

10 FORRES WEST: MITIGATION MEASURES AND ENHANCEMENT PROPOSALS

10.1 Forres West: Identifying Positive and Negative Landscape Features

All this landscape contributes to the setting of Forres – the complex ridges to the south form part of the rising backdrop to the settlement, while the level open plain to the west provides a clear plinth across which the settlement can be seen on approach from the west. The woodland across the complex landform is small in scale, but visually it merges together to create a more significant impact.

There are some well used footpaths, which are linked together by minor roads.

There were some opportunities for immediate settlement expansion identified in this area, but it was also recognised that development immediately to the west of the town was likely to be severely constrained by flooding.

10.1.1 Existing Positive Characteristics and Features

- Woodland on higher ground, although relatively small in scale has a big visual impact
- access routes link the town to the surrounding countryside
- extensive views from the higher ridges over the town to the coast beyond

10.1.2 Existing Negative Characteristics and Features

- the poorly designed edge of the settlement adjacent to the flood plain gives a poor impression of the town on arrival from the west

10.2 Landscape Change

The key pressures for change relate to development opportunities which lie within the complex landform, the economics of the agricultural and forestry sectors and the potential plans for management of the flood plain.

10.2.1 Features and Characteristics in Decline

- some mature trees, particularly broadleaves, are not being replaced as they mature

10.2.2 Features and Characteristics in Ascendance

None identified

Landscape Enhancement Opportunities



Western edge of settlement extends onto the flood plain



- Derelict building close to Balnageith



Industrial development on the north side of the A96 does not have a well defined setting

10.3 Forres West: Opportunities and Objectives for Enhancement

10.3.1 Complex Landform

This series of small level platforms, alternating with steeper slopes have been identified as having potential for development, which would focus on the more level fields.

Key opportunities for enhancement should focus on creating a wooded setting for future development, linked to a well developed footpath network. There is also the opportunity to create a well defined sense of arrival to Forres, perhaps through a more formal framework which reflects the directness of the access from this part of the town to the centre. While some of this framework may be put in place along with development, more extensive woodland along the steeper slopes and the higher ridges should be established in advance as far as possible.

This area is appropriate for less dense development, particularly as it extends south towards the existing forest, where houses set in more generous wooded surroundings would provide a gradual transition between the dense town centre and the forest beyond.

Additional opportunities for enhancement include the development of a more comprehensive footpath network, including formalising some of the informal routes and creating opportunities for views from the higher ridges as part of the master plan for this area. Some of these opportunities could be undertaken within a core path networks initiative.

10.3.2 Level Plain

Development opportunities across this area are likely to be limited by flooding, although some sites on slightly higher ground were identified.

The main objective for enhancement measures is to build on the flood plain management proposals and combine these with much needed enhancement of the highly visible settlement edge. To fit with the large, expansive scale of the landscape in this area, proposals should be similarly generous in scale.

Wide, gently graded landforms would provide the flood protection required while respecting the horizontal emphasis of the landform and would fit better than narrow, mean looking bunds. Expansive water features, including temporary areas of open water and wetland, could feature across this area and increase the habitat value.

There is the opportunity to create an extensive riparian woodland which could also provide a recreation resource which could be designed to extend into the town at Pilmuir. The SFGS could support this initiative, which could be the focus for a new community woodland.

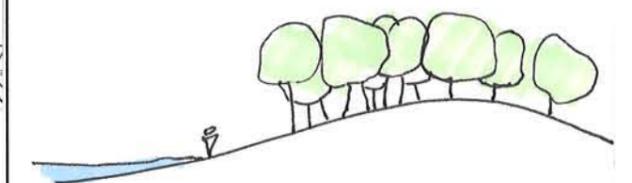
INTEGRATION OF NEW DEVELOPMENT INTO THE MORAY LANDSCAPE

Forres West

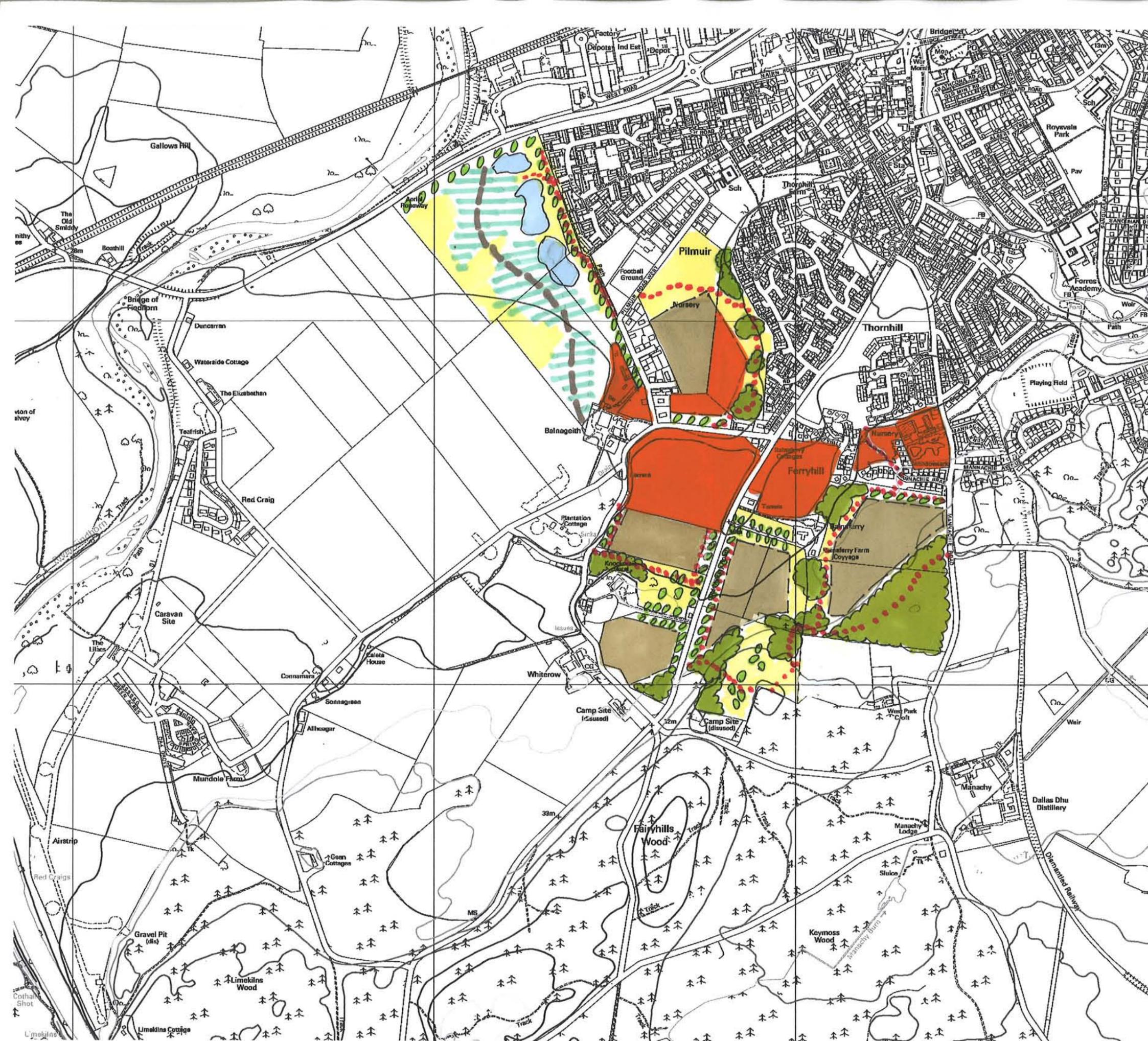
LANDSCAPE ENHANCEMENT PROPOSALS

Scale 1:10 000

-  Land already under development or identified as development in the existing Local Plan
-  Suggested locations for development
-  New woodland structure planting
-  Extensive riparian woodland
-  Feature trees
-  Public open space
-  New footpaths and other access routes
-  Open water features and associated wetland habitat
-  Centre line of wide, gently graded, sinuous earthworks which will create flood barrier



Wide, sweeping land form suits the expansive scale of the flood plain



11 CONCLUSIONS AND LONG TERM STRATEGIC OPTIONS

The purpose of this study was to identify potential opportunities for development which would allow the expansion of Forres while retaining the existing character of the settlement and important qualities of its landscape setting.

The study has concluded that Forres is located in a fine setting, with many positive attributes, including the setting created by the wooded hills, the panoramic views of the coastal plain, the range and accessibility of informal recreation facilities, and the large number of open spaces within the town, a feature which has been continued in recent development and which continues to enhance the townscape.

11.1 Major Landscape and Visual Constraints

While this study has focussed on landscape opportunities and constraints, it also recognised that potential flood risk is likely to be a major constraint in developing the low lying areas of land which lie adjacent to the town to the north. The major constraints to development which would respect the existing character and setting of the town were therefore:

- The low lying land to the north of the town in particular, which extends to the sea at Findhorn Bay, providing panoramic views and contributing, by way of contrast in character, to the setting of the town
- The prominence and proximity of the wooded hills to the south of the town, which in addition to their amenity value and their importance in providing a strong sense of containment, are a feature which also enhances the identity and landscape setting of Forres
- The convoluted and complex landform to the immediate east of Forres, which provides good containment for the town and where development is difficult to accommodate without extensive planting, and even then will always be detached from the main settlement
- Elevated land to the south west of town, where steeper slopes should be retained undeveloped to contain future development

11.2 Major Landscape and Visual Opportunities

A number of sites have been identified which have the potential to expand the settlement and still maintain the landscape character, scenic quality and visual attributes of Forres and its setting. In all cases some mitigation would be required as part of any future development and these are further developed in the accompanying section on Landscape Enhancement. The major opportunities for development are therefore:

- Expansion within contained fields to the east of the settlement
- Expansion within a very few open spaces within Sanquhar Wood
- Expansion within contained fields to the south west of the settlement

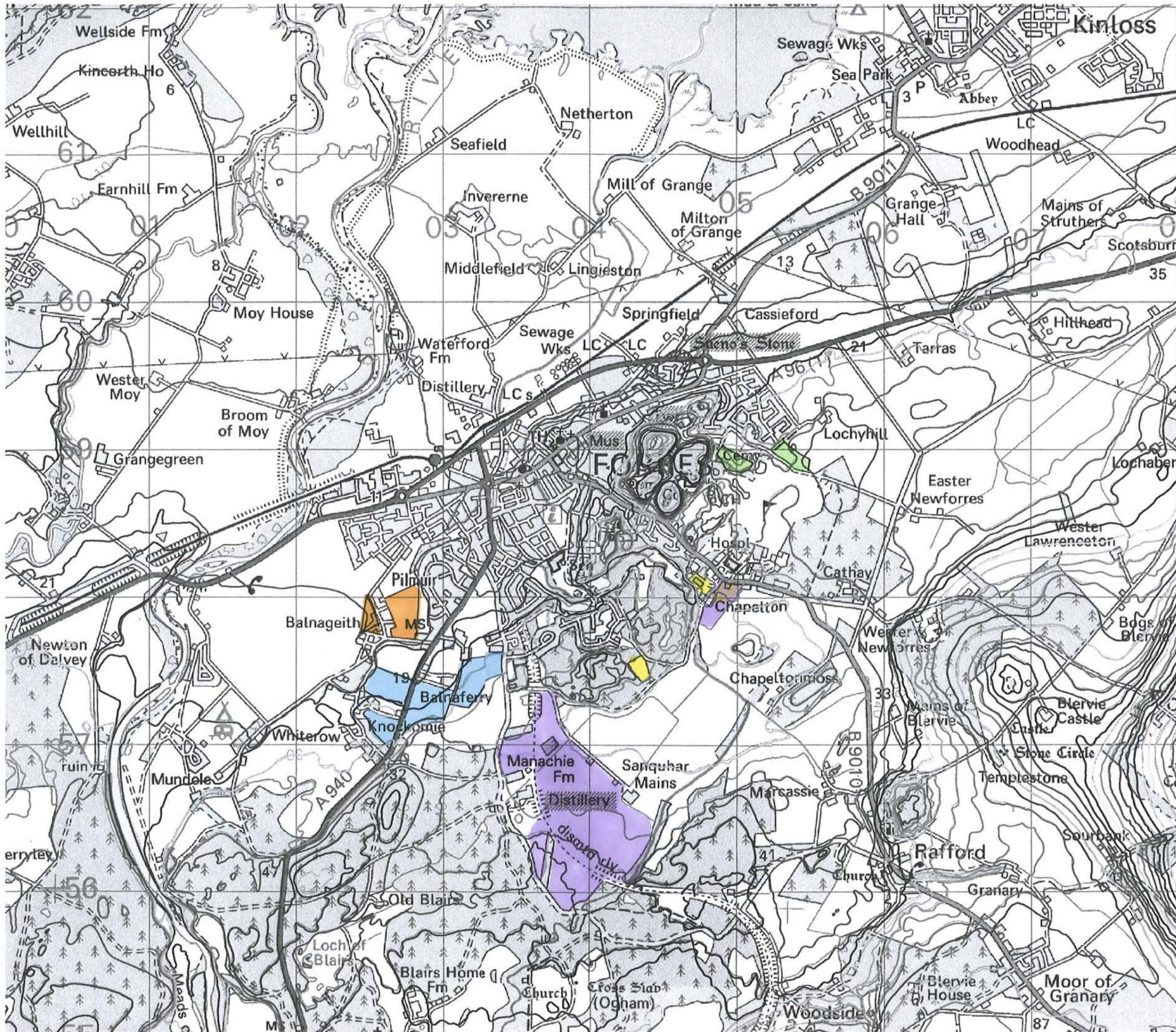
Expansion across the flood plain and within the edge of the settlement at Pilmuir to the west of the settlement is likely to be limited by flooding, but this area offers considerable potential for enhancement through a creative approach to flood management combining expansive new woodland and wetland habitats with recreation opportunities and improving the visual impact of the town on arrival.

11.3 Long Term Option for Settlement Expansion

The most appropriate landscape opportunity for the for long term significant expansion of Forres requires the establishment of a new neighbourhood and is likely to involve some level of restructuring of the focus for the settlement. This proposal therefore requires to be considered at a more strategic level, alongside the opportunities identified for expansion of other settlements in Moray which are discussed in the sister reports. Collectively, these have not been researched in detail, but are presented as part of the findings for future consideration.

The option for Forres considers developing an additional focus for the town, where the settlement is extended to the south of the hills, particularly Sanquhar Wood, which would become a new, and potentially extensive neighbourhood. Wooded knolls would provide the outer definition of the new settlement form, while the built development would move away from low lying landform to the north and focus on more elevated land, within a strongly wooded setting. Development in this area may be limited by the extent and potential indirect effects of the proposed flood water storage scheme, and the implications of flood water management are likely to influence the amount of land available for development.

Should this long term option go ahead, a master plan would be required to establish a landscape structure including the planning of open space, access routes and structure planting, as well as reinforcing links with the existing settlement. Additional measures might include drawing up a design brief to ensure that a sense of identity could be facilitated through some consistency in approach to layout, orientation, materials, proportion, scale and landscape works.



INTEGRATION OF NEW DEVELOPMENT INTO THE MORAY LANDSCAPE

Forres

CONCLUSIONS AND LONG TERM OPTIONS

Scale 1:25 000

Recommended Locations for Development

- Expansion onto contained fields to the east of the settlement
- Expansion into very few fields within Sanquhar Wood
- Expansion onto contained fields to the south west of the settlement
- Expansion to the west, within Pilmuir and adjacent to the flood plain

Long Term Option

- Extend town to the south of Sanquhar Wood

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