

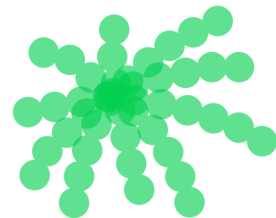
Dechmont West Lothian

Clarendon Planning and Development



Ecological Issues

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2014



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and Site

1.2 This report is commissioned by Clarendon Planning and Development, Edinburgh in respect of residential development proposals for land at Dechmont, West Lothian. (NT045708) The commission was for a desk study to identify ecological issues arising from proposed development of the land. The study and its findings are set out below.

1.3 The land is on the east edge of Dechmont, West Lothian, which is north of Livingston and west of Broxburn.

1.4 The land is three fields and an area of trees and scrub. The land is irregularly shaped. The north is a roughly rectangular area comprising two fields of, apparently abandoned, pasture. In the south-east of this land is a third, smaller field, to the south of which is a triangular area of tree cover with scrub growth. There are abandoned buildings in the north of the land with a small area of garden ground.

1.5 There is a drain on the south boundary which spreads and disappears in the south-east of the land and there appears to be a water body in the small field in the east of the land.

1.6 The north and east boundaries adjoin roads, Main Street and the A899 respectively. The south and west boundaries adjoin apparently unmanaged land supporting grassland, trees and shrubs. The apex of the southern triangle of land approaches the A89. The broader land use is farming to the north, residential to the east and west and woodland to the south.

1.7 Power lines cross the north-east corner causing fragmentation of the adjacent woodland beneath the lines.

1.8 Historical context

1.9 The northern fields have been in agricultural use since the mid nineteenth century.

1.10 The triangular tract of land in the south of the site was part of Haggis Wood until the mid twentieth century when the A89 was built. By this time, there had been clearance of the north-east corner of the wood to accommodate a curling rink. This first appears on the OS maps in 1922. The Dechmont Roundabout to the south-east of the land was built in the 1960s.

1.11 In the early twentieth century Bangour Railway was built to the south-west of the land and passing to the south on the west boundary of Haggis Wood.

1.12 Buildings first appeared on the north boundary of the land on the 1952 OS maps and the Craiglawn housing to the south-west was first recorded in the 1960s. The



housing to the north of Craiglaw had not appeared by the publication of the 1991 1:2500 OS map.

1.13 Proposal

- 1.14 The proposal is to develop the land for housing. Development of the land for housing will incorporate the creation of private gardens, public open space and SUDS facilities. Development will result in the loss of habitat opportunity but can also bring with it creation of new habitat opportunity and increase in biodiversity.
- 1.15 Development will be restricted to the three fields in the north. The development will be accessed from Main Street and the A899. The south-west will be developed as public open space and the habitats on the southern tip will be retained and brought under management for biodiversity benefit.
- 1.16 It is important development is achieved with no adverse impact on biodiversity. The purpose of this study is to ensure the protected habitats and species are safeguarded during construction and operation of the development and to ensure there is no adverse effect of development on designated sites.



2.0 DESK STUDY

2.1 The Scottish Natural Heritage interactive information service (snhi) was interrogated in respect of Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and RAMSAR sites local to the Dechmont land.

2.2 The survey findings are complemented by consideration of recorded data available from the National Biodiversity Network Gateway (NBN Gateway), The Wildlife Information Centre (TWIC).

2.3 Species for which information was sought included those protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, and European Protected Species as listed in Annex A of the EC Directive 92/43/EEC, the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Flora and Fauna ('The Habitats Directive') as enacted into domestic legislation by The Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 1994.

2.4 West Lothian Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) and UKBAP priority habitats and species were also considered.

2.5 Internationally Designated Sites

2.6 There is no internationally designated site within 2.5km of the Dechmont land.

2.7 Nationally Designated Sites

2.8 There is no nationally designated site within 2.5km of the Dechmont land.

2.9 Locally Designated Sites

2.10 There is no locally designated site within 1km of the Dechmont land.

2.11 BAP Habitats

2.12 The proposed development land is almost entirely pasture land. Farmland is a priority habitat of the West Lothian BAP. Grassland is one of the types of farmland mentioned in the plan. The value of this habitat is the species diversity it presents if it has been less intensively grazed. Features of more intensive grazing are fertiliser application, drainage, reseeding and over-grazing.

2.13 The habitat can be significantly modified and become less biodiverse as a consequence of one or more of these activities. It appears the Dechmont land has been degraded by grazing and drainage. The sward of the northern field is mainly grasses whereas the land to the south has a significant proportion of soft rush in the sward indicating impeded drainage. Phase 1 Habitat plans of the land indicate no semi-natural habitats in the north land and only a small area of grassland in the north of the southern triangular element of the land.



2.14 **Habitats**

2.15 There is no exceptional habitat on the land. Phase 1 Habitat plans for the area indicate no habitats which merit target noting.

2.16 **Protected/Notable Species**

2.17 **Birds**

2.18 No notable bird species have been recorded within 250m of the land. The habitat distribution across the land implies bird nesting potential is greatest in the south of the land.

2.19 **Badgers**

2.20 NBN hold records of badgers in grid square NT07 which includes the Dechmont land but there is no record local to the site. TWIC holds records of the species within 1km of the land, the closest being 250m distant. There are two main setts within 1km of the land, one of which is south of the M8 motorway. Nevertheless, there is potential for the species to use the land. Pasture grassland is not optimum forage for the species and there is extensive forage opportunity in the locality of the sett.

2.21 A walkover of the land would indicate whether the species forage over the land.

2.22 **Bats**

2.23 Daubenton's (*Myotis daubentonii*), Natterer's (*M. nattereri*), common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*), soprano pipistrelle (*P. pygmaea*) and brown long-eared bats (*Plecotus auritus*) are listed by NBN Gateway as present in NT07. There is no specific record from NBN or TWIC within 1km of the Dechmont land.

2.24 There are buildings on the land and mature trees within the application boundary in the extreme south. Forage opportunities are restricted to the boundaries where there are hedges and small trees.

2.25 The small trees appear to be young, in good condition and unlikely to offer roost opportunities. The mature trees could offer roost opportunities. Aerial images indicate the buildings vary in construction and may offer potential for bat roosting. Close inspection of the interior and exterior of the buildings would be required to establish their bat roost potential/use.

2.26 Bat roosting within the buildings would not prevent development of the land involving demolition of the buildings. It is possible demolition work will require a disturbance licence.

2.27 Bat roosting in the trees in the south of the land is not an issue as there is no proposal to fell mature trees.



2.28 **Other Species**

- 2.29 There is no suitable habitat running or standing water on or near the site and therefore no habitat for otters or water voles.
- 2.30 VML raster plans for the land indicate there is a pond in the east of the land. The pond is not visible on aerial images of the land but there is a change in vegetation cover in this area. The Phase 1 Habitat plan for the site indicates no standing water habitat and there is no mention of standing water in the Habitat Survey Target Notes. Great crested newts are not recorded within 1km of the land but the species is found approximately 3km to the east. If there is a pond on the land it would need to be assessed as to its potential as great crested-newt breeding habitat.



3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The proposal is to develop land at Dechmont for housing and public open space. Pasture land will be lost to development.
- 3.2 There are no internationally, nationally or locally designated sites that will be adversely affected by the proposal to develop the land for housing.
- 3.3 **Species**
- 3.4 The desk study and revealed no evidence of otters, water voles and great crested newts using the land. There is no suitable habitat for otters water voles and therefore no recommendations put forward for their protection, before, during or after development.
- 3.5 **Badgers and small mammals**
- 3.6 Badgers are recorded within 250m of the land. The species may be affected by the proposals. A further survey prior to development will be required as badgers can take up residence on land overnight. Should badgers take up residence on the land, the conservation status of the species is unlikely to be adversely affected by development as proposed. There is provision within the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 to licence development activity which would otherwise be illegal under the Act. Irrespective of the status of badgers in respect of the site, it is recommended that measures are put in place to safeguard the species and small mammals during the construction period.
- 3.7 There is potential for small mammals to become entrapped in trenches or open pipes overnight. This should be prevented by ensuring a ramped means of escape is place in trenches overnight or the trenches are covered. Open pipes should be blocked at the close of each working day.
- 3.8 Materials, fuels and solvents should be stored such that they are inaccessible to wildlife and there is no spillage onto the land that may be harmful to wildlife.
- 3.9 **Bats**
- 3.10 There are buildings on the land which must be regarded as having potential for bat roosting. It is necessary to inspect the buildings inside and out for evidence of use by bats before determining whether further surveys are necessary before deciding whether bats may be disturbed by implementation of the proposals.
- 3.11 Trees in the south of the land may provide roost opportunities for bats. It is assumed bats forage along the boundaries and individual bats may overnight amongst the ivy on trees on the south of the site. It is not proposed to fell trees in the south of the land and it is therefore not necessary to inspect the trees for evidence of use for roosting.



3.12 **Great crested-newts**

3.13 It is not clear from the information available whether there is standing water habitat on the land. Ordnance survey plans for the land indicate a pond in the east of the land which is not evident on aerial images or Phase 1 Habitat plans of the land.

3.14 The situation must be clarified as great crested newts are known to be resident on land 2.5km to the east. If there is standing water habitat found on the land it should be assessed for potential for use by great crested-newts and a decision made whether further surveys are required.

3.15 **Birds**

3.16 No evidence was found of protected bird species nesting on the land but there is potential for nesting in the semi-natural habitat in the south.

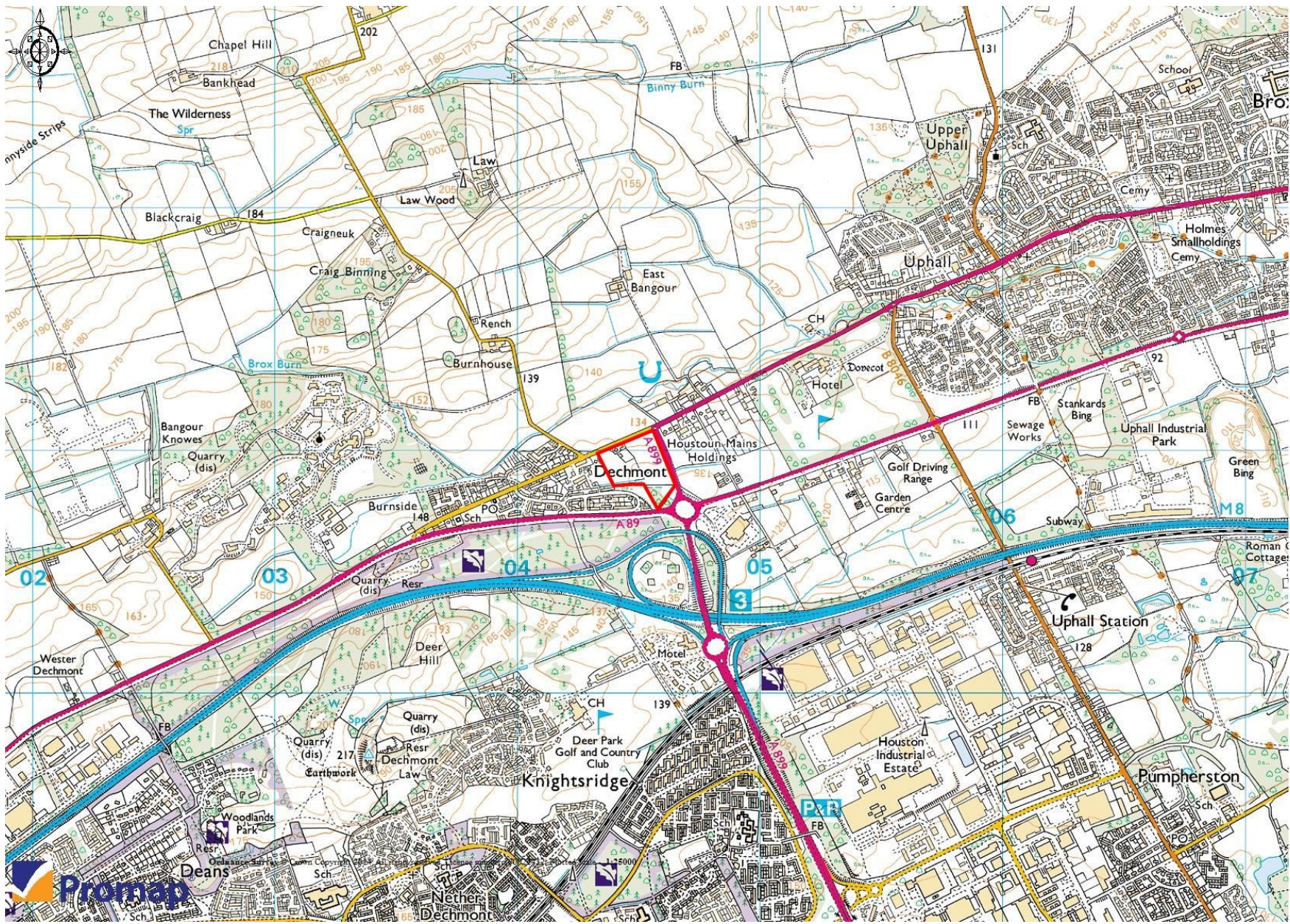
3.17 It is an offence under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 as amended to disturb a nesting bird or damage a nest. Clearance of vegetation from the proposed construction areas has the potential to disturb nesting birds; therefore clearance should be carried out outside the bird nesting season March – August. Should it be necessary to clear ground during the bird nesting season the land should be surveyed by a suitably qualified ecologist and declared clear of nesting birds before vegetation clearance starts.



Figure 1

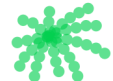
Location Plan

Figure 1



**Dechmont
West Lothian
Location Plan
March 2014**

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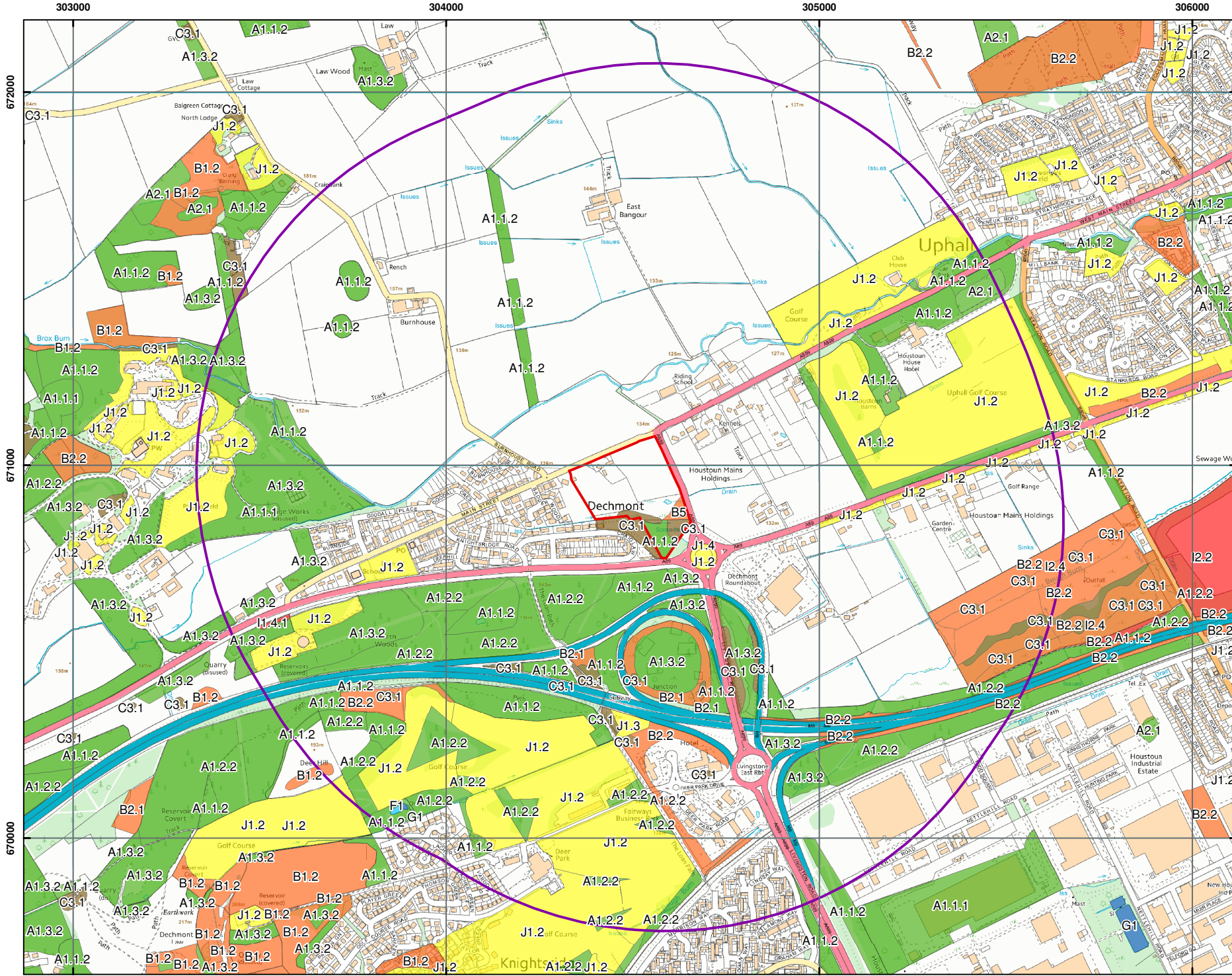


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Appendix 1

TWIC records



Phase 1 Habitats

Site
 Main Street, Dechmont
Grid Reference
 NT045708

- Legend**
- Phase 1 Habitat Groups**
- Woodland and scrub
 - Grassland and marsh
 - Tall herbs and fern
 - Heathland
 - Mire
 - Swamp, marginal & inundation
 - Open Water
 - Coastal
 - Rock exposure and waste
 - Miscellaneous

N

 Date: 20 March 2014



**The Wildlife
 Information Centre**

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CEC and Lothian Phase 1 Habitat Surveys Target Notes

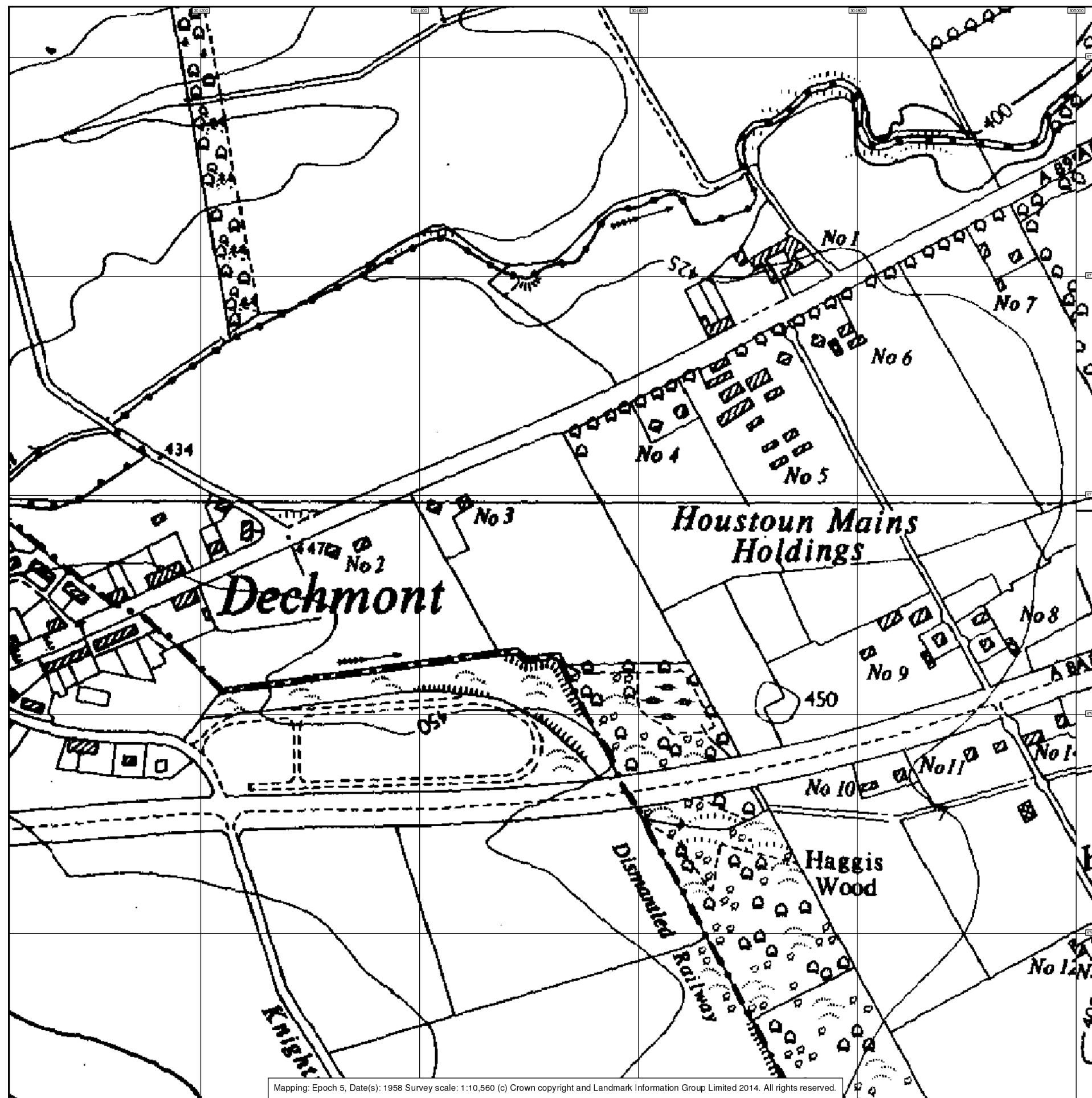
Area: Main Street, Dechmont

TN	Grid	Text
W_TN180	NT0541170553	Dactylorhiza fuchsii and Dactylorhiza purpurella in wet neutral meadow. Orchids spread throughout the meadow. This part of the meadow is in between reclaimed shale bings which are now neutral grassland with scattered scrub. A.M. reported that the shale is weathered and developing an interesting flora similar to Faucheldean.




Appendix 2

Historical maps

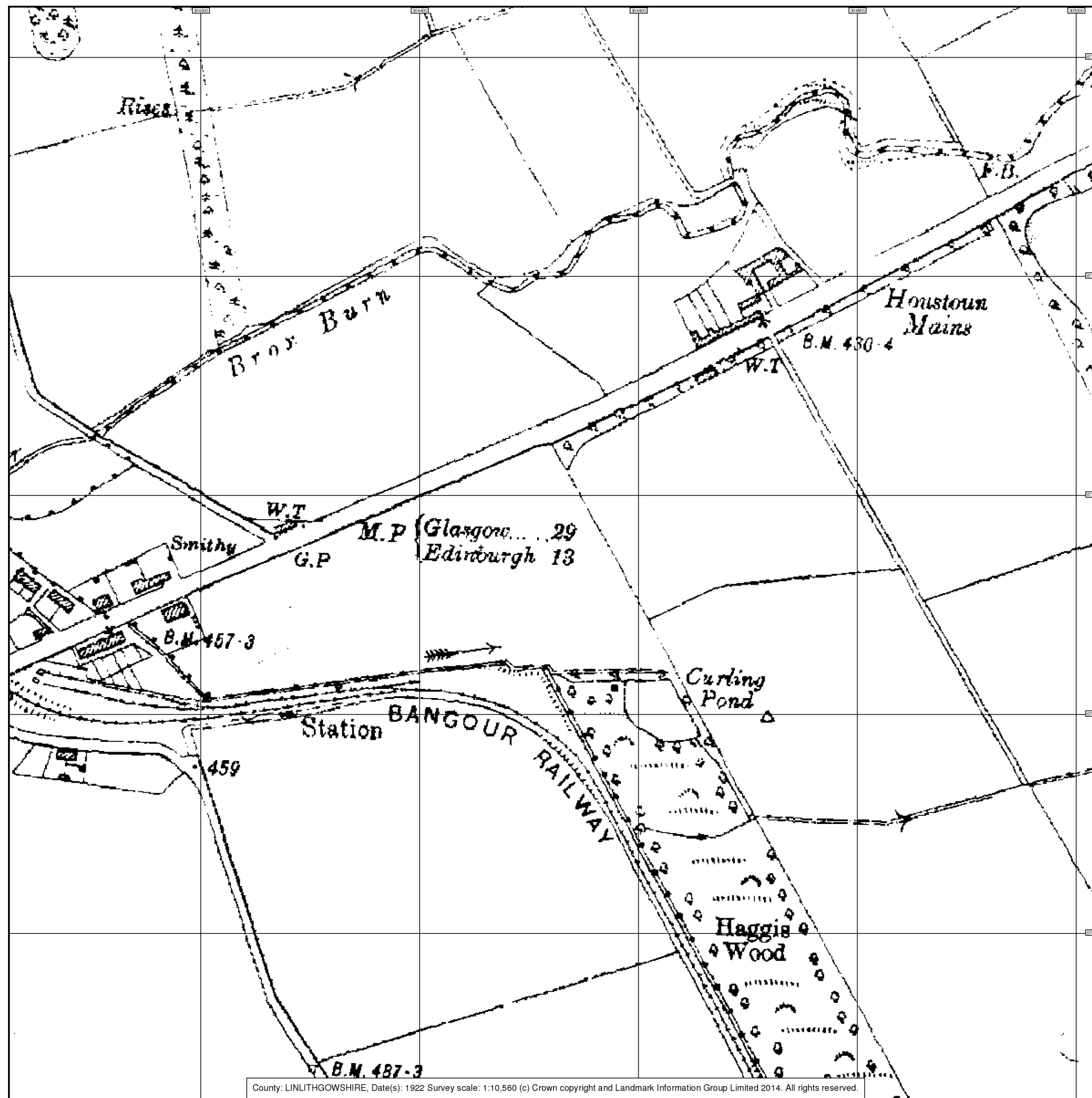


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Landmark Historical Map
 Mapping: Epoch 5
 Published Date(s): 1958
 Originally plotted at: 1:10,560

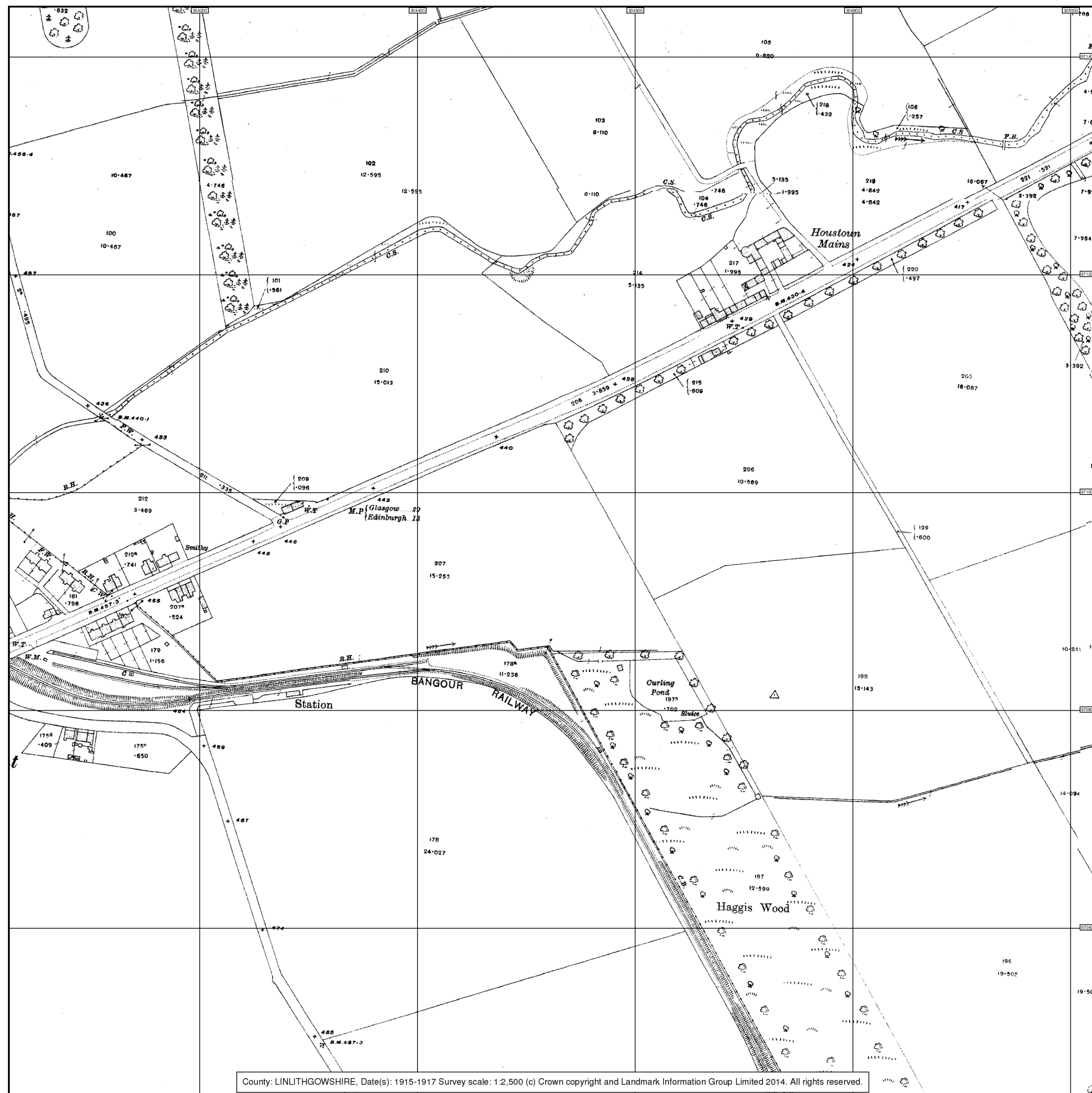



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Landmark Historical Map
County: LINLITHGOWSHIRE
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Originally plotted at: 1:10,560





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Landmark Historical Map
 County: LINLITHGOWSHIRE
 Published Date(s): 1915-1917
 Originally plotted at: 1:2,500