

MORAY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

LANDSCAPE APPRAISAL OF ADDITIONAL SITES

Final Report to Moray Council by Carol Anderson, Landscape Architect

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1 Introduction

This study forms one of a series of similar studies considering the integration of new development into the Moray landscape. Previous studies were undertaken for Moray Council by Alison Grant, consultant landscape architect, during 2005 and these principally addressed landscape and visual issues associated with housing development on key settlements as a whole rather than on the basis of individual sites.

This study considers a number of individual sites in and around settlements that were identified following the publication of the Consultative Draft of the Moray Local Plan Review. The study uses a similar assessment methodology to the studies undertaken by Alison Grant, albeit in a simplified form appropriate to the relatively less complex context of individual sites as opposed to the consideration of entire settlements. Where relevant, this study has drawn on the findings from the wider settlement expansion studies carried out by Alison Grant.

The study objective was to evaluate the potential for integrating new development into each of the sites and to identify opportunities for landscape enhancement and mitigation measures to aid the integration of any new development. The key features important to the site and its context in landscape and amenity terms were identified and the potential effects of new development (whether housing or business/industrial development) on these features and on the character of the existing settlement were assessed. Potential areas for development were identified on the basis of this assessment and mitigation and landscape enhancement measures were recommended which included the retention of key features and establishment of new woodlands, open space and access/recreational opportunities in and around the sites.

2 Lhanbryde

2.1 Survey and Analysis

The older part of Lhanbryde forms a strong linear pattern related to the former A96 main road which now by-passes the settlement. The settlement is largely sited at the foot of small rolling hills but with some newer housing extending onto lower hill slopes. Woodland on these hills increases the containment provided by the landform. Two sites were surveyed on the western edge of the settlement and these are titled Site A and Site B. Both sites are visible from the A96 with Site A being particularly close to the carriageway which is aligned on the southern edge of Lhanbryde. The key characteristics of each site are described below and illustrated on the accompanying survey figure:

- Site A is bounded by the A96 to the south and the western approach road to the village to the north and comprises a narrow triangle of undulating pasture. Two distinct rounded knolls on the site are separated by a dip; the westerly knoll is particularly prominent in views from the A96. Some newer housing extends along the approach road to the village on the edge of this site.
- Site B lies to the north of the approach road to the village. This site comprises very gently undulating to level pastures which are open to more distant views from the A96, as is the existing exposed edge of newer housing on the western fringes of Lhanbryde.

2.2 Recommendations

There is opportunity for some housing development on both sites, although this is more limited on Site A due to the constraints presented by the undulating landform and the visual prominence of much of the site from the A96. These sites are appropriate for future development in landscape terms once landscape mitigation measures, principally comprising woodland structure planting, have been established.

- Site A: Development should be located within the dip between rounded knolls at the centre of the site but could also extend onto lower hill slopes either side. Development sited on the western knoll would be prominent in views from the A96 and would be contrary to the existing form of Lhanbryde which largely sits at the foot of small hills. The containment provided by this knoll should be accentuated by woodland planting.
- Site B: The even landform of this site makes it more physically conducive to development. Woodland should be planted on the western edge of any new development and this would also ameliorate the intrusion of existing housing on the western fringes of Lhanbryde and create a firm settlement edge. There are opportunities to extend housing development to the west of the defined site providing the setting of Woodside farmhouse is maintained by limiting development around it and retaining pastures and/or public open space to the front of the building. Woodland should be planted on the subtle ridged landform present on the western boundary of this extended site to screen views from the A96 and create a strong settlement edge to any subsequent phases of housing development.

3 Barmuckity, Elgin

3.1 Survey and Analysis

This site lies on the eastern edge of Elgin and to the south of the A96. It comprises an area of flat farmland on the floodplain of the River Lossie, gently rising to the railway line which is aligned at the base of a band of small knolly hills. The core of Elgin is some distance from the site, although an area of new housing has been designated at Waulkmill to the west of the site. The key characteristics of the site are described below and illustrated in the accompanying survey figure:

- The busy A96, the railway and an overhead transmission line combine to create a strong 'communications corridor' character to the landscape. The existing Linkwood industrial estate currently presents a poor approach to Elgin experienced from the A96.
- The proposed Elgin bypass has indicative northern and southern route options. The southern route option is aligned through the western half of the Barmuckity site and would influence the design of the business park.
- The site partially lies on the floodplain of the River Lossie and is prone to periodic flooding. The river meanders at the foot of small knolly and wooded hills to the south of the A96 and these are mirrored by similar small hills on the southern edge of the Barmuckity site, although these are open and grazed.
- The existing 19th century Barmuckity Farmhouse is located on a distinctive knoll at the centre of the site and is accessed by a curving tree-lined drive. While the farmhouse is attractive, associated farm buildings and some other housing is poorly constructed and unsightly.

3.2 Recommendations

The Barmuckity site is likely to be the preferred site for business park development in Elgin as identified in the draft Local Plan. The risk of flooding and the overhead transmission line constrain much of the site in terms of developable area. This site is appropriate for future development in landscape terms once landscape mitigation measures have been established.

Development should be kept off the flood risk area and an open water body and wetlands should be created, potentially forming an integral part of flood prevention measures as well as providing a setting to high quality buildings and enhancing the approach to Elgin as experienced from the A96. These features also have potential to form part of a Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS) for the development.

It is recommended that a feasibility study is undertaken to consider inter-alia development costs such as under-grounding of the transmission line as this would enhance the setting to the business park development and the approach to Elgin. Avenue tree planting against the A96 would limit views of the transmission line from the road.

Woodland structure planting should be located to screen the railway line and along the eastern edge of the site which is currently open to views from the A96 and the adjacent rural area.

Wider off-site enhancement measures should be instigated in association with the Forestry Commission. These should principally comprise an extensive woodland scheme which includes riparian woodland along the River Lossie and the establishment of woodland on the knolly hills bordering the site to the south, where this would emphasise the containment offered to the development. The extent of riparian planting accommodated on the flood plain to the north of the A96 will be dependant on the final route agreed for the Elgin by-pass.

4 West Elgin Business Site

4.1 Survey and Analysis

This relatively small site is proposed for strategic business use. It lies on the western edge of Elgin and to the south of the A96. The site comprises a gently sloping field elevated above the River Lossie. An existing hotel is situated on the north side of the A96 opposite the site and there may also be potential for some business use in future redevelopment proposals here. The key characteristics of the site are described below and illustrated in the accompanying survey figures:

- The River Lossie lies to the south of the site, separated by a steep wooded bank. A caravan park is situated close to the river and is accessed by a narrow road on the eastern boundary of the site.
- Extensive mature woodlands are present on the western edge of Elgin and these form an attractive high quality approach to the settlement experienced from the A96 and also provide a strong containing edge to this site.

4.2 Recommendations

This site is appropriate for development in landscape terms due to the strong containment offered by existing mature woodland and its proximity to existing settlement. Development would need to be of the highest quality due to the location of this site on the western approach to Elgin where mature policy woodland and the River Lossie create an attractive landscape context.

A generous landscape edge should be created against the A96 and include avenue tree planting, renovation of existing stone walls and construction of new walls on boundaries and to create splays at the entrance to the business park. Design elements should be simple and uncluttered in order not to detract from the distinctive landscape context of policy woodlands and the river valley.

Off-site management of woodlands on the steep banks and grassland along the floodplain bordering the River Lossie would enhance the overall approach to Elgin in this area. Redevelopment of the hotel to the north of the A96 could also contribute to this enhancement provided buildings were limited and a generous but simple landscape frontage were created, avoiding the overly ornamental and fussy landscaping currently associated with the hotel.

5 Lossiemouth

5.1 Survey and Analysis

The core of Lossiemouth is prominently sited on a coastal outcrop bordering the mouth of the River Lossie. Subsequent development has extended southwards onto the coastal plain and RAF Lossiemouth occupies an extensive area to the south-west of the settlement. The edge of the settlement is well-defined by the coast to the north and to the south-east by extensive woodland and excavated sand dunes.

Two sites lying to the south of the core of Lossiemouth, and adjacent to the A941, were surveyed and key characteristics are described below and illustrated in the accompanying survey figure:

- Site A comprises a former domestic waste tip lying adjacent to existing housing on the southern fringes of Lossiemouth. The site is largely colonised by gorse scrub and is contained by mature Scots pine on its east, south and north boundaries. The potential contamination risks associated with this site may prohibit development.
- Site B comprises flat, open farmland and is highly visible from the A941 and the surrounding open coastal plain to the west. Mature Scots pine woodland contains the northern boundary of the site and further emphasises the dislocation of this site from the main settlement of Lossiemouth.
- A young shelterbelt has been planted against the A941 on the western boundary of Site B while the southern boundary is marked by an open drainage channel.

5.2 Recommendations

The preferred site for new housing identified in the Consultative Draft Local Plan and lying to the south-west of Lossiemouth, may be technically constrained by future development plans at the adjacent RAF base. These sites lying to the south of Lossiemouth have therefore been identified as possible alternatives for mixed housing and business/industrial use, although it is recognised that potential contamination may inhibit development on Site A.

Site A lies close to existing (and consented) housing on the south-western edge of Lossiemouth and thus has a clear relationship to the settlement. The site is strongly contained by mature Scots pine woodland which would screen views of any development from the open plain to the south and would provide an attractive landscape setting to buildings. While in landscape terms it would be preferable for this site to accommodate new housing development in view of its close relationship with existing housing, the contamination issues associated with the site may inhibit this. There may however be scope for industrial development and a detailed feasibility study would need to be undertaken to identify any opportunities.

Site B is some distance from Lossiemouth and development would therefore be divorced from the existing settlement. Although the site is contained by mature woodland to the north, this serves to accentuate the separation of this site from Lossiemouth as it provides a robust containing edge screening existing housing. This site is also presently very open and highly visible from the A941 and from the surrounding area to the west. There are few landform features on the site able to create a robust and well-defined edge to new development and screen views, although a young shelterbelt has potential to provide some screening in the long term.

Should there be no option but to develop Site B, significant mitigation measures would need to be instigated to address landscape and visual impacts. It is considered that housing development would be preferable to business or industrial development as the large scale buildings of the latter would be intrusive and difficult to screen on this open site even in the longer term. Large scale buildings would also affect the visual integrity of existing mature woodland, interrupting views of the distinctive edge it provides to housing in south-east Lossiemouth. Alternatively, only small scale business/industrial units should be sited in this location.

Advance planting of woodland with an open character should be undertaken on Site B within which housing could be dispersed and thus create a distinctive identity for new settlement. It would be particularly

important to establish woodland on the southern boundary of the site with the aim of limiting views from the A941.

New woodland planting should integrate with existing Scots pine woodlands characteristic of the landscape to the east of the site. There may be opportunities to create wetlands, riparian woodland and open water along the existing drainage channel. Opportunities for enhancing pedestrian/cycle access to both Lossiemouth and Elgin should be taken where attractive off-road routes could be aligned through woodland to the east and using the former railway solum.

In conclusion, while in landscape terms Site A is preferable to Site B for both housing and/or industrial development, the potential contamination of this site may inhibit construction of domestic buildings. Should there be opportunities for industrial development only on Site A, this would be preferable to large scale industrial buildings being located on the open and highly visible Site B, where housing offers greater scope to be screened in the long term by existing and new woodland planting.

6 Clovenside, Forres

6.1 Survey and Analysis

This small sloping site lies to the east of the centre of Forres, close to Victoria Road which is aligned by attractive 19th stone villas and parkland, and is set within a Conservation Area. The site is backed by the wooded Cluny Hills and the narrow, winding Clovenside Road marks its southern boundary. This site forms the lower slopes of the Cluny Hills and lies behind a single row of houses aligning Victoria Road. The site is largely colonised by dense young birch woodland, possibly indicating some past disturbance or clearance having occurred.

6.2 Recommendations

This site is appropriate for development in landscape terms as it lies close to existing housing and would not disrupt the open fields which provide the setting to Drumduan House (the Steiner school) to the east. The birch colonising the site is even-aged and dense and is not as valuable a landscape feature as mature woodlands on the adjacent Cluny Hills, which are more prominent and visually diverse.

It will be important to limit the number of houses on the site due to the need to avoid unsightly cuttings and embankments on steeper slopes, which could be visible from Victoria and Clovenside Roads. The inclusion of this site within a Conservation Area influences the importance of careful siting and a high standard of design for housing development. It is recommended that no more than 10 houses (dependant on the size of houses) could be accommodated on this site allowing for sensitively aligned access roads, generous garden allocation and new specimen tree planting at garden boundaries and on steeper ground to contain and filter through the development and thus reflect the character of older houses and their associated grounds in the area. However, it should be stressed that this estimate may need to be revised once dense birch is removed and topographic information made available.

Housing should be of a high quality in view of the distinctive architectural and landscape context of the area. While much of the birch should be removed to accommodate development, some small thinned groups could be retained and inter-planted with more long lived and larger trees, such as lime and beech, adjacent to Clovenside Road to screen views of gardens. Stone walls should be used to demarcate housing plots and provide low level screening along Clovenside Road and fit with the landscape context of the Conservation Area.

7 West of Knockomie, Forres

7.1 Survey and Analysis

Extensive new housing development has recently occurred on the south-western edge of Forres and further housing sites have also been defined east of Knockomie. Two sites, to the west of the Knockomie Hotel and close to sites already allocated for housing, have been surveyed. These sites are titled Site A and B and their key characteristics are described below and illustrated in the accompanying survey figure:

- Site A is covered with poorly managed woodland with larch being the dominant species. Former MOD structures and a bungalow are sited within this woodland. This woodland features in distant views of Forres from the A96 and screens the edge of new housing located to the west of the A940.
- Site B comprises open fields raised above the extensive flat farmlands on the floodplain of the River Findhorn. A gorse covered bank forms the northern boundary to this site against the minor road to Mundole. The wooded policies associated with the Knockomie Hotel visually contain this site to the east. Large sheds of a chicken production unit are located at Whiterow Farm close to the southern edge of the site.

7.2 Recommendations

Opportunities to develop housing on Site A are constrained by the importance of the woodland on the site in providing a containing edge to settlement and in screening recently constructed housing in views from the north. The woodland is in poor condition and any partial removal to accommodate some dispersed development may result in instability of retained trees thus further threatening the integrity of the containing edge it provides to existing settlement. It is therefore concluded that Site A is not appropriate for development due to significant landscape constraints.

Site B currently lies some distance from the core of Forres although it is close to other areas allocated for future housing and some existing small scale settlement is present adjacent to the site. Views of this site are limited from the A940 but development would be highly visible from the A96 to the north due to the openness and slight elevation of the site. Woodland planting undertaken along the north-western boundary of the site would provide a degree of screening, although this would take time to be effective. The presence of a nearby chicken production unit may be a constraint to development and it is recommended that woodland planting is extended to provide a noise and visual barrier. It is concluded that Site B would be appropriate for development in landscape terms once these landscape mitigation measures have been established.

8 Rothes Sites

8.1 Survey and Analysis

Rothes is sited at the foot of the rounded hills which contain the Spey valley. To the east of the A941, which forms the main street of Rothes, settlement extends onto the flat open floodplain of the Spey while to the west, distilleries occupy narrow tributary valleys and predominantly terraced housing is located on lower hill slopes. Two sites on the western fringes of Rothes were surveyed. Both sites are elevated above the existing settlement and access may be a physical constraint to development.

The sites are titled Site A and Site B and their key characteristics are briefly described below and illustrated in the accompanying survey figure:

- Site A comprises level to gently sloping pastures, elevated between deeply incised burns to the north and south. The site is accessed by narrow winding lanes either side of fields; the southern lane providing a tree-lined access to the former manse and adjacent cemeteries. Woodland contains the site on most boundaries.
- Site B lies close to the A941 and above the Black Burn valley where the Glen Grant Distillery is located. This steeply sloping site is currently unmanaged and colonised by dense birch scrub and bramble. A mixed narrow shelterbelt and broken stone wall form the boundary with open farmland to the west. The site lies close to the visitor car park and footpath to the distillery garden.

8.2 Recommendations

Site A is appropriate for development in landscape terms although access would need to be carefully routed to avoid impacting on the setting of the former manse and its existing avenue of beech and lime. Access to this site may also be constrained to the north by existing properties and the steep wooded slopes of the Black Burn valley.

Accommodation works associated with Site A should include the management and strengthening of the existing avenue to the former manse with new planting, including a beech or evergreen hedge planted adjacent to the avenue to provide lower level screening. New, higher stone walls should be built around the cemetery which extends into the site with the aim of screening views and conserving the privacy of visitors. Woodland planting should be undertaken to enhance the containment provided by existing trees on the western boundary of the site, where the site rises to form a rounded ridge.

While Site B is appropriate for development in landscape terms, this is likely to be physically limited by the steep slopes of the site and by access difficulties associated with the alignment of the busy A941 at this point. It may only be possible to develop this site if access can be negotiated via the Glen Grant Distillery car park. It is recommended that a single row of houses only is built on the southern portion of the site in order to limit potentially unsightly cuttings which may be visible from the visitor footpath to the distillery garden. There may be potential for a double row of houses to be located on the wider northern part of the site, although it is noted that views from this part of the site are marred by industrial development.

Existing trees marking the northern and western boundaries of this site should be managed and new trees planted to retain this feature in the long term and increase screening from the A941 to the west, where any new development on this site may be visible. The existing stone wall on this boundary should be renovated. Houses should be carefully designed to fit with the natural slope of this site.

9 Tomnabent , Aberlour

9.1 Survey and Analysis

Tomnabent comprises a recently developed community in a rural location. Existing houses almost encircle an area of former woodland, which now comprises heather and young regenerating birch. A number of consented housing plots were not yet developed at the time of survey. Key characteristics of the site are illustrated in the accompanying survey figure and described below:

- The site comprises a gently domed hill located within a rural area and with existing large detached newly built houses almost encircling upper slopes in an approximate triangular layout. Rough tracks provide access and existing houses are located on sloping ground below access tracks.
- Houses on Spey Valley Drive (north-west) have extensive views over the Spey valley and are highly visible from the A95. Houses on Ben Rhinnes Drive face south-east and are prominent in views from minor roads and small settlements such as Edinvillie. Houses sited towards the junction between Spey Valley Drive and Ben Rhinnes Drive are less visually prominent.
- The core of the site comprises heather and grass cover with some patchy regenerating birch. A number of tracks and a former small quarry are present.

9.2 Recommendations

Opportunities to accommodate further development on this site are very limited due to the prominence of existing housing and its incongruity in this rural context. Further development would only be appropriate if it were allied to more general landscape measures able to mitigate the effects of both existing and future housing development at Tomnabent.

It is important that the conservation and future management of the former woodland area at the core of Tomnabent is secured. Establishment of well-managed native woodland comprising long-lived species such as Oak, beech and Scots pine should be encouraged. As this woodland matures it would provide a backdrop to highly visible development and diminish the perceived scale and prominence of buildings presently seen on the skyline.

Further development on the site may be considered as a means of securing the conservation and management of woodland at the core of Tomnabent. If this is the case, there may be scope for reconsidering the retention of 'Amenity Land' identified in the Consultative Draft Local Plan. These areas largely comprise young birch and heather and while one of the areas provides a necessary buffer to nearby older properties close to the minor public road to the south west of the site, in general this is a less visually prominent part of the development in terms of widespread views and an additional two house plots could be accommodated on Spey Valley Drive. Up to 5 smaller houses could also be accommodated at the flatter south-west corner of the site where they would be largely screened by existing large scale houses on Spey Valley Drive, although it is accepted that properties in this location would not have extensive views of the surrounding area. It is recommended that any applications for development on the upside of existing access tracks should be refused as this would significantly exacerbate the existing intrusion of large houses, prominent on the skyline.

Should any further development take place on this site, it is recommended that timber fencing and exotic conifer species are avoided for defining garden boundaries. These are a feature of many of the newly developed plots and are particularly intrusive and alien in this rural context. There are some gaps between plots which should be planted with long-lived native tree species with the aim of softening the 'broken teeth' effect of prominent widely spaced houses seen on the skyline, along Ben Rinnas Drive, for example.

10 Lochyhill, East Forres

10.1 Survey and Analysis

This site lies on the eastern edge of Forres and to the south of the busy A96. While this site was originally considered to be constrained in landscape terms for residential development, primarily because of its detachment from Forres and the potential effect on the containment offered by elevated ridges, it is now being reconsidered as an alternative to potential development proposed to the south of Forres. Key characteristics of the site are illustrated in the accompanying survey figure and described below:

- The site rises in a series of softly rolling ridges and knolls. Flatter areas occur between ridges and are backed by small woodlands around Lochyhill Farm which is located at the top of the site. The site presently comprises farmland and lies some distance from the core of Forres yet adjacent to existing housing.
- An existing 1970's circa housing estate abuts the site to the west and is backed by the distinctive wooded Cluny hills at the heart of Forres. This housing is small scale and relatively tightly clustered and generally responds well to the rising landform rolling ridges.
- Views of the site from the A96 when travelling from the east are restricted by a distinct sandy knoll. The site offers elevated views over Findhorn Bay.

10.2 Recommendations

Opportunities to accommodate housing development on this site are constrained by its distinctive rolling topography and the need to conserve the containment provided by elevated ridges. The site is also detached from the core of Forres, although it borders dense housing located on similar rolling terrain to the west. This site is considered appropriate for housing development providing that landscape mitigation measures are undertaken and well-established prior to construction.

Steep slopes, knolls and elevated ridges should be planted with woodland and thus contain and form a backdrop to developed areas of flatter ground. The distinctive knoll on the western edge of the site should be planted and this may involve considerable soil ameliorate to support trees on sandy substrate.

Housing should be kept low, comprising single storey to one and a half storey maximum height, so as to take advantage of the containment of planted knolls and ridges. Access roads would need to be carefully designed to avoid intrusive cuttings and it is recommended that housing is orientated to take advantage of views to Findhorn Bay and therefore also avoid potentially unsightly back gardens facing the A96. Garden boundaries should be simplified avoiding timber fences in favour of the use of hedges or walls where possible.

This is a visually prominent site lying in close proximity to the busy A96 and it is therefore recommended that woodland planting is established on the northern boundary of the site to provide both a visual and noise buffer to residential development.

It is recommended that the adjacent site to the south-west of Lochyhill should be developed as recommended in Alison Grant's proposals (Integration of New Development into the Moray Landscape, Forres North East, May 2005) with woodland planted on the steep sided ridge and merging with additional planting proposed to the north of Lochyhill Farm.

11 Hattonhill, West Elgin

11.1 Survey and Analysis

This site, lying on the western edge of Elgin, has been identified for potential residential development. It is elevated above the steep wooded banks of the River Lossie and abuts existing housing on Bruceland Road and the distillery. The site comprises an area of pasture currently designated as ENV6 in the Local Plan and contiguous with extensive open space on the floodplain of the River Lossie to the north-east. Key characteristics of the site are illustrated in the accompanying survey figure and described below:

- The steeply wooded banks of the Lossie on the north-western boundary and presence of wooded knolls to the north inhibit views of the river from this site.
- The site is particularly steeply sloping to the north-east although gradients are gentler to the west adjacent to the distillery. Informal paths cross the pasture to the woodland on the steep river banks although access along the river appears to be restricted outwith the site.
- Existing housing along Bruceland Road is prominently sited at the top of steep slopes and highly visible from the A96 on the western approach to Elgin. A distinct pattern of detached large houses located on knolls on the edge of the river floodplain and set within mature wooded grounds occurs to the north of the site

11.2 Recommendations

This site has little visual relationship with the attractive broad swathe of open farmland characteristic of the floodplain of the River Lossie to the north-east at the heart of Elgin and similarly designated in the Local Plan as open space (ENV6). The presence of highly visible housing on the northern edge of this site also lessens its value as open space in the wider strategic landscape context. It is therefore considered that this site is appropriate for some limited housing development provided that landscape mitigation measures are undertaken. The density and design of housing this will be influenced by the steepness of the ground and the highly visible nature of the site as it lies adjacent to the A96 on the main approach to Elgin.

It is recommended that residential development is largely concentrated in the more gently sloping and less visible western part of the site. This part of the site could accommodate more clustered housing than the steeply sloping eastern part of the site, where development should be widely spaced with woodland planted on steeper slopes to filter views of buildings from the A96 and replicate the character of large houses set within wooded grounds that occurs to the north of the A96 and on the edge of the River Lossie floodplain. Development density will necessarily be low to attain this character and to avoid the visual and landscape impact of cuttings and embankments associated with building platforms and access roads. Housing should be designed to fit with the natural slope of the site.

The eastern and western parts of the site should be separated by a woodland strip; this helping to further define the different housing densities proposed. A footpath should be aligned through this woodland and could link with a possible walkway along the River Lossie. A new footbridge may be necessary to allow any future path to continue downstream under the A96 due to the likely constraints associated with privately owned gardens located on the eastern bank of the river. In the long term, this walkway could provide an attractive recreational resource providing access to the centre of Elgin from the west.

12 Buckie Woodland Framework

12.1 Background

The town of Buckie is being considered as a possible candidate for the establishment of an extensive new woodland framework which would have the principal aims of enhancing the setting of the existing settlement and planned new development as well as providing a recreational resource.

New planting would potentially be grant aided by the Forestry Commission (FC) under the Climate Change Programme. Under the criteria set out for the scheme, new woodland would need to comprise a minimum of 50 hectares proposed as a single application and while the key objective of the scheme would be environmental and social benefit, timber production is also a requirement with a minimum yield class of 12 needing to be attained under current rules. The scheme would only fund the establishment of woodland on new ground.

Key characteristics of the site relevant to the new woodland framework are illustrated in the accompanying survey figure and described below:

- The original core of Buckie stretches along the coast with newer development extending onto sloping ground to the south. Farmland and open ground close to the coast allows sea views from a network of minor roads; it is also exposed to salt winds.
- Three water courses cut through Buckie to the coast and are broadly aligned north/south. Some of these valleys already support woodland in places, although this is largely unmanaged or scrubby in nature. An FC spruce plantation at Carnoch to the south-east of Buckie has potential for enhancement.
- Buckie is well served by footpath routes including the Speyside Way and the Coastal Footpath. A former railway solum provides a National Cycle Route on the eastern edge of the town. All these routes run parallel to the coast and there is an absence of circular inland recreational routes around the town.
- An existing industrial estate is prominently sited within the flat open farmland lying above the coastal edge. A new business park and possible retail development is proposed on a similar flat and open site either side of the main approach road to Buckie and extending to the A98.
- Sloping ground screens existing and proposed housing in the vicinity of the former Seafield Hospital on the eastern approach to Buckie along the A98.

12.2 Recommendations

The establishment of a new woodland framework in and around Buckie should aim to enhance the landscape setting to the settlement by screening existing and new development on the open farmland above the coast and enhancing key landscape features. A key objective is also to enhance recreation and amenity for local residents.

The coastal edge and sea are principal features of the existing landscape setting of Buckie. Sea views should be retained and consequently no planting is proposed on open ground east and west of the town where views are a feature. These sites are also very exposed and are unlikely to support the commercial woodland required by the FC scheme.

The burns which cut through the settlement and open farmland to the south are not large and generally lie in shallow, visually insignificant valleys. There are opportunities however to focus new woodland planting within these valleys and thus accentuate their presence and also link with existing scattered woodland and the more substantial Carnoch woodland owned by the FC.

Existing and proposed long term business and retail development either side of the A942 to the south of the settlement could be contained by establishing woodland along the Burn of Buckie and the Freuchny Burn and parallel to the A98. Similarly, it is recommended that new woodland is established on the southern edge of the Maltings industrial site to link with proposed planting around site I3 identified in the Moray Local Plan Review (Consultative Draft). Substantial woodland in these areas would provide a framework for long term development and contain visually intrusive industry on the edge of the town.

The burn valleys have potential to accommodate new inland and circular recreational routes, linking with existing footpaths and cycleways aligned along the coast. These would offer direct links from housing areas within Buckie to the outlying countryside and contribute to an overall diverse recreational experience. Carnoch Wood could provide a key 'destination' for walkers and cyclists, although it would be essential to enhance this woodland by thinning, species diversification and the introduction of open space. A former railway line linking with the Freuchny Burn, marked by a curving line of gorse scrub across farmland to the south-east of Buckie, has potential to provide a more formal walking/cycle route providing access to the hills south of the A98.