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## GUIDANCE NOTE ON LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACTS OF CUMULATIVE BUILD-UP OF HOUSES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

GUIDANCE NOTE





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# GUIDANCE NOTE

## ON LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACTS OF CUMULATIVE BUILD-UP OF HOUSES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

### Introduction

The rate of growth of new housing in the countryside in the last 10 years has been significant in Moray. This has led to the creation of areas where there are concentrated pockets of housing and parts of the countryside are becoming suburbanised by an uncharacteristic build up of houses that threatens to erode the distinctive qualities of rural Moray.

### How to use this document

This guidance has been prepared to provide further detail in respect of the landscape and visual impacts associated with the build-up of new housing in the open countryside and to assist in determining when it becomes unacceptable. This additional guidance supports Policy H7 - Housing in the Open Countryside and associated Supplementary Guidance and is a material consideration when assessing housing in the countryside proposals, specifically where build up is one of the determining issues.

### Scope of the Guidance

This guidance covers the whole of Moray as cumulative build up is an issue throughout the area. The first part of the guidance sets out cumulative build up indicators to identify build up and determine when it becomes unacceptable.

The second part of the guidance focuses on 8 study areas identified as housing in the countryside hotspots where cumulative build up is prevalent. A landscape consultant was commissioned to identify the key landscape and visual impacts associated with cumulative build up and assess the appropriateness of further development within these study areas.

- Roseisle
- Miltonhill
- Mosstowie
- Rafford
- Birnie
- Craigellachie
- Archiestown
- Letterfourie/Hilton

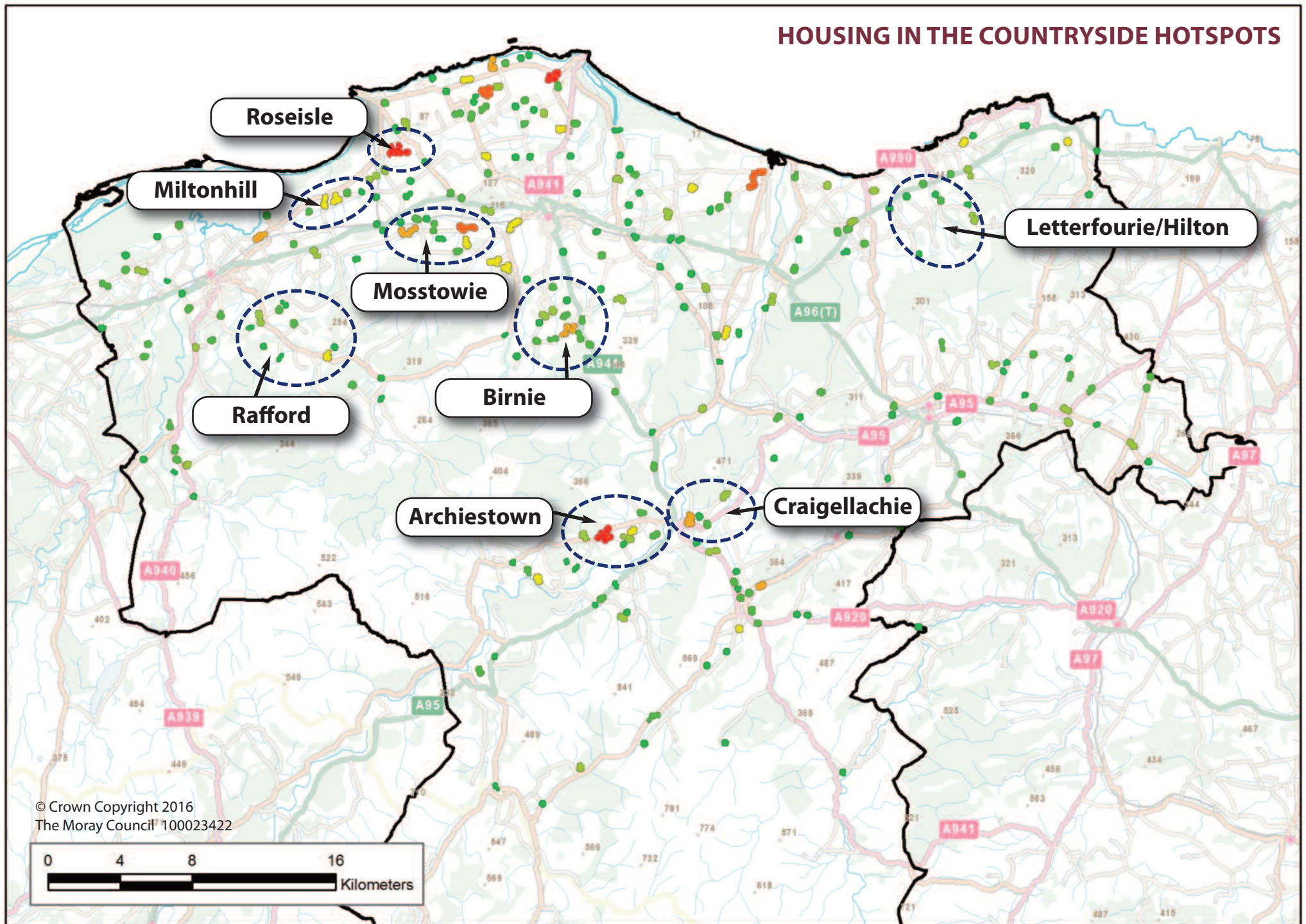
**It should be noted that the mapping provides a snapshot in relation to cumulative build up which will change over time. On this basis it is proposed to review the mapping every two years to keep it updated.**

**Furthermore, the boundaries around the development hotspots are indicative and do not represent the extent of cumulative build up but instead provide a visual aid to identify the areas the guidance is referring to.**

**The study areas cover the wider area surrounding the identified development hotspots. The guidance is applicable to all housing in the open countryside proposals that are sited within the boundaries of the identified hotspots and those on the edges of it and surrounding area that may exacerbate or create cumulative build up.**



## HOUSING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE HOTSPOTS





# Cumulative Build Up Indicators

There are different types of build up occurring across Moray including sequential build up when travelling through an area, concentration of new houses in an area that overwhelms traditional buildings and concentrated development that creates suburban cul-de-sacs. The conditions for build up differ depending on the characteristics of a particular location and on this basis it is impossible to provide a singular definition of what constitutes unacceptable build up.

Identifying the area surrounding an application site that should be taken into account when considering build up can also be problematic. This should be based on the characteristics of the locality, applying a blanket measurement around a site is not an appropriate approach.

In order to help identify the conditions when build up is an issue and has an unacceptable impact a number of indicators for build up have been identified.

## Siting Indicators

- The number of new houses overwhelms the presence of older buildings, such that the new houses are the predominant components of the landscape and the traditional settlement pattern is not easy to perceive.
- The incidence and inter-visibility of new houses result in these being a major characteristic of the landscape. There is a prominence of new houses from key viewpoints such as roads, adopted core paths or long distance paths and existing settlements.
- There are sequential visual effects of cumulative build-up of new housing experienced when travelling along roads in the vicinity of the site. The proposal contributes to ribbon development between existing/consented houses contrary to the traditional dispersed settlement pattern.

## Design Indicators

- In order to serve numerous new house plots in any given area, commonly suburban style features are required, such as accesses built to adoptable standards (rather than gravel tracks) and large bin storage areas at the end of tracks. These features erode the rural character of an area.
- The larger scale of new houses contrasts to generally smaller size of older building, cottages and farms results in the development being out of keeping and incongruous within the rural setting.
- There are numerous incidences of open prominent elevations that are visible in the landscape and are orientated for views and in contrast to traditional settlement pattern.
- A new architectural design is prevalent which has overwhelmed the older vernacular style.



# Roseisle

This study area comprises a loose grouping of new housing to the south-west of Roseisle. There is a cluster of recent housing associated with former farmsteads at Middle and Easter Buthill. More dispersed houses are predominantly sited within semi mature and even aged woodland of scots pine. Other houses are located in more open positions but partially screened by the undulating landform and woodland.

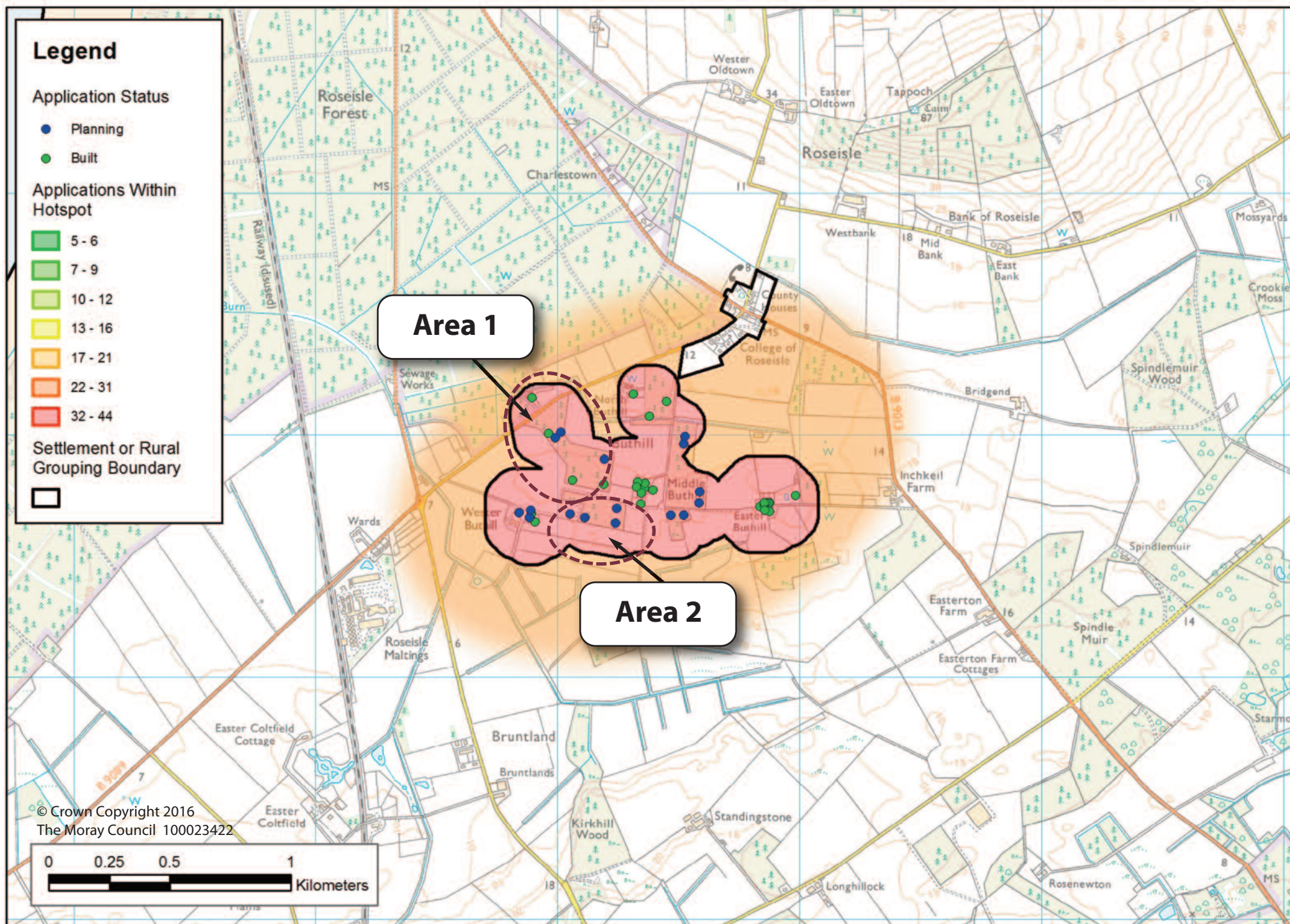
**Area 1:** This area is perceived as a distinct and concentrated grouping of houses, although it lacks the dense clustering associated with a traditional settlement. It appears more like a suburban residential area commonly found on the edge of a larger urban settlement and is therefore incongruous in its landscape setting.

Although semi mature pine woodland provides the setting for some more recent developments, new houses are situated in the outer edges of the woodland with only limited screening provided by a few widely spaces trees. No further development should be consented within this existing woodland.

**Area 2:** Fenced housing plots are laid out in a linear arrangement with a young plantation. Housing development within the plantation will be prominent being sited in an open location on a slight ridge. The woodland is not sufficiently mature to provide screening or to form a strong landscape feature aiding the integration of the development. A geometric young plantation is not an appropriate landscape feature to associate new development within. No further housing should be consented in this location as it will appear arbitrary, isolated and contrast with the settlement pattern prevalent in the wider landscape.









# Miltonhill

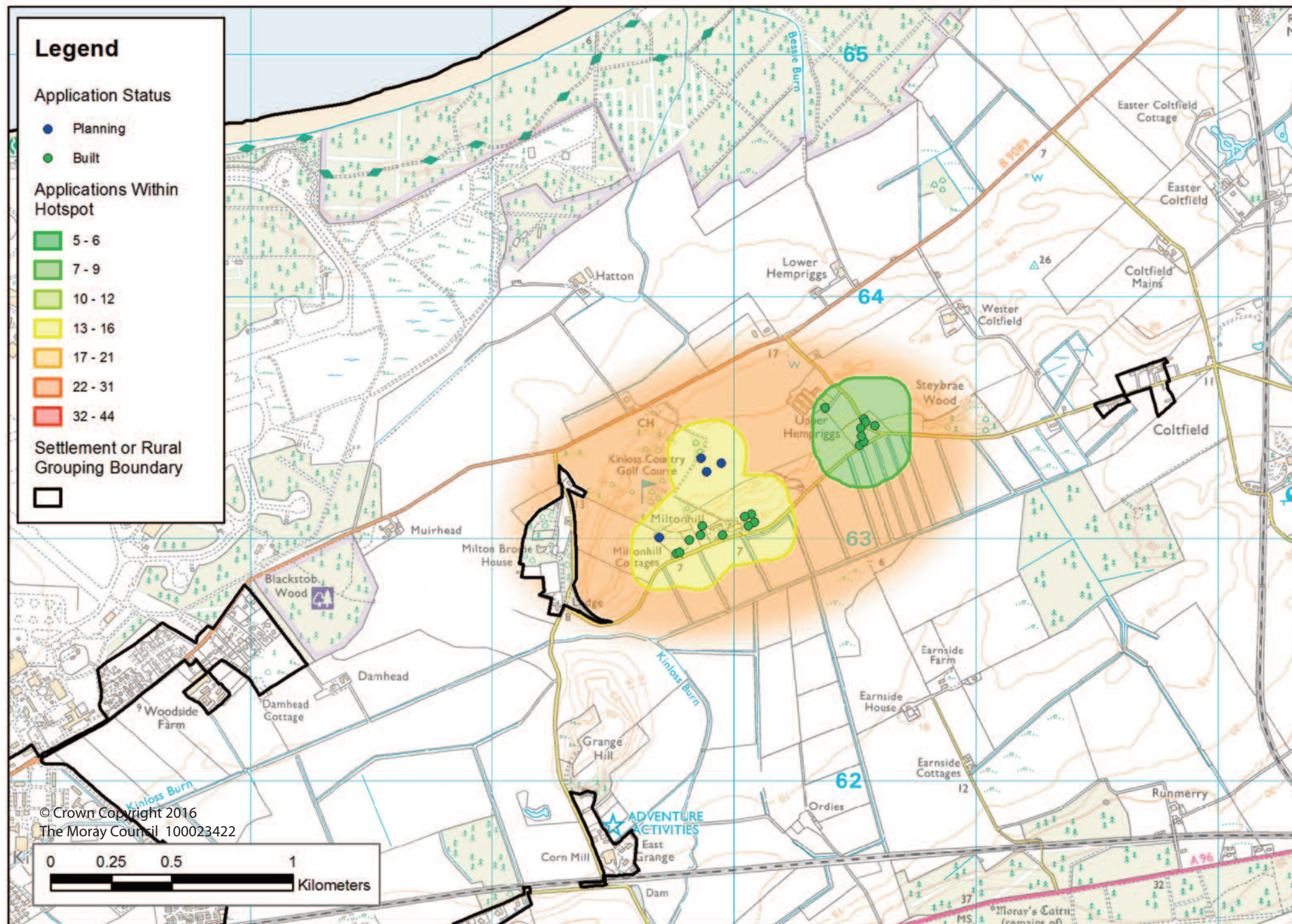
Capacity is close to being reached in this area as there are very few more gently sloping sites at the foot of the bank and siting additional houses on steep slopes or higher up the bank would be contrary to the pattern of older houses and the majority of more recent housing in this area.

Further housing constructed on the upper slopes of the golf course, resulting in a greater number and proportion of buildings visible on the top of the bank, would have adverse effects on the view across the open coastal farmland including from the A96. There is scope to accommodate further small scale development within the golf course itself avoiding prominent locations. A masterplan must be prepared to support the release of land for small scale house development. The council will work with the developer/landowner to prepare a masterplan that promotes sensitive development that integrates into the landscape and is of a high design quality.

Any further building on the bank itself or seen on the skyline of the bank should be avoided as development in this area is prominent from the A96.









# Mosstowie

A number of late 20th century bungalows and houses are aligned against the minor roads and more recently constructed houses tend to follow this pattern forming infilling between older properties. Area A forms a more concentrated linear grouping while areas B and C comprise a more cluster and space arrangement but are broadly linear in their proximity to the minor road.

Inter-visibility of new buildings does not have a significant cumulative impact. The sequential visual effects of cumulative build up experienced when travelling along the minor roads is however an issue. In close view some of the key effects include in Area A recently constructed houses being aligned contrary to the traditional settlement pattern.

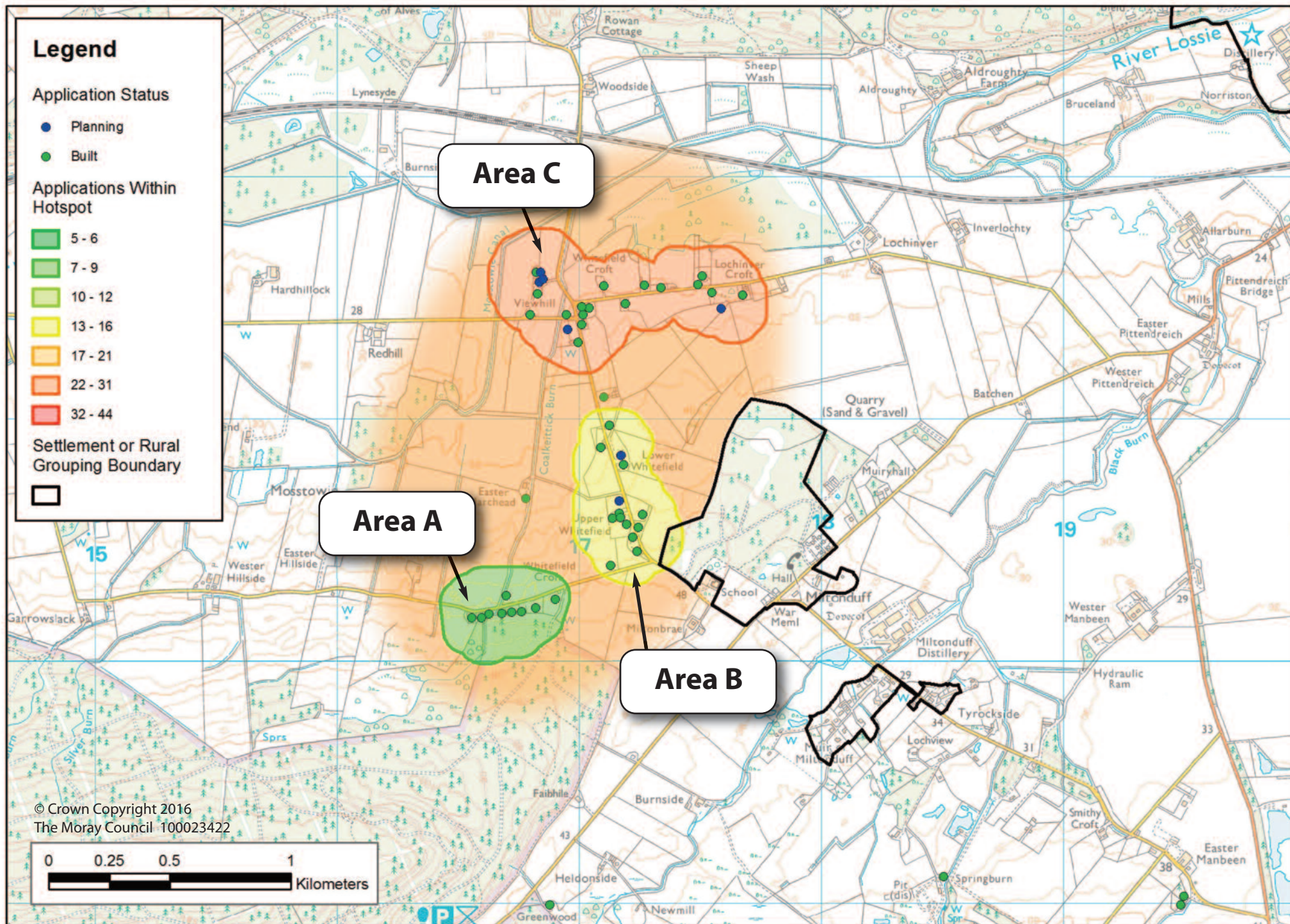
There are new dense clusters of development associated with farm steadings renovations including a number of recently constructed houses. These commonly appear incongruous in this area as the scale, layout and design is in contrast to traditional farmsteads

No further development should be undertaken in Area A due to the absence of any additional sites on the southern side of the minor road with an immediate backdrop of woodland. New housing on the northern side should be avoided as it would significantly increase the density of development in longer views.

Infilling between existing housing in Areas B and C would contribute to a more concentrated ribbon settlement form which is contrary to the dispersed settlement pattern of traditional buildings and would incur adverse sequential cumulative visual effects. The cumulative effects of concentrating development in Areas A-C together with increasing build up within nearby Milntown would impose a more urban settlement form inappropriate in the countryside and should therefore be avoided. There is only limited scope for a small number of compact 1½ storey new buildings to be accommodated in this study area. New development should only be consented in less open areas where existing trees/woodlands and the rolling land provide a degree of containment to avoid contributing to existing build up issues.









# Rafford

Rural housing development has significantly increased to the south west and north east of Rafford.

## Area A

A short row of modern housing in Area A associated with a small wooded bank to the west of the Marcassie Burn and while visually associated with the original village this area is set slightly apart from it. Further new housing development is discreetly located to the north west of Rafford in Site A but is largely screened by the rolling landform and woodland.

There is no scope to accommodate any further housing in the southern part of Area A. A limited number of discreetly sited and well designed houses of an appropriate scale and massing could be located in the northern part of the area.

## Area B

A number of widely dispersed and longer established large modern houses are located between Rafford and the embanked former railway line. Some of the properties are set in extensive grounds with considerable plantings of young native species and hedged boundaries. In time this planting will replicate the wooded characteristics of the surroundings. A limited number of discreetly sited, well designed houses could be accommodated in this area. New housing proposals should duplicate the extensive native planting and hedged boundaries of surrounding properties to assist development to integrate sensitively.

## Area C

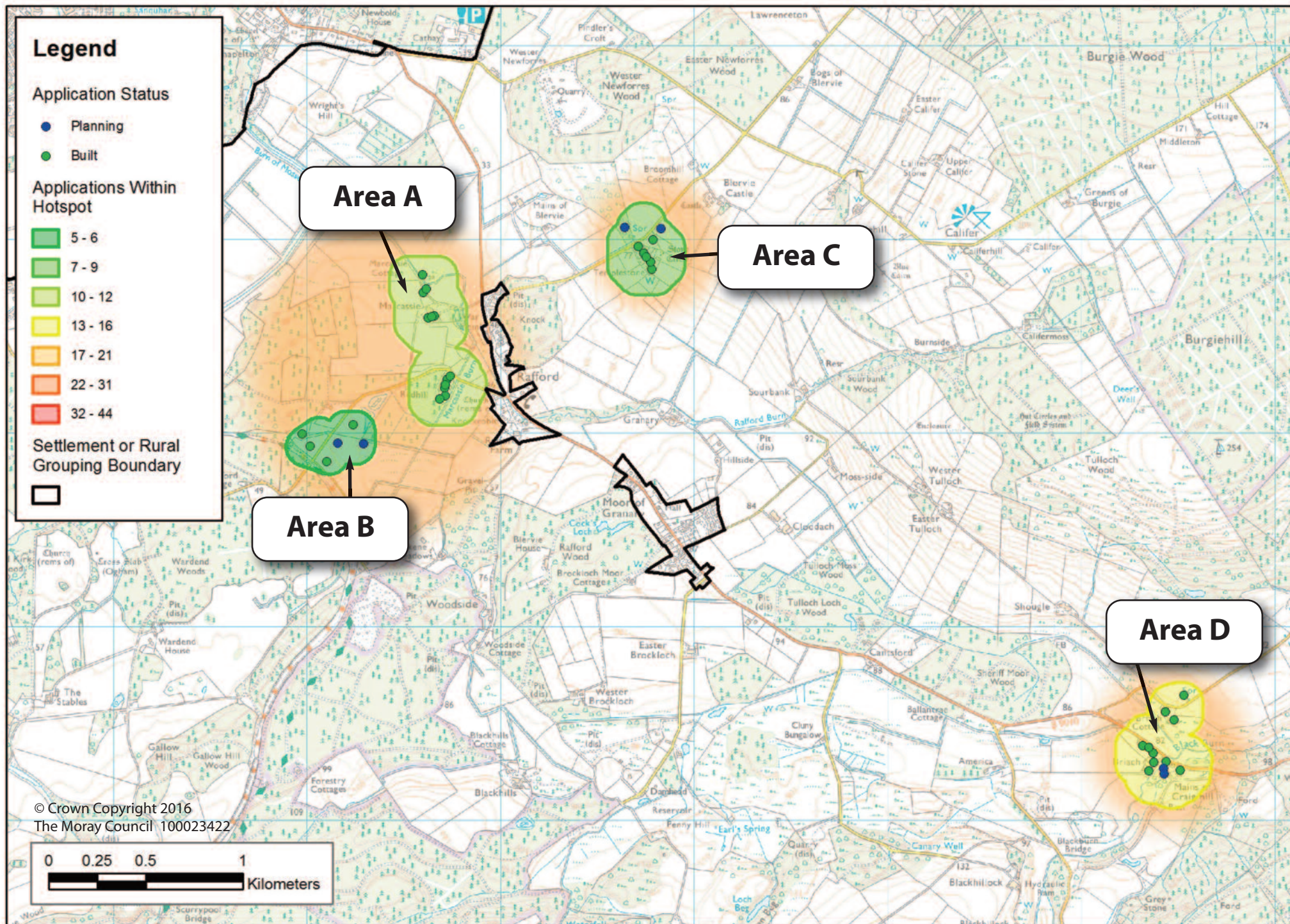
In the wider area around Rafford, new houses are dispersed along roads and occasionally form more concentrated linear groupings associated with a defined bank, edge of woodland or set along a minor road or track. Additional houses in this location would increase the incidence, density and prominence of housing and have a detrimental impact on the rural character of the area. On that basis no further development should be permitted in this area.

## Area D

Development at Mains of Craigmill is more clustered being associated with an old mill and farmstead. More dispersed new housing to the north east of Craigmill is highly visible from the B9010. No further development should be permitted in this area as the further build up of housing in this area will detract from views into the valley from this road.









# Birnie

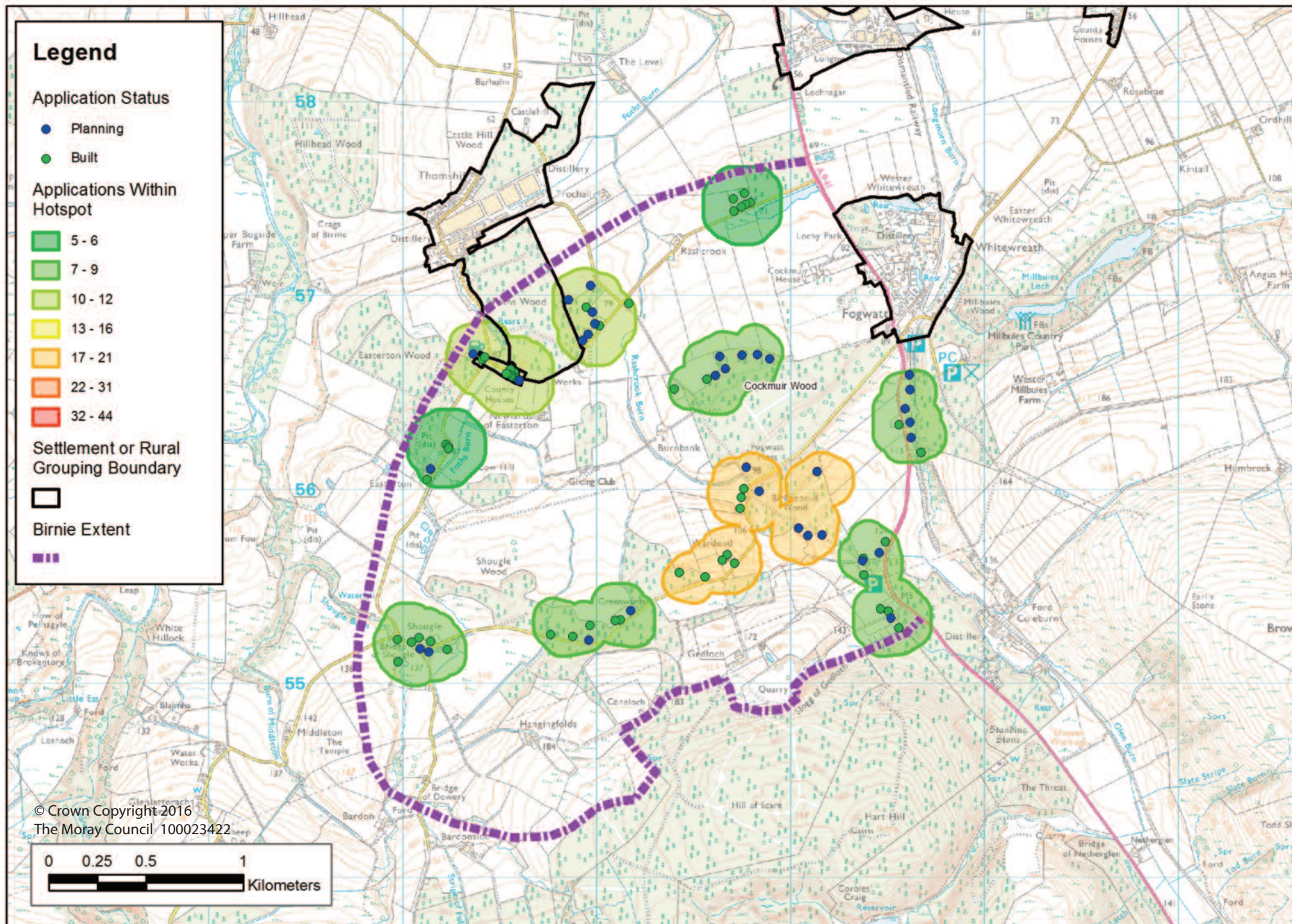
New buildings far outnumber older buildings in this area. New housing is predominantly largely aligned close to minor roads which form a broad loop to the west of the A941. Rolling landform and woodland helps to screen new houses in the wider views, more elevated and particularly large new properties are intrusive from minor roads in this location.

Some recently constructed houses are located on the outer edges of semi-mature managed pine woods but in elevated locations, orientated towards views of the Moray Firth. Although these properties are partially screened by woodland from the south, they are large, fairly close together and open to views from the north, resulting in the case of very recent building on the edge of Cockmuir Wood, in a prominent line of buildings seen above a small ridge.

The incidence and inter-visibility of large new houses in the Birnie area result in them being a major characteristic of the landscape. The rural character of the area is significantly diminished with a more peri-urban character prevalent. Landscape and visual capacity has therefore been exceeded in this area and no more development should be consented within the area delineated in purple on the adjacent map.









# Craigellachie

## Area A

Steep hill slopes to the north east of the settlement of Craigellachie and on the opposite side of the Fiddich feature a number of large 19th century stone houses set in mature wooded grounds. Newer houses are located in more open situations and are consequently more prominent from the A95.

Additional houses should only be accommodated on these hill slopes in exceptional circumstances where adequate screening is provided by mature woodland.

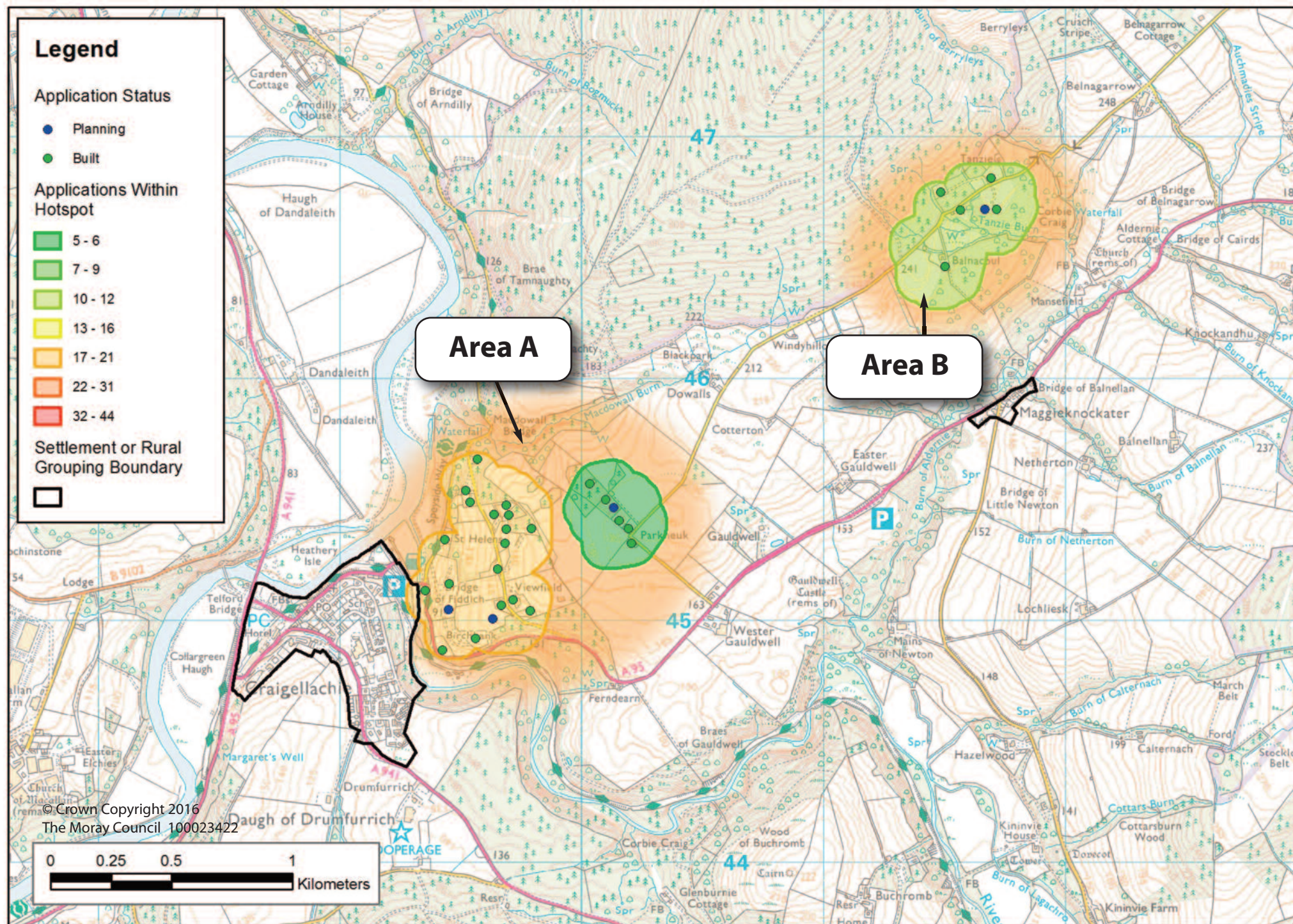
## Area B

New housing development in the Maggiecknockater area is more dispersed in character. New properties are generally smaller than those in other parts of Moray, for example Letterfourie/Hilton and Birnie study areas. New properties are aligned either side of the minor road above steep undulating slopes and are often backed by mature coniferous woodland. This area is elevated above the A95 and there is a little visibility of new housing from this well used road. Despite this cumulative build up is such that additional housing would likely affect the traditional settlement pattern and result in a more concentrated ribbon effect along the minor road.

There is very limited scope for any further development in this area.









# Archiestown

A build up of housing is evident with a particular concentration of new housing occurring to the east of Archiestown and close to the B9102. In some areas this concentration of new buildings result in them being a key characteristic of the landscape. The cumulative build up apparent across the study area threatens to detract from the distinctive pattern of small farms and planned settlements including nearby Archiestown.

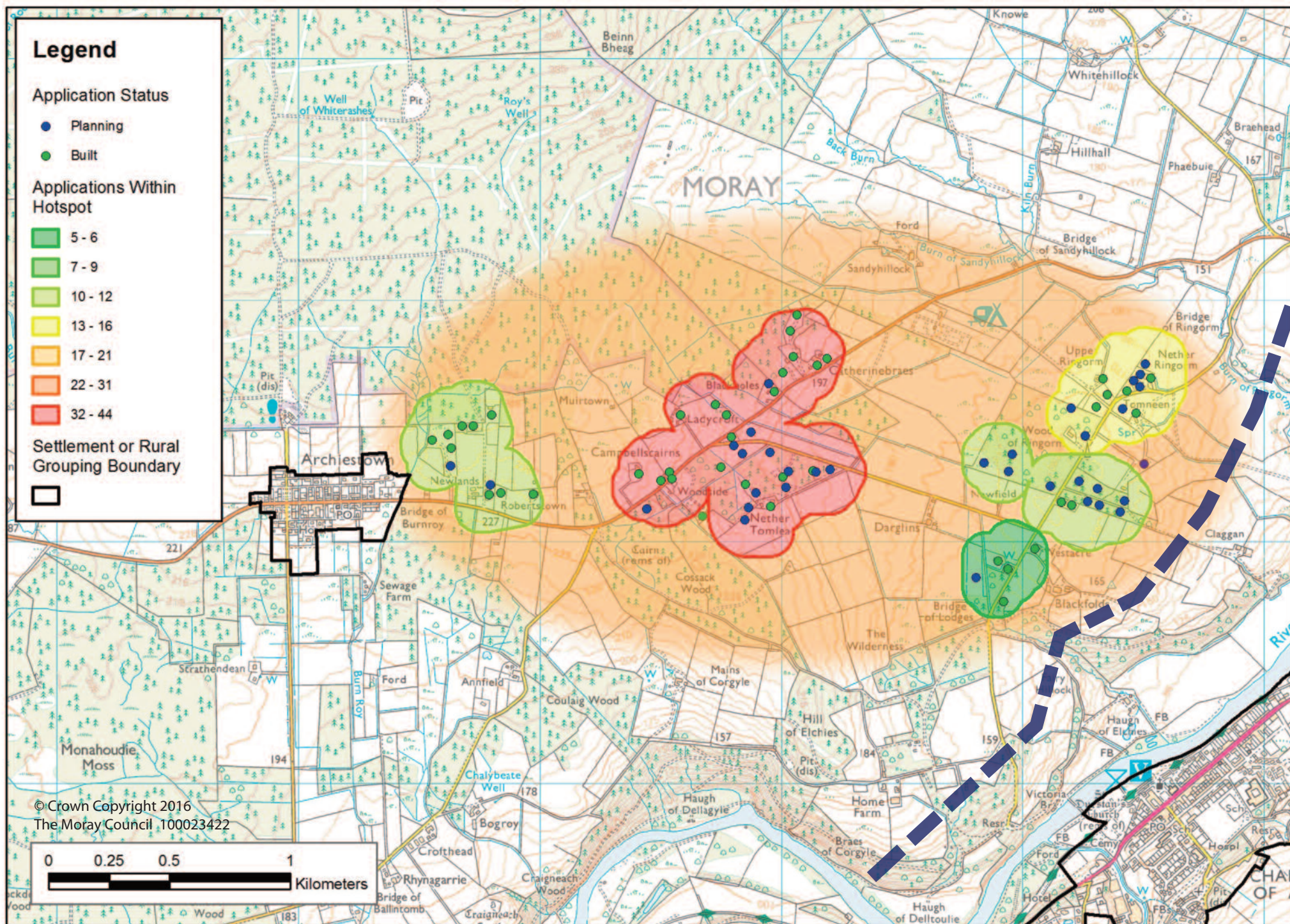
Further cumulative build up could significantly affect views from roads, footpaths and settlements. This would likely occur if further housing was allowed to south eastern edge of the study area, near the steep slopes, immediately above the River Spey, as annotated on the accompanying mapping.

Development is occurring within conifer woodlands, where new houses are sited in woodland, the poor quality plantation could diminish the screening provided by trees , removal of these trees would result in an incongruous loose cluster of houses being revealed unconnected to any landscape feature and contrary to the traditional settlement pattern. No further development should be consented within woodlands in the Nether Tomlea area and close to the B9012.

There may be some very limited scope for a small number of well-designed houses in parts of this study area although the potential effects on landscape and on views would have be carefully considered.









# Letterfourie/Hilton

This study area lies to the south of Buckie and surrounding the Drybridge area. There are many newer houses in this area and these are invariably significantly larger than the few older properties that are evident. New houses are fairly well space apart on the lower hill slopes but are more concentrated around Maryhill and in the Hill of Maud Crofts area.

Buildings are orientated to gain views over the Moray Firth and their principal elevation is therefore open and highly visible. Due to the concentration of new housing a new architectural style is now prevalent which has overwhelmed the older vernacular style of the relatively few older farms and cottages. There is a changed settlement pattern from sparsely settled rural area with small clustered villages to a much more settled rural area.

Additional housing would increase the incidence, density and prominence of dispersed housing although in terms of visibility, this area is not particularly well frequented and views of the A98 are distant.

There is some limited scope to accommodate further development in Maryhill to make it more tightly clustered and reflect the traditional settlement pattern. Beyond this no further development should be consented within the area delineated in purple on the accompanying map given the number of large scale new houses in this location that have had a detrimental impact on the rural character of the area.





