

4.4 Context: Landscape Character and Strategic Visual Assessment

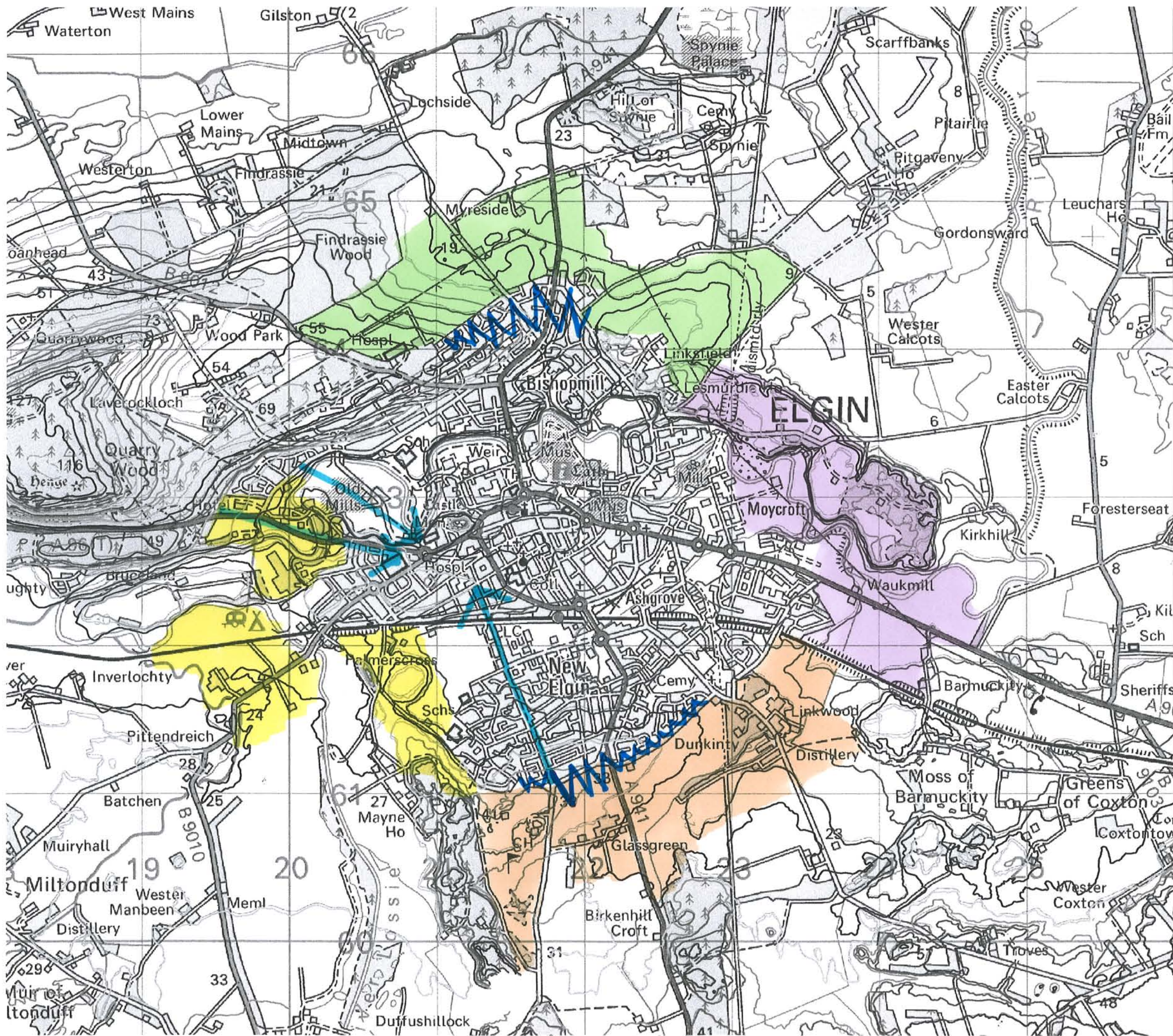
Elgin is located within the 'Coastal Farmland' character area as identified in the Moray and Nairn Landscape Character Assessment¹, and strategic advice on how best to accommodate urban expansion is included within the Assessment report. An extract is included in Annex Three. The more specific landscape character of the setting of Elgin was used to inform the extent of study areas which form the basis of the analysis and presentation of findings in the remainder of this report. The study areas around Elgin were identified as:

- Elgin North: This landscape is enclosed by the wooded ridges of Findrassie and Hill of Spynie, which provide both physical and visual containment. Cultivated fields, without hedgerows or trees, create a uniform character, while the woodland is more diverse.
- Elgin East: Steep slopes rise up from the north banks of the Lossie, while to the south, the level flood plain extends to the railway. Farmland reaches to the edge of the settlement, and woodland is generally limited to the most exposed plateau.
- Elgin South: Regular, south facing slopes extend out from New Elgin. These are the focus of current building activity. The landscape is cultivated or neglected farmland, often poorly drained and generally uniform in character, divided by the occasional line of trees associated with watercourses.
- Elgin West: the most diverse and highest quality landscape on the outskirts of Elgin, where extensive mature woodland, managed farmland, the enclosed meanders of the River Lossie and the policies associated with large houses come together to contribute positively to the setting of the town.

Elgin is not particularly visible from the wider landscape, as it is seen only from the higher hills to the north, from where it is viewed within a wider landscape context. Views from the town are also limited. Key visual characteristics of Elgin include:

- The generally inward orientated views, from higher streets and buildings afford views across the bulk of the settlement
- Some recent development breaches the containing ridges and offer more expansive views away from the town, and are more visible on approach
- Landmark features include the Lady Hill monument, Dr Gray's hospital and St Giles Church which are prominent on the skyline of the town, particularly from internal views

¹ Moray and Nairn Landscape Assessment, 1998, Turnbull Jeffrey Partnership, Scottish Natural Heritage



INTEGRATION OF NEW DEVELOPMENT INTO THE MORAY LANDSCAPE

Elgin

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

Scale 1:25 000

Study Areas

- Elgin North: uniform farmland within low containing ridges
- Elgin East: Level plain of the River Lossie
- Elgin South: South facing slopes extend to level farmland
- Elgin West: more complex and diverse landscape

Views

- Key views across the town from high points within Elgin
- These more recent developments have breached containing ridges and are more visible across a wider area than the rest of the town, which is visually contained

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5 ELGIN NORTH : ASSESSING THE DEVELOPMENT BIDS

5.1 Elgin North: Landscape Survey and Site Observations

This study area has been further subdivided into three landscape character units. Elgin north is dominated by shallow basins enclosed by low ridges, where enclosure is emphasised by woodland. Key characteristics which influence settlement expansion include:

Sloping ridgeline

- this long, north east facing slope forms the outer face of a ridge which encloses most of the northern part of the settlement
- the area is characterised by cultivated farmland, enclosed by established woodland creating a quiet, self contained character
- the long ridge and established woodland of Findrassie shelter and visually contain these slopes from the north west
- the area feels perceptually detached from the centre of Elgin, an experience which is reinforced by the lack of visual connection and the orientation of the slopes away from the settlement
- the fine policy woodland which frames Duffus Road and provides a setting for Spynie hospital reinforces the sense of arrival from the north west along the B9012
- where more recent development has breached the ridge, the immediate settlement edge is emphasised by relatively recent planting and banded land forms, within which are informal access routes

Lowlying Basin

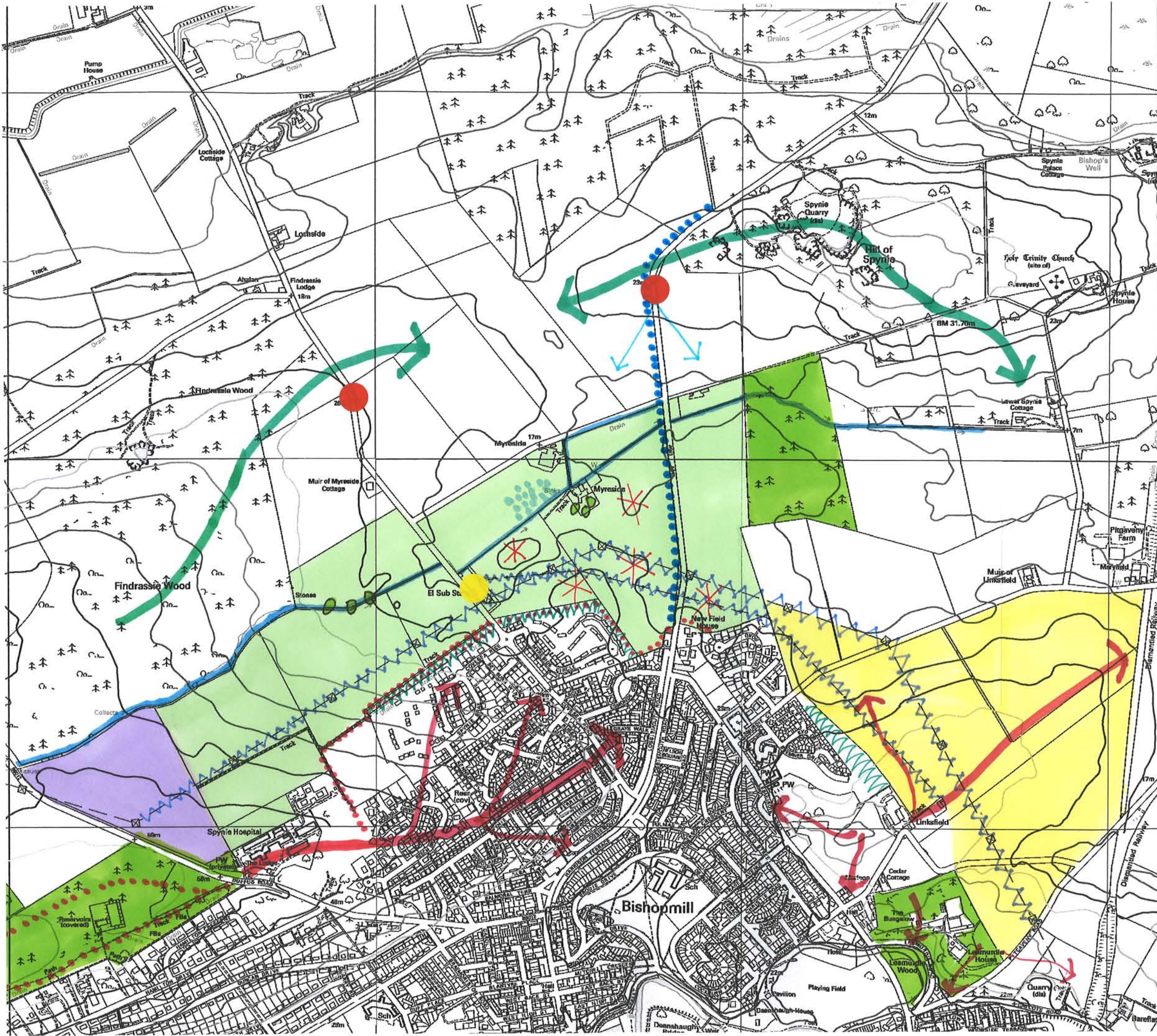
- this area is characterised by a series of interlocking knolls which extend across a gently undulating lowlying basin
- the lowlying elevation is characterised by some wetter land, although much of the area is simple, open, cultivated farmland, generally enclosed by conifer woodland
- overhead lines encircle the northern edge of the settlement and fragment the immediate setting of the town, while the presence of the electricity sub station and the busy roads further reinforce the sense of peri urban character
- within a wider context, the ridge associated with Hill of Spynie creates visual and physical enclosure, and provides a backdrop and setting to the town
- recent development has breached the ridgeline which skirts the northern edge of Elgin and extends over into the lowlying basin

- the area feels perceptually detached from the centre of Elgin, an experience which is reinforced by the lack of visual connection and the contained nature of the basin as well as physical distance
- further west, the long descent from Findrassie Wood towards the edge of the settlement creates a sense of arrival from the direction of Findrassie Lodge
- the long descent from Spynie ridge towards the edge of the settlement creates a well defined sense of arrival from the north along the A941
- on arrival along the A941, the series of rounded, low knolls interrupt views of the long settlement edge and contribute to its setting
- the immediate settlement edge is emphasised by relatively recent planting and banded land forms, within which are informal access routes

Low Wide Ridge

- this wide elongated hill provides some sense of containment to the north eastern edge of the settlement
- the area is characterised by open, cultivated and relatively featureless farmland, traversed by a prominent pylon line which encircles the northern edge of the town
- the gentle convex slopes of the undeveloped ridge have an outward facing orientation, north and east, away from the existing settlement
- visual links between this area and the existing settlement are limited to views of the existing settlement edge which has only recently breached the containment provided by the west facing slopes at Linksfield
- the area appears perceptually detached from the centre of Elgin, an experience which is reinforced by the lack of visual connection and the contained nature of the basin as well as physical distance
- sense of arrival is characterised by new planting adjacent to the settlement edge on approach from the long straight minor roads
- rising ground and mature planting and policies associated with Linksfield and Lesmurdie house provide containment for much of the town, but recent development has just breached the ridgeline.
- more recently developed parts of the immediate settlement edge are emphasised by relatively recent planting and banded land forms, within which are informal access routes

INTEGRATION OF NEW DEVELOPMENT INTO THE MORAY LANDSCAPE
Elgin North
SURVEY AND SITE OBSERVATIONS
 Scale 1:10 000



Landscape Character

- Sloping Ridgeline
- Lowlying Basin
- Low Wide Ridge

Landscape Survey

- Key ridges provide visual containment
- Distinctive low interlocking knolls
- Prominent mature woodland
- Recent planting on modified earth works
- Feature trees
- Watercourse
- Wetland
- Paths and Tracks
- Cycle route from Lossiemouth
- Electricity Substation
- Overhead Lines

Landscape Setting

- Wooded ridges of Findrassie and Spynie contribute to the wider setting of Elgin
- Sense of arrival emphasised by long descent from these ridges

Visual Assessment

- Views on approach are limited to the outer edge of more recent developments

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