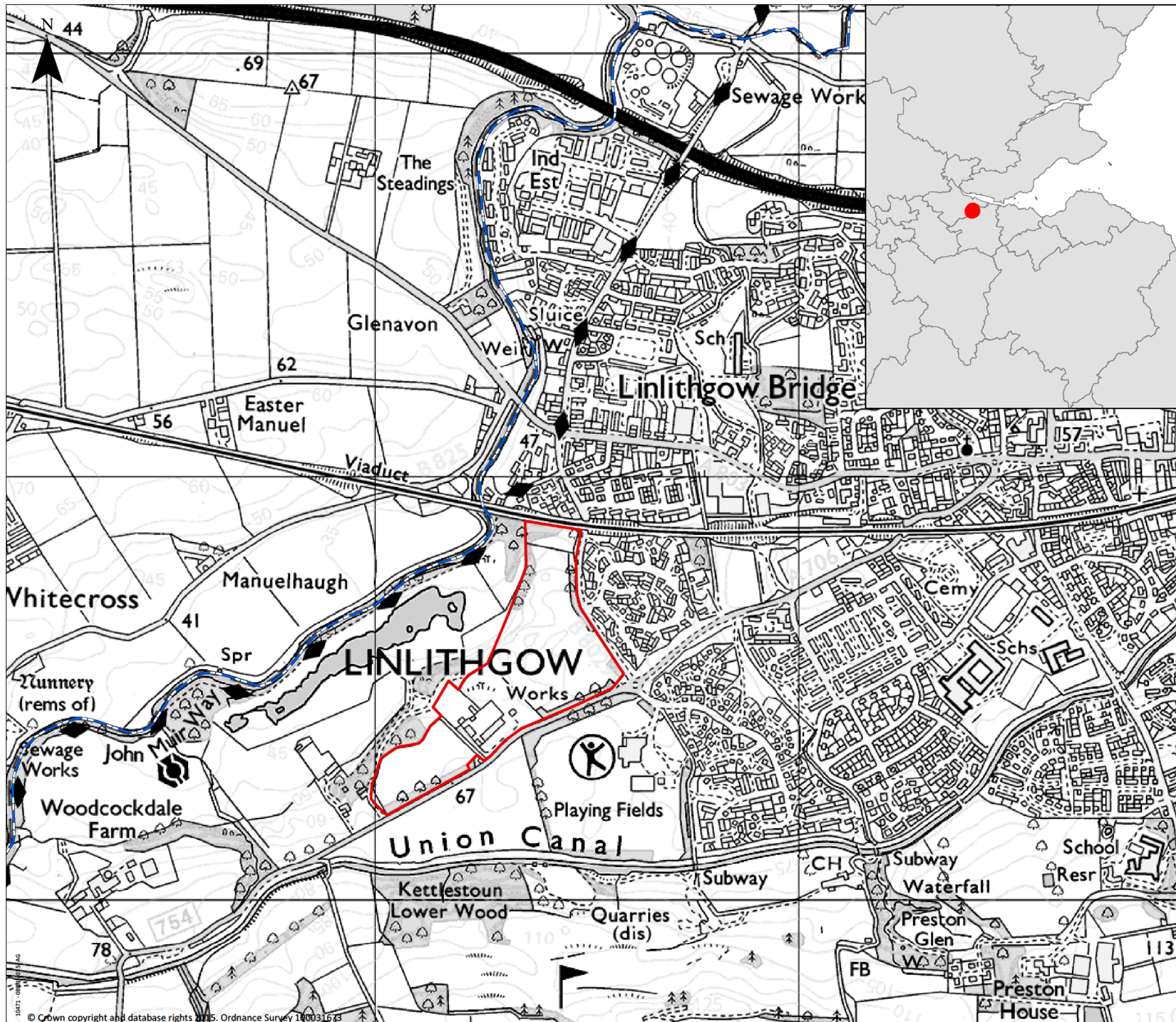
The proposed development would sit low in the landscape, at the base of the hill before it drops into the Avon River Valley. It extends from the existing urban edge of Linlithgow, and is bounded by mature woodland. Overall, the change in views from the south of the development site is expected to be low at most. It is not considered there would be significant visual effects, particularly at distances of greater than 500m from the site.

7 Conclusions

- The landscape of the proposals site is a brownfield site, degraded as a result of the historic use of the site for mining and quarrying. A scrap metal facility within the centre of the site also contributes to this degraded character.
- Woodland is a defining feature of the character of the landscape of the site and in the wider environment. It provides a strong sense of enclosure, containing views and creating intimate spaces in both rural and urban areas.
- The landscape effects associated with the proposed development will result from the loss of an area of generally open land to the west of Linlithgow and the change in character of the site from partially industrial to residential development which would define part of the western settlement edge of Linlithgow.
- It is considered that the management and maintenance of a degraded site arising from the proposed development will have positive landscape effects in the immediate area in the longer term.
- In drafting the masterplan, full consideration has been given to the site's landscape setting and its historical qualities and relevance. Effects on the landscape character will be mitigated through the retention and enhancement of the existing woodland framework which will help to settle the development into the wider context and reduce its impact on landscape character. The existing woodland, and the additional planting that is proposed in the masterplan, will contain the housing within the site, and the setting of the proposed development will benefit from the woodland structure as it will create a clear, well defined space.
- Development of the proposals site will not have a detrimental impact on the overall area of the Avon Valley Special Landscape Area (SLA). Rehabilitation of a brownfield site, in line with the development proposed in the masterplan (including existing woodland enhancement) could further promote the landscape qualities of this area of the SLA.
- There are both clear and filtered views to the proposals site from properties located on the western edge of Linlithgow and Avontoun House Lodge immediately to the west of the site. The proposals site is set lower in the landscape than the surrounding area, as a result of the earth moving work that was undertaken as part of the previous land use. This difference in level will set the houses lower in the landscape, and therefore lower in the view. Views from the western edge of Linlithgow, and from Mill Road, will generally be across the top of the development however due to the development being a notable change in these views, a significant visual effect would be experienced users of the road network and residents of the area.
- The development site is screened in views from much of the surrounding area, and the proposed development will be well contained within the lower lying landscape, particularly in views from the south.
- In views from the north, the new development will be visible amongst the woodland setting, extending from the edge of Linlithgow. There would be a noticeable change in views from some areas in the north, particularly during and following construction, which would be likely

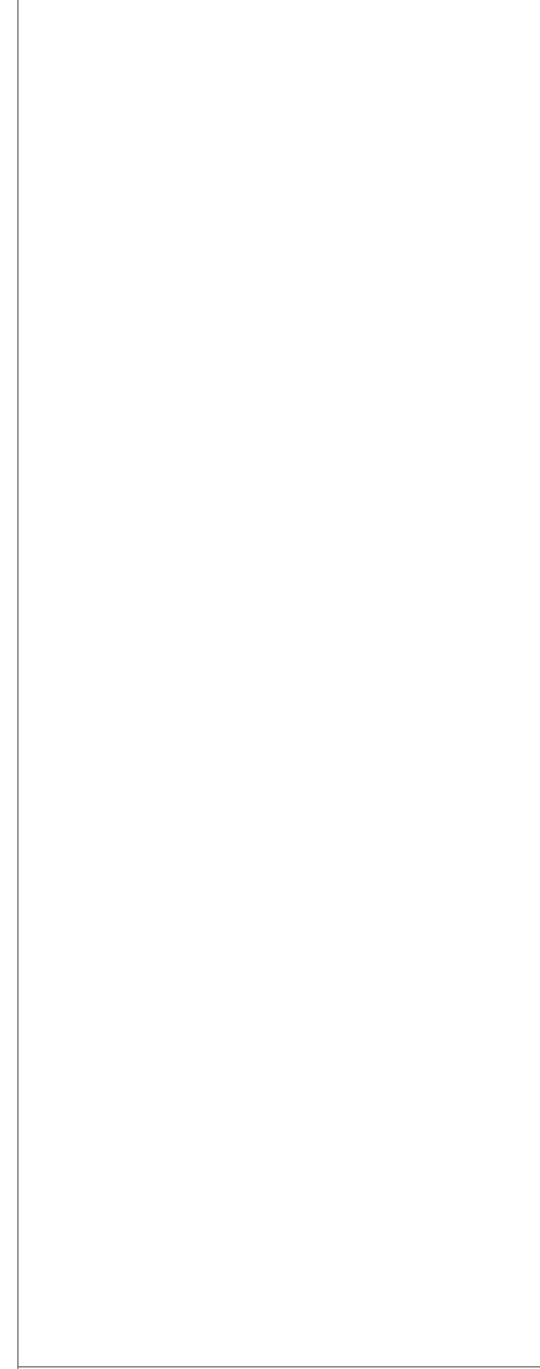
to be significant, however over time the development would settle into its context and would sit comfortably within the woodland (both existing and proposed).

- The masterplan will retain a high degree of the site's existing woodland framework to control the effects on these views and will introduce further strategic planting into areas in order to embed the development within its surroundings. The existing woodland which defines the site boundary to the south will be retained to filter views to and from the A706.
- The proposed masterplan will retain and improve existing pedestrian links across the site, encouraging continued use and improving connectivity to the wider path network.
- It is considered that the proposed development, if taken forward in line with the principles and concepts indicated in the site's masterplan, will be successfully integrated into the existing settlement at Linlithgow and will sit comfortably within the landscape character of the immediate and wider area.
- As the masterplan is developed into a more detailed design, it will be important to control the quality of the development. A Design Code will be drafted to assist in controlling the progression of the design and detailing of all new buildings and external works to ensure that the principles and objectives of the masterplan is upheld.



KEY

- Site Boundary
- Local Authority Boundary



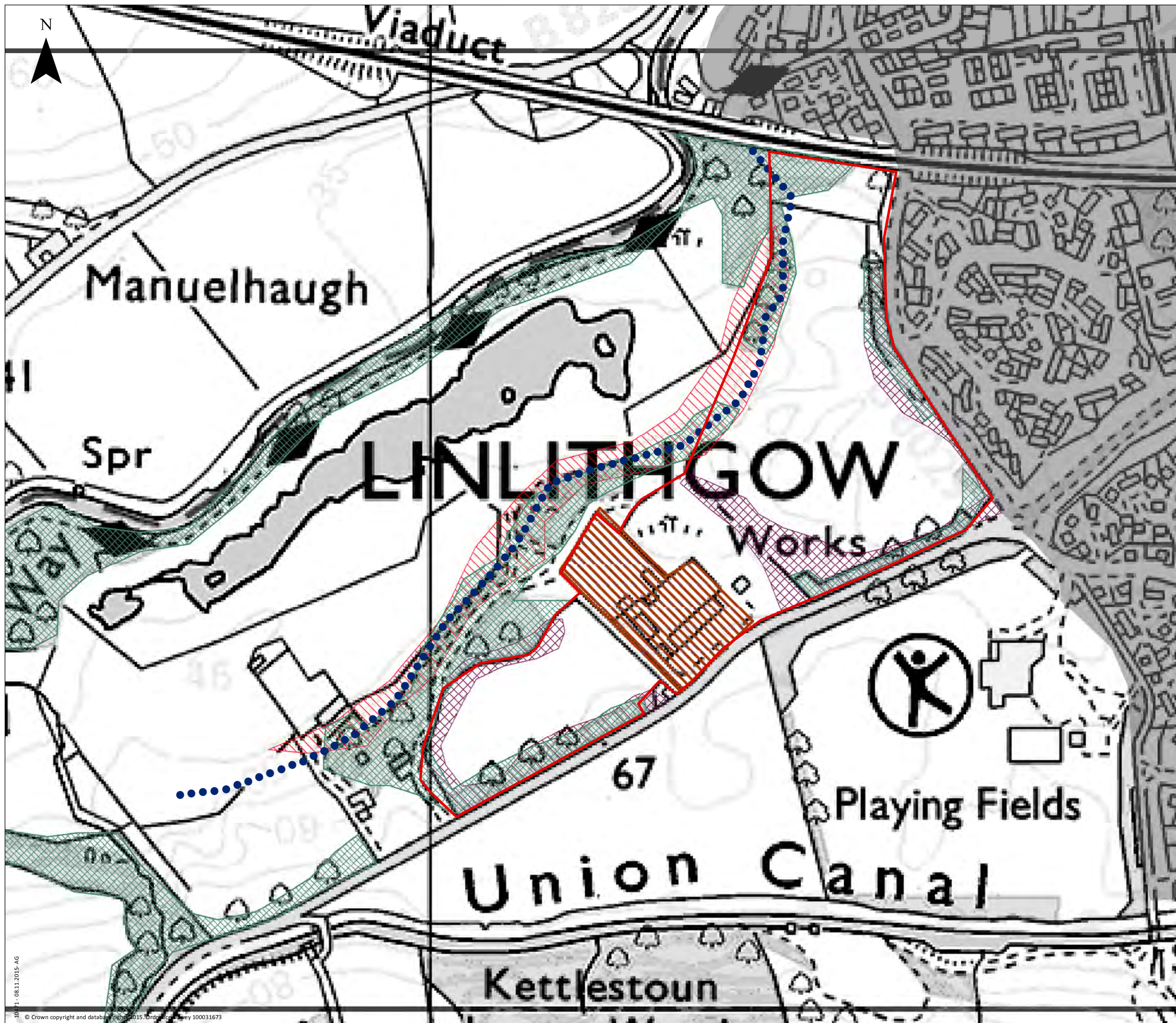
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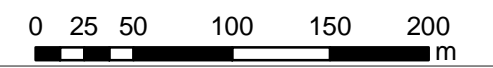
Avontoun Housing Allocation
Landscape Appraisal

Figure 1
Location Plan

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- KEY**
-  Site Boundary
 -  Ridgeline
 -  Steep Slope
 -  Earthbund
 -  Woodland
 -  Metal Work Facility
 -  Urban Area



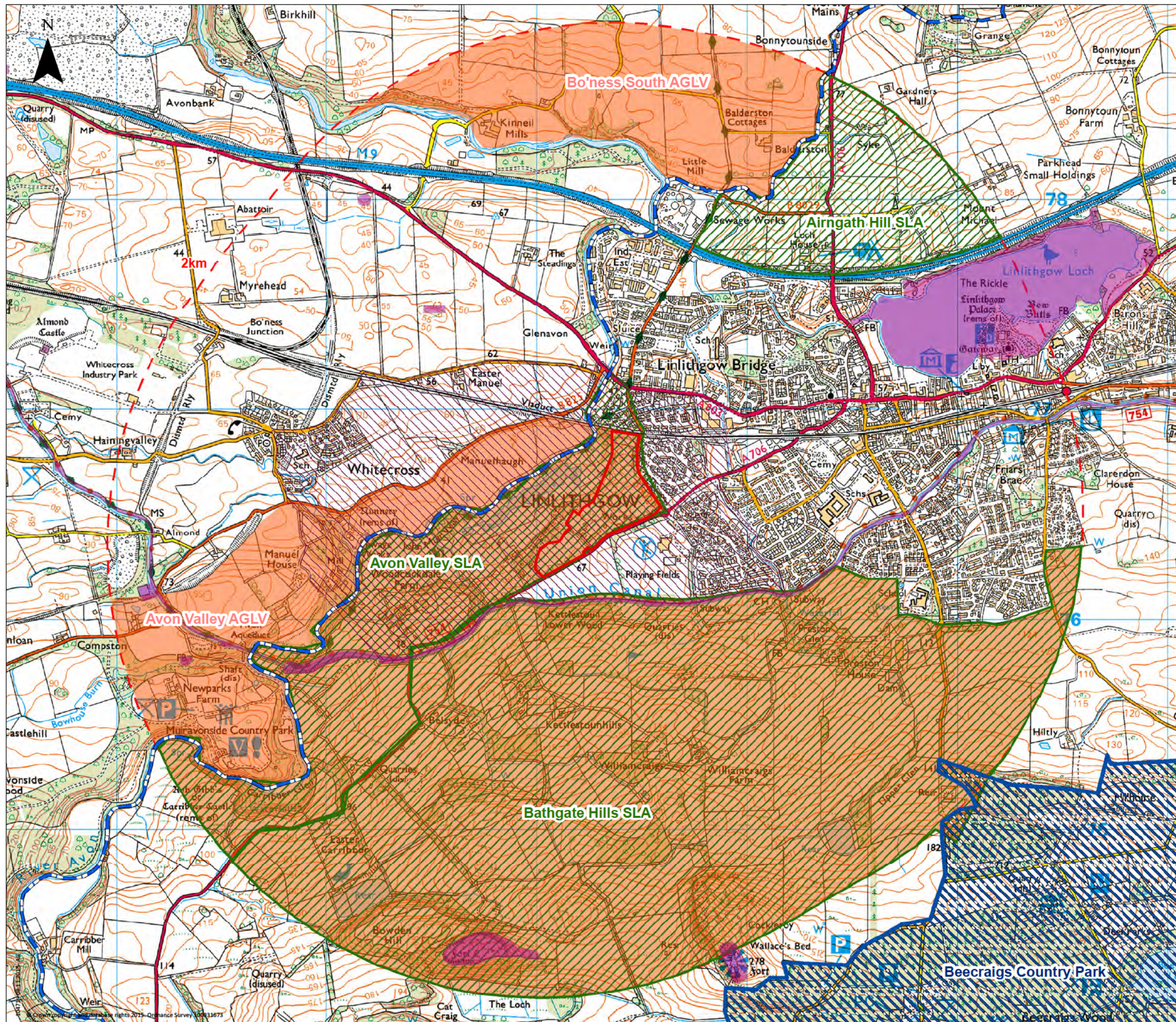
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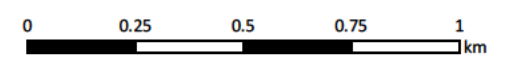
Avontoun Housing Allocation
Landscape Appraisal

Figure 2
Site Features

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- KEY**
- Site Boundary
 - 2km Study Area
 - Local Authority
 - Special Landscape Area (SLA)
 - Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV) (Local Plan)
 - Beecraigs Country Park
 - Scheduled Monument
 - Battle of Linlithgow Bridge Battlefield (Inventory)



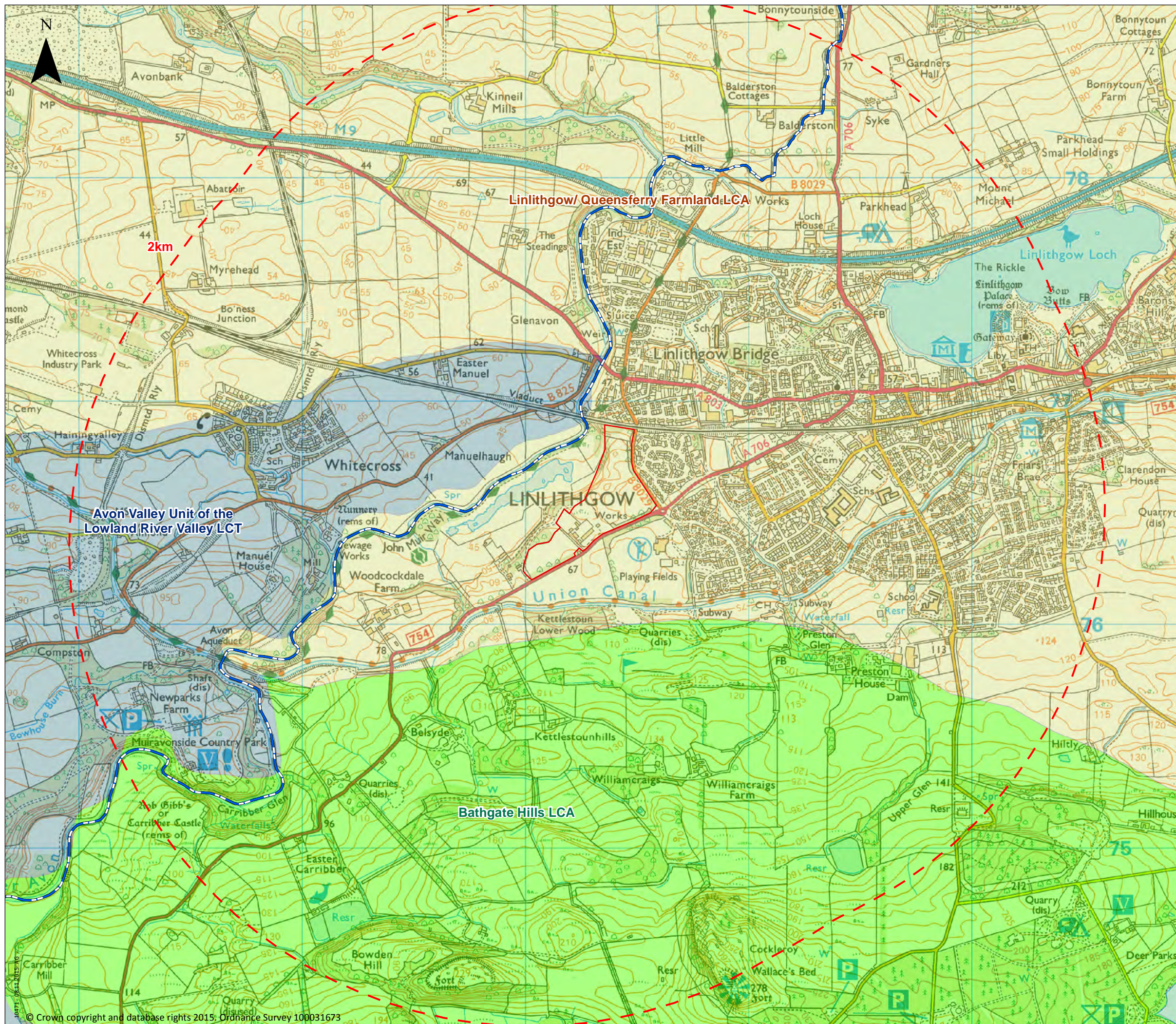
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Avontoun Housing Allocation
Landscape Appraisal

Figure 3

Landscape Constraints



KEY

- Site Boundary
- Local Authority Boundary
- 2km Study Area

Landscape Character Classification

- Linlithgow/ Queensferry Farmland LCA of the Coastal Margins LCT
- Bathgate Hills LCA of the Lowland Hills LCT
- Avon Valley Unit of the Lowland River Valley LCT



Scale 1:16,500 @ A3



Avontoun Housing Allocation
Landscape Appraisal

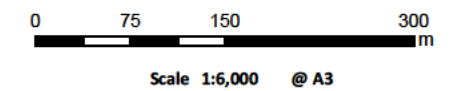
Figure 4

Landscape Character Classification

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- KEY**
- ▭ Site Boundary
 - ★ Potentially Affected Property
 - ⋯ Road
 - ⋯ Rail
 - ⋯ Recreation Trail



Avontoun Housing Allocation
Landscape Appraisal

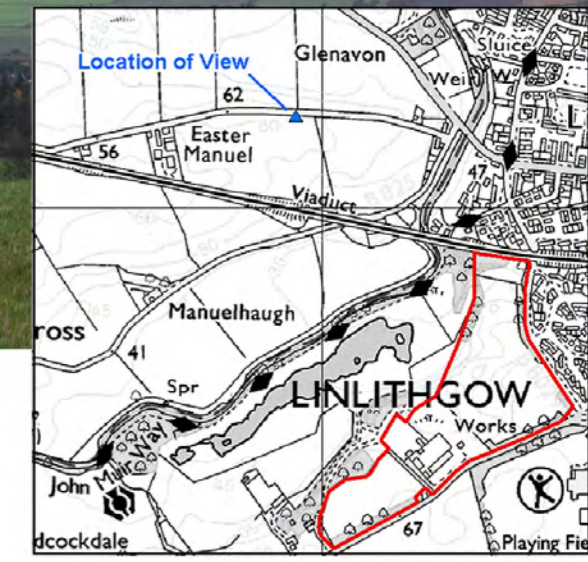
Figure 5

Key Visual Receptors

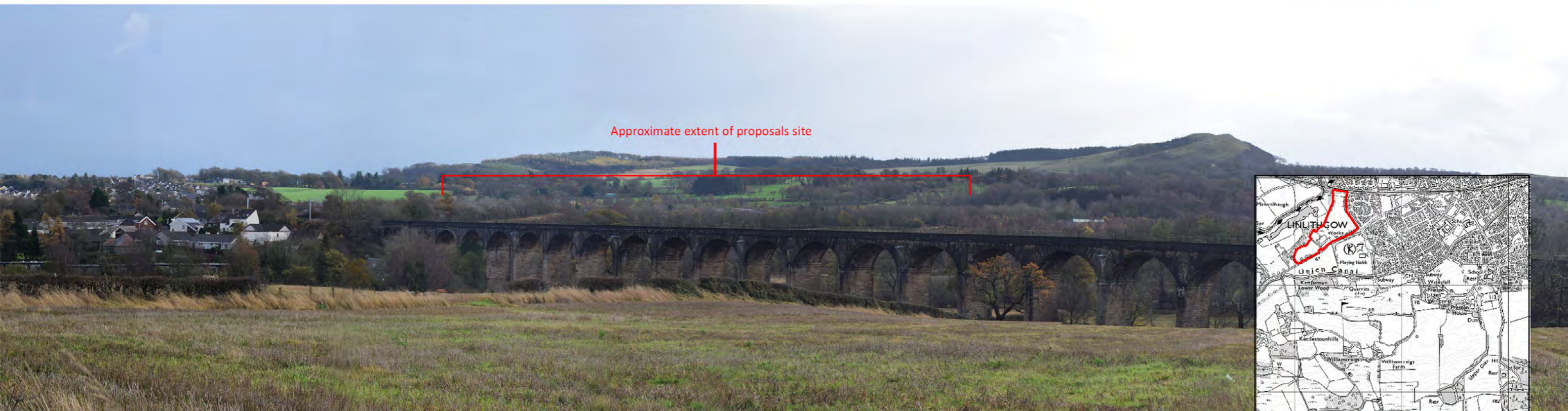
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Approximate extent of proposals site



Views from the south: Views from the south of the site, where not enclosed by woodland, are wide ranging and look across the lower lying landscape in the north towards the Firth of Forth. The proposals site sits low in the landscape and is screened in many locations by woodland and topography in the surrounding area



Approximate extent of proposals site



Views from the North: Views from the north look across open pasture towards the development site, which currently appears as dense woodland. The woodland structure would be retained and new planting introduced as part of the housing masterplan, sitting the proposed development within the existing landscape setting and would limit clear and unfiltered views to houses. Roof tops and some development would be visible amongst the trees however these would sit comfortably adjacent to the western edge of Linlithgow (see to left of photograph)

Land at Avontoun - Landscape Appraisal
Figure 6a: Views from the North and South



Approximate Site Boundary



Views from the east: The site sits lower in the landscape than the surrounding area. Views from the east extend across the site, and to the scrap metal facility and scrub woodland in the centre. Mill Road separates the proposals site from the closest residential receptors. These properties face east, while the upstairs rear windows have views towards the proposals site. Trees which align parts of the site boundary along the east screen some views to the site from this western edge of Linlithgow



Approximate extent of proposals site



Views from the west: Views from the west are largely screened from the proposed development by woodland and topography. The A706 road winds through the landscape, bordered by roadside trees. There are few locations in the west, within 2km of the proposed development site, which would have views to the proposals site.



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