

Bilbohall Masterplan

2017

Landscape and Visual Appraisal

Prepared on behalf of Bilbohall Consortium

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1. Introduction

This Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) evaluates the effects of the proposed Bilbohall development (hereafter referred to as ‘the proposed development’) on the landscape and visual resource. The LVA has been carried out to determine the effects that are likely to arise as a result of the proposed development and to support the production of a masterplan for the area which will be adopted in due course as Supplementary Guidance. The appraisal has been undertaken by Chartered Landscape Architects at Optimised Environments Limited (OPEN) on behalf of the Bilbohall Consortium. It has considered the effects on the landscape and visual resource of the site and surrounding area.

1.1 Content of the Appraisal

This appraisal contains the following sections:

1. Introduction: setting out the content of the appraisal, the approach taken, the description of the project and extent of the study area;
2. Appraisal methodology: describing the methods used in the baseline appraisal, the appraisal of sensitivity and magnitude of change, and the appraisal of the level of effect;
3. Planning context: setting out the key policies of relevance to the appraisal;
4. Baseline conditions: describing the landscape character and visual amenity of the development site and the surrounding area based on desk based study and site visits;
5. Development design mitigation: summary of the measures taken to avoid or minimise the landscape and visual effects of the proposed development through the design;
6. Appraisal of effects on landscape elements and landscape character: identifying the residual effects on landscape elements and landscape character areas;
7. Appraisal of effects on visual amenity: identifying the residual effects on selected viewpoints and principal visual receptors; and
8. Summary of effects.

The appraisal is supported by a set of figures which contain GIS maps and viewpoint photographs to illustrate aspects of the appraisal. These figures, along with site work, have supported the professional judgement that is applied within the appraisal. They should be viewed in accompaniment to the written text. Figures 1 to 5 are map based and present data of relevance to the assessment within a 2km study area. Figures 6 to 12 are photographs taken from representative viewpoints in and around the site of the proposed development.

1.2 Approach

Although there is no requirement for a formal Environmental Assessment for the proposed development, this appraisal follows best practice guidance produced by the Landscape Institute in its ‘Guidance for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment’ (GLVIA) (3rd Edition 2013) and evaluates the likely effects of the proposed development on the landscape character, townscape character and visual amenity of the site and its surroundings.

The following extract, taken from the GLVIA Statement of Clarification (Jan 2013), gives guidance on the terminology to be used in non-EIA Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisals, such as this.

‘In carrying out appraisals, the same principles and process as LVIA may be applied but, in so doing, it is not required to establish whether the effects arising are or are not significant given that the exercise is not being undertaken for EIA purposes. The reason is that should a landscape professional apply LVIA principles and processes in carrying out an appraisal and then go on to determine that certain effects would be likely be significant, given the term ‘significant’ is enshrined in EIA Regulations, such a judgement could trigger the requirement for a formal EIA. The emphasis on likely ‘significant effects’ in formal LVIA stresses the need for an approach that is proportional to the scale of the project that is being assessed and the nature of its likely effects. The same principle - focussing on a proportional approach – also applies to appraisals of landscape and visual impacts outside the formal requirements of EIA.’

In this appraisal, effects are assessed to be either ‘minor’, ‘moderate’ or ‘major’. The level of effect is assessed through a combination of two considerations - the sensitivity of the landscape element, landscape character receptor, townscape receptor or view, and the magnitude of change that will result from the proposed development. This evaluation is carried out for each of the receptors described within the baseline section of the report.

1.3 Project Description

The LVA is based on a strategic masterplan that comprises up to 376 new homes, associated access, public and private space, and parking. The proposed development is located on land to the immediate south- of Ward’s Road on the west side of Elgin. The appraisal is based upon the project description set out in the Masterplan report. The key information which is used to inform the appraisal of landscape and visual effects includes the location and extent of the development footprint, the scale and massing of the development envelope and the integration of open space and landscape planting.

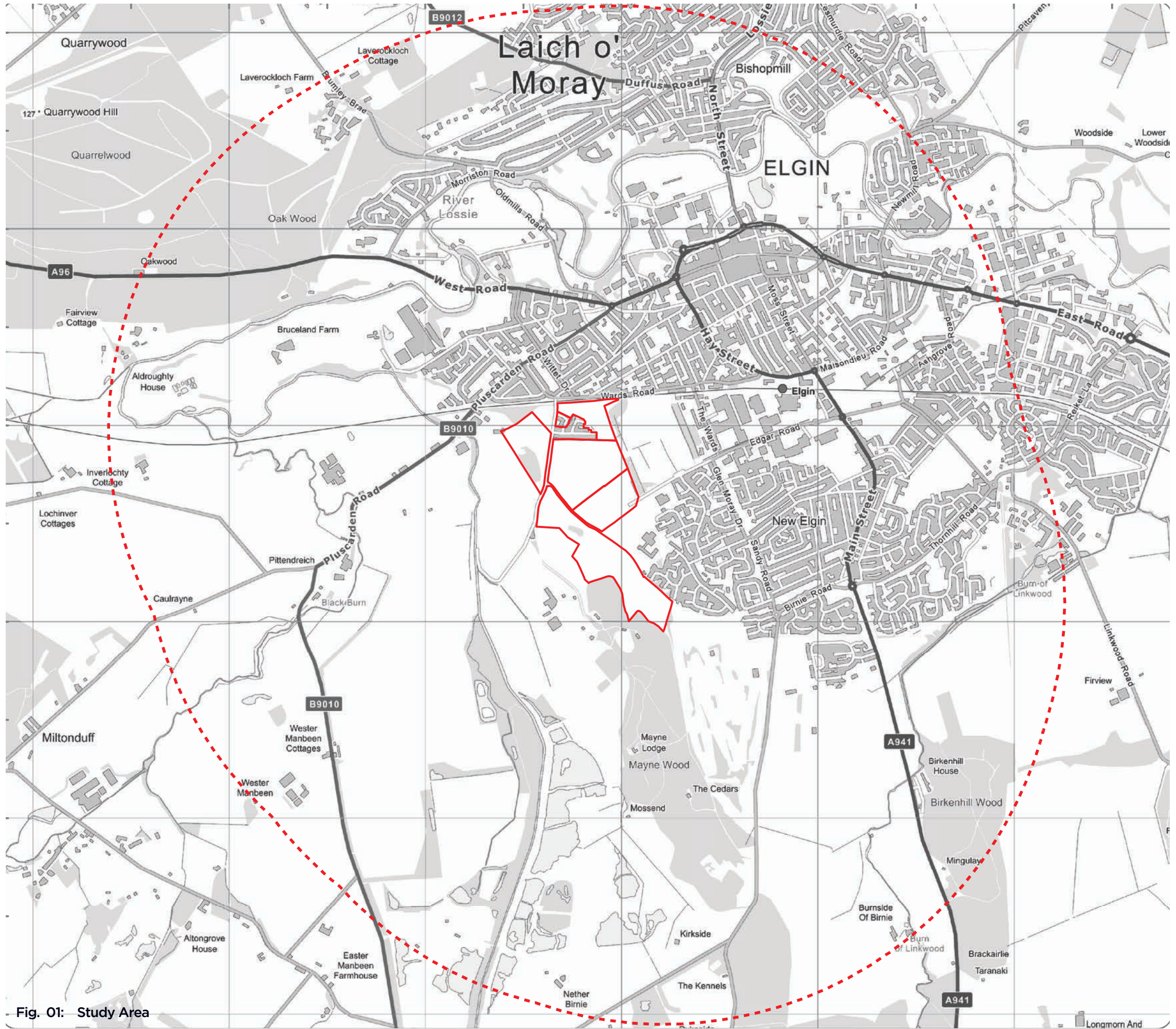
The key components of the proposed development include:

- Up to 376 new homes, with a mix of terraced, semi-detached and detached properties of up to two-storey in height;
- Associated private garden grounds;
- Associated infrastructure including access roads;
- Associated public open space; and
- Landscape structure planting.

Details of the site analysis, approach and design process are provided within the Masterplan report, which is to be adopted as Supplementary Guidance in due course.

1.4 Study Area

Site work has shown that the visual influence of the proposed development would be limited to the localised area around the site. This is largely owing to the screening effect of built form, land form and mature tree cover within the vicinity of the site. The study area, therefore, has been set at a radius of 2km from the edge of the boundary of the proposed development. This reflects the localised extent within which it is likely for notable effects to arise.



- Legend
- Site Boundary
 - 2km Study Area

Fig. 01: Study Area

0 200 400 800 m



2. Appraisal Methodology

Presented below is a summary of the appraisal methodology. The following sources have been used in the preparation of the methodology and as guidance in the preparation of the written appraisal and production of figures;

- The Landscape Institute with the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (GLVIA3);
- Natural England (2014). An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment;
- The Landscape Institute (2011). Landscape Institute Advice Note 01/11, Photography and photomontage in landscape and visual impact assessment; and
- The Landscape Institute (March 2017). Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02/17, Visual Representation of development proposals.

2.1 Scope of the appraisal

The appraisal covers the potential landscape and visual effects of the proposed development. The LVA is based on the Development Framework and associated illustrative Strategic Masterplan, and as such considers the principle of development on this site in terms of its footprint, massing and form. The appraisal considers how the proposed development will integrate with the existing landscape and townscape context and to what extent the characteristics of these will be changed.

2.2 Categories of effects

In the appraisal, the potential effects on the landscape and visual resource are grouped into three categories: effects on landscape elements, effects on landscape and townscape character, and effects on visual amenity.

Effects on landscape elements are restricted to the area within the site boundary, and are the direct effects on the fabric of the site, such as the removal or addition of trees and alteration to ground cover. This category of effects is made up of landscape elements, which are the components of the landscape such as hedgerows or woodland that may be physically affected by the development of the site.

Effects on landscape and townscape character arise either through the introduction of new elements that physically alter the pattern of elements that makes up landscape and townscape character, or through visibility of the proposed development, which may alter the way in which the pattern of elements is perceived. This category of effects is made up of townscape and landscape character receptors, which fall into two groups; landscape and townscape character types and designated areas.

Effects on visual amenity is an appraisal of how the proposed development will affect views throughout the study area. The appraisal of visual effects is presented as an appraisal of the effects that the proposed development will have on views from principal visual receptors, which are the notable settlements,

routes, features and attractions found throughout the study area (as ascertained through the baseline study).

The appraisal of effects on landscape and townscape character, and visual amenity are informed by a series of viewpoints that have been selected to represent visibility of the proposed development from the principal visual receptors around the study area. Further information on these viewpoints is provided in the baseline section of this appraisal.

2.3 Methodology

Sensitivity

Sensitivity is an expression of the ability of a landscape or visual receptor to accommodate the proposed development. The sensitivity is determined through a combination of the value of the receptor, and the susceptibility of the receptor to the proposed development.

Levels of sensitivity - high, medium to high, medium, medium to low, low and negligible- are applied in order that the judgement used in the process of appraisal is made clear. The criteria used to determine sensitivity differ for the effects on landscape receptors and visual receptors, as well as the cumulative effects on both. These criteria are explained in full in the Appendix to this report.

Magnitude of effect

Magnitude of effect is an expression of the extent of the effect on the landscape and visual receptors that will result from the introduction of the proposed development. The magnitude of effect is assessed in terms of the size and scale of the effect. The geographical extent of the area influenced is described in relation to the magnitude of effect.

Levels of magnitude of effect - high, medium to high, medium, medium to low and low - are applied in order that the judgement used in the process of appraisal is made clear. The criteria used to determine magnitude of effect differ for the effects on landscape receptors and visual receptors, as well as the cumulative effects on both. These criteria are explained in full in the Appendix to this report.

Levels of effect

In order to ascertain the level of effect, the sensitivity rating is combined with the magnitude of change rating, through the application of professional judgement to conclude whether the level of the effect is major, moderate or minor. A major effect occurs where the proposed development would provide a defining influence on a landscape element, landscape / townscape character receptor or visual receptor. A minor effect occurs where the effect of the proposed development is not material, and the baseline characteristics of the landscape element, landscape / townscape character receptor, or visual receptor continue to provide the definitive influence. A moderate effect occurs where the proposed development has a notable influence on a landscape element, landscape / townscape character receptor or visual receptor, but where the baseline characteristics continue to provide the definitive influence.

2.4 Method of baseline data collation

Desk study

A desk study has been carried out as part of the appraisal. This study identifies aspects of the landscape and visual resource that may need to be considered as receptors in the landscape and visual appraisal, including landscape-related planning designations, Conservation Areas, landscape character typology, roads, footpaths, and settlements.

The following sources have been referred to in the desk study:

- Scottish Natural Heritage (1998). Moray and Nairn landscape assessment;
- Alison Grant Associates (2005). Integration of New Development into the Moray Landscape;
- Moray Council (2015). Moray Local Development Plan; and
- Moray Council (2017). Moray Council Open Space Strategy (Draft).

Site study

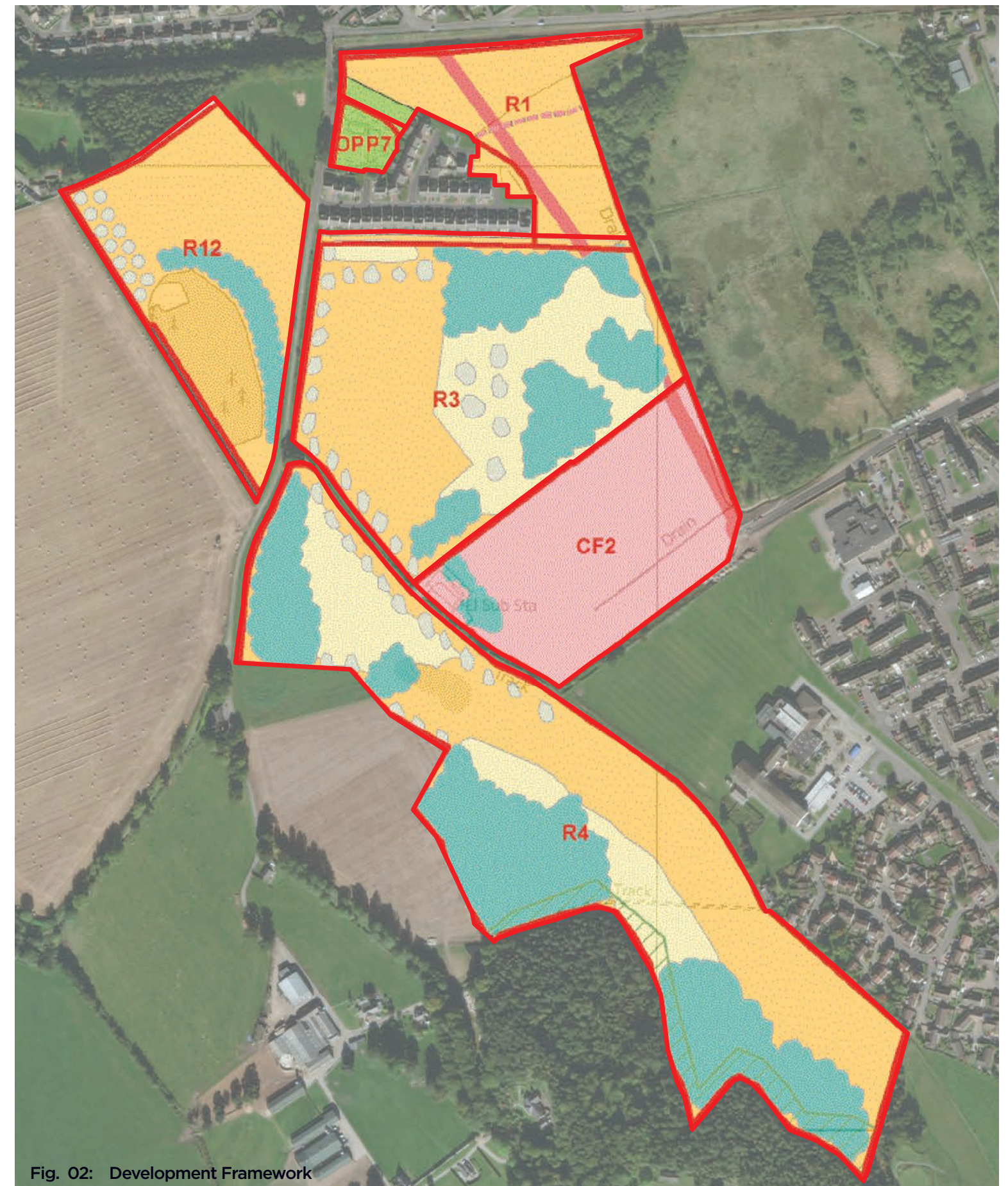
Visits to the site and the study area have been carried out in the course of the appraisal, in order to review the baseline conditions of the site, identify potential landscape and visual receptors, take viewpoint photographs, and carry out and review the appraisal of effects. Site visits and viewpoint photography took place in July 2017.

3. Planning Context

3.1 Introduction

Planning policy at the national, regional and local level and its relevance to environmental design and appraisal is discussed in the Planning Statement accompanying this application. Presented below is a summary of those policies that have a bearing on the landscape and visual appraisal of the proposed development.

Moray Local Development Plan (MLDP) (adopted July 2015) is the current plan which sets out all relevant policy and guidance. It highlights sites around Elgin which can accommodate development with an indication of capacity in terms of allocated numbers of housing units. The Settlement Statement in the MLDP sets out the allocations for the Bilbohall sites, along with key design principles. This information is set out in the Masterplan report.



4. Baseline Conditions

4.1 Introduction

The baseline study records the existing conditions of the site and study area. The process of this survey helps to gain an understanding of what makes the landscape and townscape distinctive and what their important components or characteristics are. The baseline study is instrumental in the identification of the landscape elements, landscape and townscape character receptors and visual receptors that are included in the appraisal. The baseline study is presented in three sections:

- Survey of landscape and townscape character;
- Review of landscape and townscape related planning designations; and
- Survey of principal visual receptors and representative viewpoints.

4.2 Survey of landscape and townscape character

The aim of this section is to survey and record the landscape and townscape character of the site and study area. The relevant documents are reviewed, and conclusions regarding natural characteristics, cultural and social factors, and aesthetic and perceptual responses are described.

Elgin is situated on the River Lossie in Moray. It is located approximately 60km to the east of Inverness and 100km to the north-west of Aberdeen, and connected to these two cities by its location on the A96. It lies within an area characterised by arable farmland, a fine network of rural and main roads, and a hierarchy of settlements from villages, to small towns. This is a settled and cultivated landscape with few unmodified areas. The site location and study area are shown in Figure 1.

4.3 The site

Bilbohall comprises a collection of five six consecutive sites with various landowners, located on the south-west side of Elgin in Morayshire.

R12 Knockmasting Wood occupies the north-west corner of the collective site. It sits to the west of Mayne Farm Road and to the south of the Aberdeen to Inverness railway line. To the west lies the rural edge, characterised by large and open fields of arable and pasture farmland, although this western site boundary is largely enclosed by the landform of a distinctive knoll and stand of mature Scot's Pine. Open space and play equipment occupy the small space to the north-east.

R1 Bilbohall North is the northern most site, occupying the land to the immediate south of the Aberdeen to Inverness railway line and Wards Road and the immediate north and east of Fairfield Avenue, a recent residential development comprising two storey detached properties. R1 forms a small pocket of land gently sloping eastwards.

R3 Bilbohall South sits to the south of Fairfield Avenue and to the east of Mayne Farm Road and is characterised by one of the distinctive knolls that define this

area. Steep sides rise up to the relatively level circular plateau at the top of the open knoll. The flat and level wetland named 'The Wards' lies to the east and the lower lying and more level landform of site CF2 lies to the south.

CF2 Edgar Road is enclosed by the landform of the knoll to the north and another longer knoll to the west. The new Elgin High School site lies to the immediate south, the big mass and institutional character of this super block establishing a strong influence over this urban / rural edge.

R4 South West of Elgin High School occupies the long knoll to the west, which extends from Mayne Farm Road in the north-west, to Elgin Golf Course in the south-east. The ridge follows this alignment with more level land rounding across the ridge and then slopes falling way to the north-east. This area is currently open farmland, although dense and mature woodland occupies the southern part of the ridge, which lies to the south of the site and which forms a substantial wooded backdrop.

OPP7 Biblohall comprises a former NHS elderly care facility and associated grounds. The buildings are surplus to requirements and residential development is proposed. A group of disparate buildings occupy the site, set within a setting of mature trees which are under a Tree Protection Order.

The distinctive knolls create an irregular pattern of landform which is further complicated by the imposition of field boundaries, roads and paths which do not necessarily relate to the contours. The mature woodland forms a prominent feature, and adds to the enclosure formed by the knolls, but could be extended to contribute to a clearer pattern. While the current urban edge is poorly defined, the proposed development presents the opportunity to create a more robust and responsive western edge to Elgin.

4.4 Landscape Character

The landscape character of the area around Elgin is recorded and classified in SNH's 'Moray and Nairn landscape assessment' (1998) as a Coastal Farmlands Landscape Character Type (LCT). This is a broad and expansive LCT that lies inset from the Moray Firth coastline, extending from the west to the east of the region. It is characterised by the very gently undulating landform of the coastal plain, with a general fall from south to north towards the Moray Firth. The fertile soils have led to a long history of settlement and cultivation in this landscape. The predominant land use remains as arable farming, with large, and often unenclosed fields creating an open and exposed landscape. Shelter-belts of pine trees or mixed species occasionally provide some enclosure and definition. The level and open nature of this landscape has led to a concentration of settlement and communication corridors, with main rail and road connections between Inverness to the north-west and Aberdeen to the south-east and small to medium size towns dispersed throughout the landscape. The landscape assessment highlights the pressures for land in this LCT and in particular the pressures for built development as being the most acute.

The Moray and Nairn landscape assessment, presents guidance on Urban Expansion in the Coastal Farmland LCT. It makes the assumption that towns will be expanding into an open and flat landscape stating, 'the openness of the

relatively flat landscape provides no cues for the creation of a sense of place, a strong setting and/or partial screening for new housing.' While the openness of the landscape is considered to lack the enclosure required to accommodate new housing in the landscape, the openness of the landscape is also considered a positive feature in terms of wide open views afforded into the adjacent landscape.

'The structural properties of woodland and forestry should be used to create a setting and backdrop for housing, which helps to visibly 'tie-in' development to the land on one hand, but retain views on the other.'

In respect of this guidance, the Bilbohall site presents different baseline conditions in that it occupies a landscape that is not flat and open, but one that is characterised by a series of hummocky drumlins and mature woodland copses. In terms of addressing the issues of urban expansion, this landscape presents a different starting point. It already has a distinct setting with enclosure and definition from both the landform and the woodland. As the masterplan demonstrates, these have been used and enhanced to create a strong structure and setting to the proposed development.

The generic description at the regional level of the Coastal Farmland LCT, is complemented with a more specific description at the local level of the landscapes around Elgin in a report by Alison Grant Associates on behalf of Moray Council and entitled 'Integration of New Development into the Moray Landscape: Elgin' (May 2005). In this report, the landscape around Elgin is described as follows:

'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.'

The report also observes that Elgin is not readily visible from the surrounding landscape, with the exception being from the hills to the north, from where the town is seen as a contained feature within a wider landscape context. Conversely, views from within the town looking out, are also limited. This gives the indication that the influence of the proposed development would be largely contained within the local area.

The landscape of Elgin West is described to provide the basis of the landscape capacity study in respect of new development as follows.

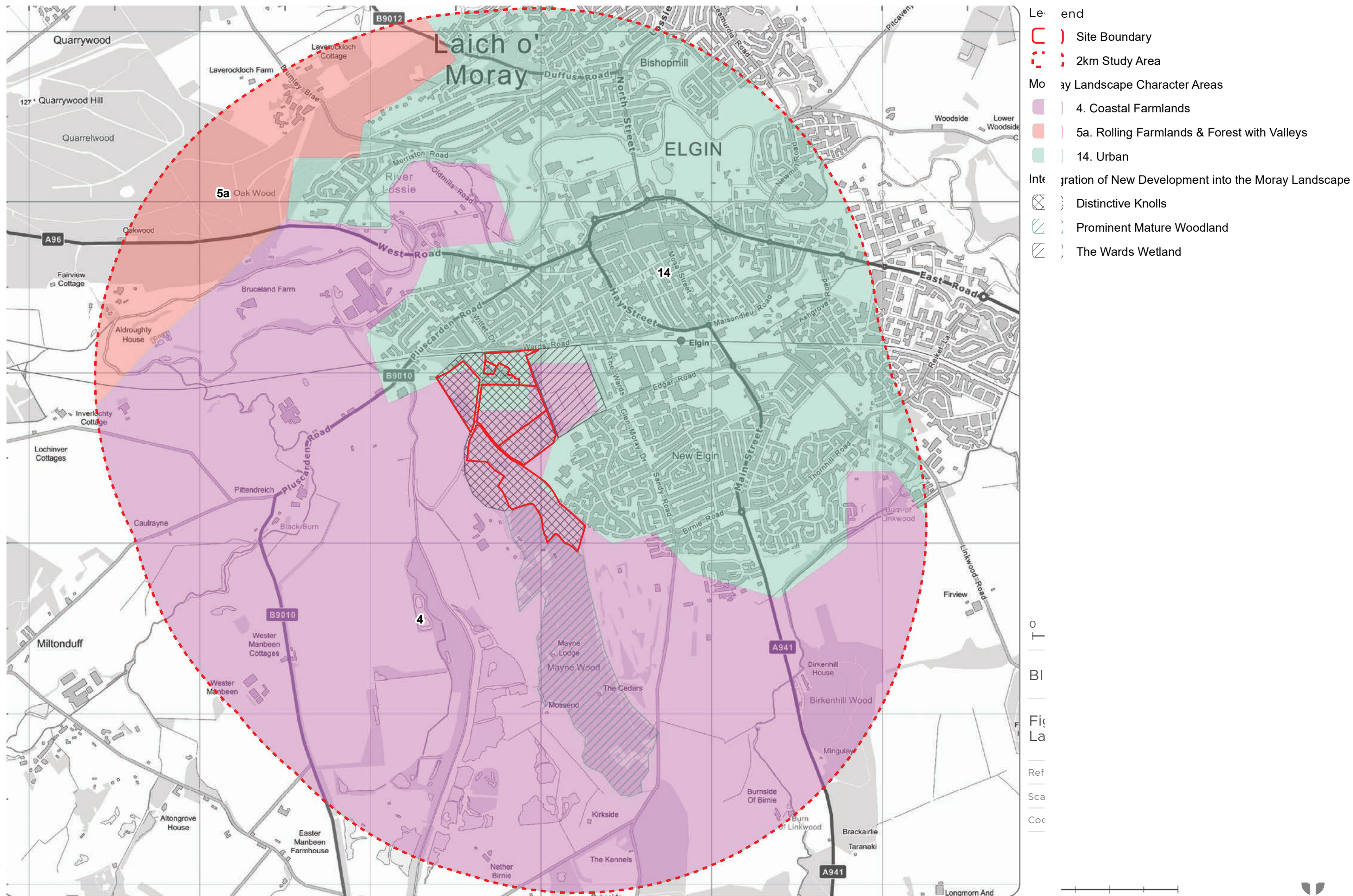


Fig. 03: Landscape Character
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‘Prominent knolls, clothed in cultivated farmland or woodland, with distinctive small groups of pine trees creating point features across the upper slopes.

These knolls create a sense of enclosure along the south western edge of the settlement, and form a distinctive feature which contributes to the setting of the town.

The area is characterised by the small scale of the knolls, and some of the slopes are orientated towards New Elgin.

There are no major approaches to Elgin which traverse this character unit.

The existing settlement edge includes the change of gradients associated with the knolls and the woodland at Mayne.

Land orientated to the west, away from the town, and separated from the existing settlement by rising land, has some perceptual detachment from the core of Elgin.’

Under the heading ‘Preferred Opportunities for Development’, the Bilbohall site is referred to as the Distinctive Knolls character area and described as follows.

‘The landscape which extends west from Elgin is one of diversity and relatively high quality, with distinctive landforms and some fine woodland. Landscape opportunities for settlement expansion lie principally within the Distinctive Knolls character area. There are some landscape opportunities for development within the lower land overlooking the school and adjacent to the Wards. These are areas orientated towards the existing settlement and are well contained by rising slopes. Development should take care to retain the dominance and integrity of the distinctive knolls, perhaps through extensive planting of woodland, particularly if they are no longer farmed in the future. Development should also avoid breaching the ridges and extending west, away from New Elgin. Settlement expansion here would help consolidate the settlement edge, and the setting could be further enhanced with extensive woodland planting along the upper slopes and ridges.’

The landscape character of the site and study area are shown in Figure 3.

4.5 Landscape and Townscape Designations

The site and study area are not covered by any national, regional or local landscape designations, which would otherwise denote scenic value or landscape quality. There are also no townscape designations covering the site or study area, except for the High Street and Elgin South Conservation Area which covers the historic core of the town to the north-east of the study area. The enclosure of this area, combined with the separation distance from the site and the extent of urban development within the separation distance, ensures that the proposed development would not have an effect on the character of the Conservation Area. Designations are shown in Figure 4.

Those features of relevance to the site include the following Core Paths, which pass through the site.

- EG36 – this core path passes through the centre of the site, along Mayne Farm Road in the north and adjacent to the western boundary

of the new Elgin High School in the south;

- EG37 – this core path extends around the peripheries of The Wards Wildlife Site to the east of the site;
- EG35 – this core path links EG37 with Fairfield Avenue; and
- EG34 – this core path links Wards Road with EG36.

The effect on these core paths is considered in the appraisal of visual effects.

4.6 Views and Visibility

As described in ‘Integration of New Development into the Moray Landscape’, the town of Moray occupies a bowl-shaped landform, which means that views are typically contained within the extent of the urban area and the town is not readily visible from the surrounding landscape, apart from where views occur from the higher hills to the north.

On the western side of Elgin, from where the proposed development would potentially be visible, the landscape forms the floodplain of the River Lossie and is characterised by fairly level and open, pastoral and arable farmland. The only potential visual receptors in this westward area are road-users on the B9010, the back road between Elgin and Forres, and residents of the rural farmsteads and properties accessed from this road. The extent of enclosing tree cover along the initial approximate 600m of this road out of Elgin, and then intervening tree cover in the rural landscape beyond, would combine to reduce the potential visual influence of the proposed development on both road-users and residents. Furthermore, the presence of the distinctive knolls and mature woodland, whilst themselves apparent landscape features in views from the west, would screen large parts of the proposed development. From the range of approximately 1km, where parts of the proposed development would potentially be visible, the two storey properties would be seen as relatively small and minor components occupying only a small proportion of the wider view.

On the southern side of the site, the presence of the mature and dense Mayne Wood, covering a substantial part of the Distinctive Knoll, precludes visibility from receptors to the south. While visibility of the proposed development would be readily evident along the eastern boundary where it abuts Elgin Golf Course, the residential area and the grounds of the new Elgin High School, this front row of development would screen much of the proposed development from receptors lying behind. Where the proposed development abuts ‘The Wards’ along the northern part of the eastern boundary, the potential for visual receptors to be affected would be limited by the extent of enclosing tree cover around the paths system and this would also preclude visibility arising further east across the town. There would however be glimpsed views from close range paths through The Wards’ and these are assessed in the visual appraisal.

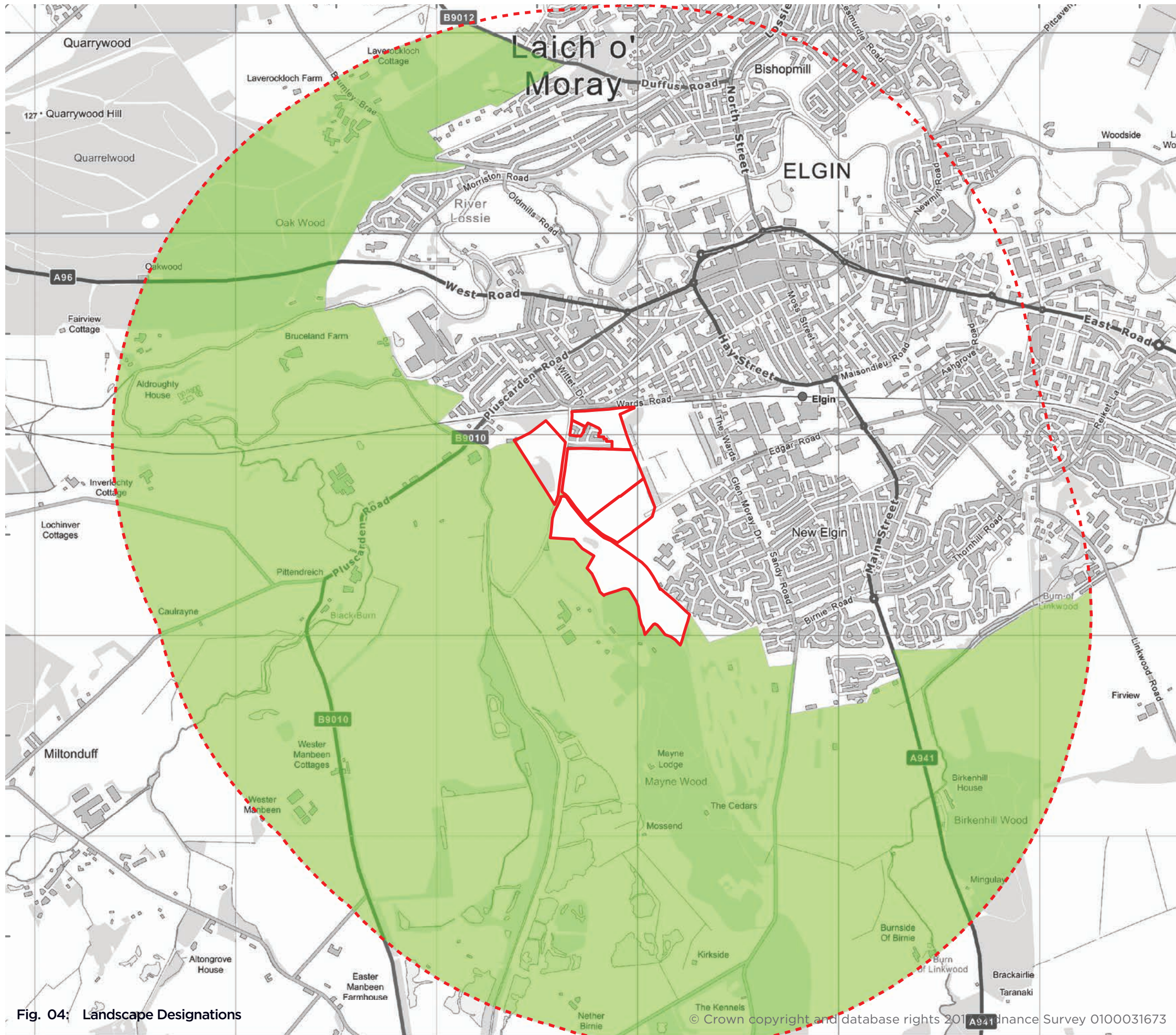
The extent of visibility along the northern site boundary is similarly contained. To the north of the Aberdeen to Inverness railway line and Wards Road, the landform rises, and the presence of residential development enclosing this aspect would prevent the influence of the proposed development affecting visual receptors beyond the localised area.

The combination of these enclosing elements would restrict the potential visibility of the proposed development to within the localised area. Viewpoints have, therefore, been selected to represent visual receptors within the local area. Their location is shown in respect of principal visual receptors in Figure 5 and

viewpoint photography is shown in Figures 6 to 12 and listed in Table 1 (right).

Viewpoint number and name	Reason for inclusion
Viewpoint 1: Ward’s Road west	View from adjacent settlement edge to the north. Representiave of the views of road users and residents on Wards Road.
Viewpoint 2: Ward’s Road east	View from adjacent settlement edge to the north-east. Representiave of the views of road users and residents on Wards Road further east than Viewpoint 1.
Viewpoint 3: Mayne Farm Road	View from main access road into the proposed development. Representative of walkers, road-users and residents.
Viewpoint 4: Core Path EG36	View from main access road through the proposed development. Representative of walkers.
Viewpoint 5: Path to Mayne Farm	View from main access road through the proposed development. Representative of walkers.
Viewpoint 6: Edgar Road	View from main access road to the new Elgin High School to the east of the proposed development. Representative of the views of walkers, road-users and residents.
Viewpoint 7: The Wards	View from The Wards Wildlife Site to the east of the proposed development. Representative of the views of walkers.

Table 1: Representative viewpoints



- Legend
- Site Boundary
 - 2km Study Area
 - Countryside around Towns

Fig. 04: Landscape Designations

0 200 400 800 m



5. Development Design Mitigation

5.1 Introduction

Section 6 presents the appraisal of effects on the landscape, townscape and visual receptors. The appraisal is laid out in three sections that follow the categories of effects as described previously:

- Appraisal of physical effects on landscape elements;
- Appraisal of effects on landscape and townscape character (including effects on landscape character types and designated areas); and
- Appraisal of visual effects (effects on principal visual receptors).

Within each of these categories, the effects which could arise from the construction and operational phases of the proposed development are assessed. This appraisal includes an evaluation of the sensitivity of each landscape element, townscape and landscape character receptor and visual receptor; the magnitude of change that will result from the introduction of the proposed development; and whether the effect is major, moderate or minor.

5.2 Mitigation

The appraisal also includes a description of how potential effects have been mitigated. The principal mitigation of landscape and visual effects is ‘embedded’ mitigation, achieved through careful design of the various elements of the proposed development, such as the layout of the buildings and how the layout responds to the landform and orientation of the site, the density and massing of the buildings, and the integration of open space and planting, which can reduce effects, or in some cases, prevent effects from arising.

The concept for the layout design has been to respond to the natural landform by shaping the proposed development along the existing contours in those parts that are not overly steep and then retaining the steeper slopes as green space for the establishment of woodland. This approach would ensure a strong landscape framework is established which would provide a strong setting to the proposed development and a more robust western edge to the settlement of Elgin.

The following mitigation measure have been incorporated into the design of the layout;

- In R3, keeping the residential development contained within the lower northern and western margins and on the more level plateau of the knoll;
- In R3, designing a sinuous road that traverses the contours so that the gradient is never too severe and the shape of the landform is accentuated;
- In R3 introducing woodland planting across the steeper southern and eastern slopes to help slope stability, create a setting and enclosure to the houses and accentuate the baseline character of the wooded knolls;
- In R2, utilising the lower-lying, more level and better enclosed landform to introduce a denser pocket of development and create a

suitable location for potential SUDS;

- In R12, preserving the distinctive knoll and associated woodland cover along the western boundary by developing around it and bolstering the tree planting to the north and south;
- In R4, respecting the sensitivity of this prominent knoll by preserving the majority of the higher land as green space designed with a strategic mix of open space and woodland planting and concentrating the residential development in lower lying pockets to the north, east and south.

The potential for mitigation of landscape and visual effects has been considered throughout the design and appraisal process, and is described in the assessment of each receptor that has been identified as requiring detailed appraisal. There is very limited potential for ‘add-on’ mitigation of landscape and visual effects, that is mitigation that would be added following the construction of the proposed development, and this has not been considered in the appraisal.

5.3 Potential effects

In order to understand the potential effects of the proposed development, it is first necessary to understand the construction processes involved, and the components of the proposed development which would be present during the operational life of the proposed development (the detail of these processes would be set out in subsequent Planning applications). The likely effects that would arise as a result of the proposed development can be attributed to either the short-term construction works or the long-term presence of the proposed development. Figure 2 shows an illustrated plan of the proposed development within an aerial image.

5.4 Effects of construction

The key consideration in assessing the construction phase of the proposed development is the phasing. Whilst at this early stage in the process, a phasing programme is indicative in nature, there are sufficient markers that can be established to help inform the assessment.

The proposed development would not take place all at the same time. There would be a gradual progression from one area to the next and while this would lengthen the overall construction phase, it would mean during any sub-phase the effects would be more localised within a particular area. The extension of the residential areas would be likely to follow a logical spread from north to south.

The construction activities would include the initial instatement of infrastructure, including roads and utilities and this would be followed by buildings construction. Key features of the construction phase would be the loss of the open agricultural land and its replacement with fenced construction compounds containing plant, materials, top soil heaps, site offices and welfare facilities, alongside emerging buildings and roads, but not just the presence of these components but also the activity and noise that accompanies the construction process. The construction works for the residential developments would be proportionally smaller than

those associated with the recent construction of the new Elgin High School. More latterly in the construction phase, there would be the establishment of green space and planting, apart from in peripheral or defined areas where advanced planting may be possible.

The effects of the construction phase would be short term and reversible. The effects would be most evident across close range townscape, landscape and visual receptors where the presence and activity of the construction would have a notable effect.

5.5 Effects of operation

Once construction works were complete there would no longer be construction compounds, active plant and uncompleted buildings on the site and, as a result, the effects associated with the operational development could potentially be comparatively less.

It would then be the presence of the new urban area with its new buildings and streets that would potentially give rise to significant effects. From the existing urban area, the proposed development would be seen as a logical extension to the town, albeit in many instances reducing the association with the rural area, while from close range parts of the rural area, it would be seen as an advancement of the urban edge into the rural area.

During the operational phase, there would be instances when the effects would be gradually reduced as mitigation planting matures. A description of the mitigation measures is presented above.

6. Effect on Landscape Elements

6.1 Introduction

The first category of effects covered in the landscape appraisal is effects on landscape elements, which are the direct effects on the fabric of the site. Effects on landscape elements are found only on the site, where landscape elements may be removed or altered by the construction and operational use of the development site.

The principal physical effect of the development will be on the agricultural land that currently covers most of the site. There may also be some small loss of hedgerows and trees on the site in order to accommodate the proposed development. The assessment of the effects on these elements is described below.

6.2 Agricultural land removal

Baseline:

The development will involve the conversion of arable farmland into land for new residential development. The site comprises a series of fields which are small to medium in size and enclosed partly by hedgerows and partly by post and wire fencing. The fields are intensively managed as arable farmland, and contain single species crops grown annually, harvested and sold commercially. This is a managed landscape that has been modified from its natural state through agricultural practices. The openness of the fields means that the irregular nature of the Distinctive Knolls landform is evident across the site.

Sensitivity to change:

The agricultural land has a medium sensitivity. The character of the Coastal Farmland LCT, which covers an expansive extent of the northern part of Moray, is characterised by arable farmland set across gently undulating landform. The site comprises Distinctive Knolls, which makes this area of arable farmland more unique within the wider Coastal Farmland LCT context, owing to the distinctive shape of the underlying landform. The agricultural land itself, comprising cultivated crops and no natural vegetation, has no distinctive features or characteristics that would otherwise increase its value. The sensitivity rating is prevented from being high as a substantial provision of green space will ensure that not all the land would be developed. Furthermore, the value of the land that would remain undeveloped would be increased by the establishment of large areas of new woodland planting.

Magnitude of change:

The magnitude of change on the agricultural land would be medium. While the farmland would be lost, substantial parts of the site would provide public and private open space, where the land would not only remain undeveloped, but would be established as either open space or woodland areas. Large areas of green space have been incorporated into the layout, one along the western boundary of R12, one across the eastern half of R3, and the largest along the western and central parts of R4. Furthermore, areas of tree planting have been included along the streets and behind properties, which would increase the overall undeveloped proportion of the site. These substantial areas of green space would, to some extent, mitigate the loss of the agricultural land. Another factor which limits the magnitude of change is the modified nature of the farmland. The loss of the farmland would result in the loss of the arable crops which are not a natural vegetation cover and which are removed annually anyway.

Level of the effect:

The effect of the proposed development on the arable land would be **moderate** as a result of the combination of the medium sensitivity of the arable land and the medium magnitude of change. This would occur in the localised area of the site. The wider context of arable farmland would remain unaffected.

6.3 Hedgerow and tree removal

Some of the field boundaries are delineated by traditional hedgerows. These are important features within the rural landscape and are seen to contribute to the character of the countryside. Hedgerows are often of historical importance as they preserve the enclosed field patterns of the past. Their existence is, however, often threatened by agricultural intensification which leads to field amalgamation through hedgerow removal.

The hedgerows on site mainly occur along Mayne Farm Road in the section between Wards Road and the junction where Core Path EG36 forks to the south-east. The hedgerows are almost continuous either side, are in good condition and have been managed to form a dense and medium sized enclosure to the road. They contribute to the rural character of the area.

Sensitivity to change:

Hedgerows have a medium sensitivity to change. Hedgerows are a traditional feature that contribute to the character of the rural landscape, providing enclosure and definition in contrast to the openness of the agricultural landscape. They are a traditional feature, often indicative of the historic pattern of field enclosure and in this area, their removal across much of the agricultural landscape denotes a scarcity value. The sensitivity of the hedgerows is moderated by the relative ease with which they can be reinstated over a relatively short time frame.

Magnitude of change:

The magnitude of change in respect of the loss of hedgerows would be low. There are few existing hedgerows on the site and the majority of these would be preserved. The proposed development has been designed to ensure that the hedgerows on Mayne Farm Road would be retained as part of the embedded mitigation. Removals would occur at the three points where access would be drawn from Mayne Farm Road into the residential areas, each access requiring a 10 to 15m break.

Level of the effect:

The effect of the proposed development on the hedgerows would be minor. The medium sensitivity of the hedgerows, combined with the low magnitude of change, would limit the overall effect.

7. Effect on Landscape Character

7.1 Introduction

Landscape character is the distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occurs consistently in a landscape area, and the way that this pattern is perceived. Effects on landscape character are manifested both on the site, where the characterising pattern of elements will be directly altered by the addition of the development to the landscape; and off-site, around the study area, where visibility of the development may alter the way in which this pattern of elements is perceived.

The Coastal Flats LCT covers a substantial part of the Moray landscape. The effects of the proposed development on such an expansive LCT would be very limited as the extent of its influence on landscape character would be contained within a localised area. The effects on landscape character are therefore assessed against the local landscape character unit identified in ‘Integration of New Development into the Moray Landscape’ as Distinctive Knolls. This area applies to the site and immediate surroundings and is appropriate in extent for the purposes of the appraisal.

7.2 Distinctive Knolls LCU (Figure 3)

Baseline:

The Distinctive Knolls LCU covers the area where the site is located. It is characterised by the parallel mounds of fluvio-glacial sands and gravels, which have formed small but distinctive knolls, in this otherwise gently undulating landscape. In total there are three distinctive knolls on the site, a small oblong shaped wooded knoll along the northern part of the western boundary, an open round knoll to the west of The Wards Wildlife Site and a very long linear knoll stretching from the junction between Mayne Farm Road and Core Path EG36 in the north-west to Elgin Golf Course in the south-east, with the northern half open and the southern half wooded. The land surrounding these knolls is typically lower-lying and more gently undulating.

The land-use is arable agriculture, which gives the area its rural character. The presence of development in this LCU, does however mark a transition along this urban/rural fringe. While the location of The Wards Wildlife Site to the immediate east preserves a large green space, further south, the development of the new Elgin High School and residential developments create a notable urban influence on the character of the wider area.

Sensitivity:

The value of the Distinctive Knolls LCU is medium to high. While this LCU is not covered by any landscape designations which would otherwise denote a special scenic value, the distinctive knolls and extent of mature woodland give it a unique character and add to its local value.

The susceptibility of the Distinctive Knolls LCU to the proposed development is medium to high. While this LCU is already influenced by the presence of the existing development at Fairfield Avenue, which is located within this LCU, this means the proposed development would not present a new influence on the

LCU although it would increase the level and extent of this existing influence. The site is, however, characterised primarily by its rural landscape and this makes it susceptible to the extension of development.

The overall sensitivity of the Distinctive Knolls LCU is medium to high.

Magnitude of change:

The magnitude of change on the Distinctive Knolls LCU as a result of the proposed development would be medium to high. While development already exists in this LCU, it is located in the northern part, which is relatively low lying and more closely associated with the developments on Wards Road. The introduction of the proposed development would increase the extent and influence of development across a wider part of this LCU, such that it would come to characterise this area.

The magnitude of change is prevented from being rated high on account of the ways in which the layout of the proposed development respects the baseline landscape character. Firstly, the wooded knoll along the northern part of the western boundary would be retained along with the stand of Scot’s pines that cover it. Woodland planting would be extended to the north and south to consolidate the woodland character along this edge. Secondly, while some development would occur on the open round knoll to the west of The Wards Wildlife Site, this would be located across the lower slopes to the north, west and south, and on the western side of the knoll top plateau. This would leave the more sensitive eastern plateau top and knoll side free from development. These slopes are steep and adjoin The Wards Wildlife Site to the east. The large area of open space and proposed woodland planting would ensure the character of this landform feature would be retained. Thirdly, the long linear knoll in the south of the site, which is the highest and most prominent, would be mostly retained as undeveloped land. The proposed development would occupy the more discrete parts of this area, such as the lower-lying land in the northern apex, along the eastern edge adjoining the high school site, and in the southern apex enclosed by woodland to the west and residential development to the east.

The result is an area which accommodates development, albeit in landscape which retains the identity of its baseline character. The characterising features of the three distinctive knolls would all be retained to some degree, and the substantial extent of open space and woodland would ensure that the proposed development would be seen to integrate with its landscape context.

Level of effect:

The level of the effect on the Distinctive Knolls LCU would be major. While the proposed development would increase the extent and influence of development on this LCU it has been designed to ensure that the key features of the landscape character have been retained, although many of the individual buildings are listed. The village does, however,

8. Effect on Visual

Fig. 05: Viewpoints

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Seven viewpoints have been selected to represent the visual amenity of the surrounding area. The baseline character of the view from each viewpoint is described, along with the sensitivity of the visual receptors, and then the predicted effects are assessed in respect of the magnitude of change that will occur to the view as a result of the proposed development, taking into account the mitigation measures incorporated into the design of the layout.

Legend







-  Site Boundary
-  2km Study Area
-  A Road
-  B Road
-  Railway
-  Viewpoints





Fig. 06: Viewpoint 1: Ward's Road west

8.2 Viewpoint 1: Wards Road west (Figure 6)

Baseline:

This viewpoint is located on Wards Road to the north of the site. The view looks south across the site and is representative of the views of road-users on Wards Road and residents who live on the northern side of the street. The fall of the land from north to south combined with the open aspect to the south means the natural draw of the view is in this direction.

The view extends over Wards Road and the Aberdeen to Inverness Railway Line towards the site. The primary focus of the view is the recent residential development at Fairfield Avenue, located in the middle range of the view, approximately 110m south of the viewpoint. The secondary focus is the even more recent new Elgin High School which can be seen to the left of centre at approximately 700m. These developments are seen in a context which is still largely characterised by the rural landscape.

Mature tree cover frames the view on the left and on the right, while in the centre a substantial depth of rough grassland separates the development from the viewpoint and ensures the openness of the view is retained. The landform rises behind Fairfield Avenue where a raised open knoll forms a prominent feature, albeit back-clothed by the dark and dense coniferous woodland cover of Mayne Wood.

Sensitivity:

The value of the view is medium. The viewpoint is not a formal viewpoint and is not representative of a landscape designated for scenic value. The view is experienced incidentally, by passing road-users and pedestrians and although largely characterised by the wider rural area, the focus is the housing at Fairfield Avenue. The view has local value in respect of the visual amenity of the few residents with an outlook in this direction.

The susceptibility of road-users to the proposed development is medium. Despite the close proximity of the proposed development to Wards Road, the clarity of road-users' views are reduced by their transitory nature and oblique angle at which the proposed development would be seen relative to their direction of

travel. Furthermore, there is already development evident in this sector of the view. The susceptibility of pedestrians is slightly higher as their views are of longer duration and they have more opportunity to focus on different aspects of the view.

The susceptibility of residents to the proposed development is medium to high. Although there are only a small number of residents with their houses orientated towards the site, the natural draw of views follows the open aspect to the south. Although development can already be seen in this view, it is predominantly rural and open in character.

Taking all these factors into account, the sensitivity of road-users is medium and the sensitivity of pedestrians and residents is medium to high.

Magnitude of change:

The magnitude of change as a result of the proposed development would be medium. Although built development forms part of the baseline character of the view, in respect of both the residential development and the school development, they are seen as features within a rural landscape and both contained below the skyline. The part of the proposed development that would be most readily visible from this viewpoint would be the residential development on site R3, which would occupy the open knoll to the south of Fairfield Avenue.

The steep eastern slope and eastern part of the knoll top (seen on the left of the knoll in this view) to the fore of Elgin High School and Mayne Wood, would be kept free from development with a mix of open space and the establishment of areas of woodland planting. The proposed development would occur behind the existing properties at Fairfield Avenue and although would be seen to increase the vertical extent of development up onto the more prominent higher land, would not be seen to increase the horizontal extent of development much beyond the existing extent.

Mitigation measures include the retention of the open slopes on the eastern side

of the knoll and the introduction of woodland planting, which would not only create a setting for the proposed development but would also help to screen the wider extent of development on site CF2 to the rear.

Level of effect:

The level of effect as a result of the proposed development would be major. Although development is already evident in the view and the readily visible proposed development would be largely contained within the extent of the existing residential development, it would be seen on the more prominent knoll to the south and this would increase its prominence and the influence of development on this view.



Fig. 07: Viewpoint 2: Ward's Road east

8.3 Viewpoint 2: Wards Road east (Figure 7)

Baseline:

This viewpoint is located on Wards Road, approximately 250m further east than viewpoint 2. The view is directed south-west towards the site and is representative of the views of road-users and pedestrians travelling west-bound on Wards Road. It is also representative of the views of residents whose properties are orientated in this southerly direction

Despite being closer to the town than Viewpoint 1, the view from Viewpoint 2 appears more rural in character, although this is due largely to intervening tree cover associated with The Wards Wildlife Site screening the two main developments visible to the south of the road, namely Fairfield Avenue and the new Elgin High School. The view is characterised by the mix of open fields and enclosed woodland set across an undulating landscape. In the foreground, the wetlands of The Wards Wildlife Site and the enclosure of mature tree cover around the periphery enhances the unmodified appearance of the landscape. The absence of visible development gives this aspect a predominantly rural character, despite the close range presence of Wards Road and associated residential development.

Sensitivity:

The value of the view is medium. The viewpoint is not a formal viewpoint and is not representative of a landscape designated for scenic value. The view is experienced incidentally, by west-bound road-users and pedestrians and presents an attractive rural aspect on this urban fringe. The view also has local value in respect of the visual amenity of residents in properties and garden grounds on the northern side of the road.

The susceptibility of road-users to the proposed development is medium. Much of the proposed development would be screened by intervening tree cover associated with The Wards. The clarity of road-users' views are reduced by their transitory nature and while views of the proposed development would mostly be oblique to the direction of travel, west-bound road-users would gain visibility of the proposed development within their forward field of vision. The susceptibility

of pedestrians is slightly higher as their views are of longer duration and they have more opportunity to focus on different aspects of the view.

The susceptibility of residents to the proposed development is medium to high. Although there are only a small number of residents with their houses orientated towards the site, the natural draw of views follows the open aspect to the south.

Taking all these factors into account, the sensitivity of road-users is medium and the sensitivity of pedestrians and residents is medium to high.

Magnitude of change:

The magnitude of change on this viewpoint as a result of the proposed development is medium to low. The proposed development would be visible in the centre of the view, between the road-side tree on the left and the group of mature trees on the right. On the left it would form a relatively subtle feature with rooftops visible between the band of deciduous woodland on the lower slopes and coniferous woodland on the upper slopes. Further development would be seen in the trough between the long knoll to the south and small knoll to the north, with development extending onto the lower slopes of the south side of the small knoll and possibly onto the knoll top.

Despite the more distant range of this viewpoint and the extent to which intervening tree cover would screen parts of the proposed development, because development is not readily visible in the baseline view, the introduction of the proposed development would make a more notable change from the perceived rural character of the baseline view. The horizontal extent of the proposed development, in respect of the wider extent of the view, would form only a small proportion and appear relatively contained. Furthermore, mitigation measures include a substantial retention of open space and establishment of woodland planting across the upper slopes of the long knoll and facing eastern side of the small knoll, which in this view, would reduce the extent of visible development and in respect of the planting, would mature to screen parts of the proposed development that would be visible.

Level of effect:

The level of effect as a result of the proposed development would be moderate. While the proposed development would introduce development into a view where other existing developments are not readily visible, it would appear relatively well contained within the landscape setting, with notable areas retained as open space and woodland planting maturing over time to further mitigate residual effects.



Fig. 08: Viewpoint 3: Mayne Farm Road

8.4 Viewpoint 3: Mayne Farm Road (Figure 8)

Baseline:

The viewpoint is located on Mayne Farm Road on the site, to the immediate south of Fairfield Avenue and looking south down the road with site R3 on the left and site R12 on the right. The viewpoint is representative of the views of the few road-users who access their farms and properties from this road, residents at Fairfield Avenue and pedestrians who use this route, which forms the northern extent of Core Path EG36. This road would be retained in the proposed development and therefore is representative of the views of future residents.

The extent of the view is contained by the landform of the open knoll on the left and the wooded knoll on the right. The open knoll has a smooth convex profile and is used for arable farming, while the wooded knoll is characterised by a stand of tall Scot's pines. The road is aligned either side by an almost continuous hedgerow and the road channels the viewers' focus towards more distant trees.

Sensitivity:

The value of the view is medium. The viewpoint is not a formal viewpoint and is not representative of a landscape designated for scenic value. It is a viewpoint representative of the views road-users, pedestrians and residents will experience either passing through, or living in this area. The view across the site is of an attractive rural character, enhanced by features such as the wooded knoll and hedgerows, while the open knoll on the left appears more typical of the wider agricultural landscape.

The susceptibility of residents to the proposed development is medium to high. The existing presence of residential development at Fairfield Avenue forms a baseline component in the wider view, such that the proposed development would not form a new feature. The site does, however, present an open aspect to adjacent residents and this increases their susceptibility to the additional development.

The susceptibility of road-users and pedestrians to the proposed development is also medium to high owing to the close proximity of the proposed development.

Whilst the views of road-users will be short and transitory compared to the longer duration of pedestrians' views, the close range of the proposed development would make road-users equally susceptible to the changes.

Taking all these factors into account, the sensitivity of residents, pedestrians and road-users to the proposed development is medium to high.

Magnitude of change:

The magnitude of change on this view as a result of the proposed development would be medium to high. The proposed development would occupy the land to the left and right of the road, with residential properties aligned parallel and fronting onto the road. On both sides the properties would be recessed approximately 10m and accessed from a narrow road set behind a road-side strip of the retained hedgerow and avenue trees. While the properties would be readily visible, especially on the left where they would be seen set on the lower slopes, the intervening trees would reduce the effect, and this mitigation would increase over time as the trees matured. A band of woodland planting, proposed for behind the properties on the left, would also grow to screen the other properties proposed along the upper slopes of the knoll.

The landform on the right is relatively level, such that the properties on this side would not appear overly prominent and would benefit from the enclosure of the wooded backdrop which would be retained undeveloped. For residents at Fairfield Avenue where their properties back onto site R3, a woodland belt would be planted which would grow to screen the proposed development, but which would also screen the open aspect currently experienced.

Level of effect:

The level of effect as a result of the proposed development would be major. While there is an existing urban influence from Fairfield Avenue in the rear sector of the view, the proposed development would extend this influence into

the sector of the view which is currently not developed and characterised by the rural landscape. The effect would be mitigated to some degree by the recessed position of the residential properties and the screening effect of hedgerows, street trees and woodland strips.



Fig. 09: Viewpoint 4 : Mayne Farm Road Junction

8.5 Viewpoint 4: Core Path EG36 (Figure 9)

Baseline:

The viewpoint is located on Core Path EG36 to the north of Elgin High School. The view looks south along the path with site R4 on the right. The viewpoint is representative of the views of pedestrians on the path and will be representative of future residents in this area.

The view is defined by the transition from the urban edge to the rural landscape. Residential development occupies the land to the left of the view and marks the current western settlement boundary. The recent development of the new Elgin High School has drawn this boundary further into the rural area and owing to its large mass and institutional appearance has altered the character of this local area. The landform rises up to the right of the view, where the southernmost knoll on the site occurs. In views from the path, it forms a prominent landform feature and encloses the view within the close range. It is currently used for arable production and while there is little natural vegetation in this area, occasional scrubby hedgerows and trees occur along the path.

Sensitivity:

The value of the view is medium. The viewpoint is not a formal viewpoint and is not representative of a landscape designated for scenic value. The view is experienced by pedestrians on the core path. While the presence of the settlement boundary is evident, the local value of the view relates to the rural aspect that can be experienced in this area.

The susceptibility of pedestrians to the proposed development is medium to high. The proximity of the proposed development on the right-hand side of the path, would make it a prominent feature in the views of pedestrians. Their susceptibility would be moderated by the presence and influence of the new high school and other development evident on the western settlement boundary.

Taking all these factors into account, the sensitivity of pedestrians on the core path is medium to high.

Magnitude of change:

The magnitude of change on this view as a result of the proposed development would be medium to high. Site R4 occupies the land to the immediate right of the core path and while the majority of this area would be retained as being open or wooded, a row of residential properties would be located along this edge and front onto a new road which would follow the alignment of the core path. The rising elevation of the land to the right would mean that the proposed development would sit at a higher elevation and this would increase its prominence in views from the core path. While the houses would be set along the lower slopes, their close proximity to the core path means that the open upper slopes would not be readily visible.

In the opposite direction, the proposed development located on Site CF2 would be visible, albeit not so prominent owing to its lower-lying location and its partial enclosure by street trees. Where it would extend onto the lower slopes of the small knoll, it would be seen to increase the influence of development in this area.

Level of effect:

The level of effect as a result of the proposed development would be major. While there is an existing urban influence from the new high school and settlement boundary, the proposed development would extend this influence into the sector of the view which is currently not developed and characterised by arable farmland. This change will redefine the character of the view.



Fig. 10: Viewpoint 5: Path to Mayne Farm

8.6 Viewpoint 5: Path to Mayne Farm (Figure 10)

Baseline:

This viewpoint is located on the footpath that extends from Mayne Farm in the west to Core Path EG36 at the point adjacent to the south-west corner of Elgin High School grounds. It is located within the proposed development in the southern part of site R4 and the view looks north and east across the wider site. The view is representative of the views of pedestrians on this path.

The viewpoint lies close to the elevated ridge through this long knoll, which is aligned south to north and which is blanketed in coniferous woodland to the south. As such the viewpoint is elevated above much of the site and affords expansive views to the north and east. The view north is characterised by the rural landscape with fields of arable farmland and intermittent woodland cover, back-clothed by the wooded hills to the north-west. The view east is characterised by the town of Elgin, which is seen set within the bowl-shaped landform and largely contained by the surrounding low hills.

The western settlement boundary is marked by the new and old Elgin High Schools which sit at the base of the eastern slopes, the new high school forming an especially prominent feature on account of its large and blocky mass and light coloured modern materials. Site R4 covers the knoll upon which the viewpoint is located, although the eastern slopes are concealed by the rounding of the landform. The smaller knoll to the north is where Site R3 is located, with Site CF2 located at the southern base of this knoll.

Sensitivity:

The value of the view is medium to high. The viewpoint is not a formal viewpoint and is not representative of a landscape designated for scenic value. It is a viewpoint representative of the views pedestrians will experience walking on this footpath. The viewpoint presents an attractive and expansive view across the site and the town of Elgin, which is of local value, despite the close-range influence of the western settlement boundary.

The susceptibility of pedestrians on the path is medium to high. The elevated position of the viewpoint opens up the extent of the view and makes a wider

extent of the proposed development theoretically visible. While the expectation of pedestrians in this area is to enjoy a largely undeveloped landscape, the influence of urban development is already evident, especially owing to the close proximity of the new Elgin High School.

Taking all these factors into account, the overall sensitivity of pedestrians is medium to high.

Magnitude of change:

The magnitude of change on this viewpoint as a result of the proposed development would be medium to high. The extent of the proposed development in Site R4 is limited such that less than half the area is proposed for development and the majority is to be retained as open space or for the establishment of woodland planting. The three plots of development proposed for Site R4 include; a group located in the northern apex, although owing to the level difference of 10m it may be unlikely that this would be visible; a group located adjacent to Core Path EG36 to the north-east, although owing to the level difference of 8-10m it may be that only rooftops are visible; and a group to the south-east, which would be located closer and higher on the slopes, such that it would be likely to be visible.

The proposed development to the south-east would be seen in the context of the adjacent development that lies to the north of Elgin Golf Club and to the south of the high school. The proposed development would be seen in a sector where the influence of built development already exists and while this would moderate the effect, the proposed development would be seen on the more prominent eastern slopes of the knoll and this would increase the effect.

The proposed development adjacent to EG36 would be sufficiently low so as not to impinge on the view of the town and while the proposed development on the small knoll in the middleground (at CF2 and R3) would be readily apparent, the location of the residential properties to the left side of the small knoll would keep the right side free and reduce the extent to which this part of the proposed

development would affect the view of the town.

There is a substantial provision of open space and woodland planting in Site R4 to mitigate residual effects. Intervening woodland planting would screen any visibility of the proposed development in the northern apex and partially screen any visibility of the proposed development adjacent to EG36 and in the south-east corner. It is anticipated that woodland planting would take 15 years of growth to form an effective screen and in this time the magnitude of change would be reduced from medium to high, to medium to low.

Level of effect:

The level of effect as a result of the proposed development would be major in the first 15 years and then minor for the years following. The proposed development would mark an evident expansion in the settlement boundary to the south-east of the viewpoint, while visibility of the developments to the north and north-east would be limited owing to their intentionally lower-lying locations.



Fig. 11: Viewpoint 6: Edgar Road

8.7 Viewpoint 6: Edgar Road (Figure 11)

Baseline:

This viewpoint is located on Edgar Road, which provides an access route to Elgin High School from the east. The view looks west towards the site and is representative of the views experienced by local residents, road-users and pedestrians in the area, and teachers, pupils and visitors to the school.

To the north of Edgar Road lies The Wards Wildlife Site (on the right in the photograph). While this comprises an expanse of open wetland, it is enclosed on all sides by mature and semi-mature tree cover, which notably reduces visibility both in and out (Viewpoint 7). To the south of Edgar Road lies Greenwards Primary School and the surrounding residential area (on the left in the photograph). To the west lies the site, characterised by the knolly landform and its covering of arable farmland.

The focus of the view is the new Elgin High School, which appears prominent owing to its large mass and modern materials. It sits to the left of the view while tree cover associated with The Wards sits to the right. The extent of the view is contained by the middle range landform, with the long knoll to the left and the small knoll to the right of centre, collectively forming a low but well-defined ridgeline.

Sensitivity:

The value of the view is medium. The viewpoint is not a formal viewpoint and is not representative of a landscape designated for scenic value. It is a viewpoint representative of the views many of the local user groups experience. While the viewpoint is characterised by the surrounding urban area, the outlook towards the rural edge adds to the local amenity value.

The susceptibility of residents, road-users and pedestrians in this local area is medium. While some of the properties on the western edge of the settlement are orientated west towards the proposed development, in the majority of cases either the high school or the primary school form an intervening feature. The enclosing ridgeline does, nonetheless, form a prominent feature in the background of views of residents, road-users and pedestrians, and marks the

rural edge.

Taking all these factors into account, the sensitivity of residents, road-users and pedestrians is medium.

Magnitude of change:

The magnitude of change on this viewpoint as a result of the proposed development would be medium. Edgar Road would provide the main access into Site CF2 and the residential properties would be readily visible at the end of the road and extending right onto the lower slopes of the small knoll. While the development would generally be up to two storey and partially screened by intervening street trees, it would be seen as a readily apparent extension into the rural edge. Substantial woodland planting would be seen across the steeper upper slopes and this would create a setting to the proposed development, as well as screen the knoll top residential properties from this area.

The residential properties in Site R4, set immediately west of Core Path EG36, would be seen to the left of centre. These would further extend the influence of the proposed development within the rural edge. Their location on the lower slopes would ensure that the proposed development would be mostly set below the enclosing skyline, especially where Mayne Wood adds to the vertical extent of the back-cloth. Mitigation planting would add further to the woodland enclosure along the long knoll. Only a small proportion of the overall proposed development would be visible and this would reduce the overall magnitude of change.

Level of effect:

The level of effect as a result of the proposed development would be moderate. While the proposed development would be seen to increase the extent of built development into the rural edge, it would be seen in the context of the high school, primary school and surrounding residential areas.



Fig. 12: Viewpoint 7: The Wards

8.8 Viewpoint 7: The Wards (Figure 12)

Baseline:

This viewpoint is located in The Wards Wildlife Site on the footpath that lies close to the western boundary. Much of this footpath is enclosed by vegetation such that views east across the wetland area and west towards the site are restricted to glimpsed views where breaks in the vegetation cover occur. The view is representative of pedestrians in this area and is taken where a short gap occurs.

The view looks west towards the small knoll where Site R3 is located. While glimpsed views of more distant landform and tree cover occur to the left and right, the depth of the view is largely contained by the landform of the knoll. The land cover comprises a blanket of short grass with no apparent enclosures other than the temporary construction compound to the left, associated with the construction of the new Elgin High School.

Sensitivity:

The value of the view is medium. The viewpoint is not a formal viewpoint and is not representative of a landscape designated for scenic value, although it is designated for nature conservation value. The Wards Wildlife Site preserves a semi-natural habitat and while views across the wetlands are attractive, the view towards the site is contained within the close range by the landform.

The susceptibility of pedestrians to the proposed development is medium to high. This relates chiefly to the close proximity of the viewpoint to the proposed development. While The Wards is located on the urban / rural fringe of the settlement and new development is evident in the surrounding area, most notably the new Elgin High School, there is little development visible from this pathway through The Wards and this increases the susceptibility of pedestrians.

Taking all these factors into account, the overall sensitivity of pedestrians is medium to high.

Magnitude of change:

The magnitude of change on this viewpoint as a result of the proposed

development would be medium to low. Despite the close proximity of Site CF2 and Site R3 to the viewpoint, the proposed development would be recessed approximately 100m. Furthermore, the knoll, which forms the main feature in the view, would be retained relatively free of development. A road would cut across the middle slopes of the knoll side with the lower slopes remaining open and the upper slopes planted with large copses of woodland planting, albeit with a central section remaining open to the top. While proposed development on Site R3 would be located beyond the brow of the hill, it is unlikely it would be readily visible from this viewpoint.

In the area to the immediate south-west of the viewpoint an area is located with potential to accommodate a SUDS pond and the proposed development associated with Site CF2 set beyond this would be seen to occupy the lower southern slopes of the knoll (on the left side) and the flatter land further to the south (left). Most of these residential properties would be seen set behind the avenue trees, albeit in a slightly lower-lying part of the landform and with the new Elgin High School present to the south.

A further factor which would limit the magnitude of change is the limited extent of the break in vegetation which allows an open view in this direction. This means only a short section of the path would be affected by the proposed development.

Level of effect:

The level of effect as a result of the proposed development would be moderate. Despite the close proximity of the viewpoint to the proposed development, the extent of the mitigation measures, most notably the retention of open space and establishment of woodland planting, combined with the recessed location of the proposed development and its location away from ridgeline of the prominent knoll, ensures that the proposed development would not redefine the character of this view.

9. Summary

A Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) has been prepared in support of a Strategic Masterplan for Bilbohall and this follows best practice guidance produced by the Landscape Institute in its Guidance for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) (3rd Edition 2013). The LVA has appraised the potential level of effect on the landscape character and visual amenity of the site and its surroundings.

The proposed development comprises the residential development of the collection of sites which are located to the south of Wards Road, east of The Wards Wildlife Site and Elgin High School and to the north of Elgin Golf Course. The Bilbohall Masterplan provides for up to 376 residential dwellings along with associated infrastructure in a substantial landscape setting of open space, woodland planting and SUDS. The potential effects relate to the changes to the landscape character on this urban / rural fringe, and changes to the visual amenity of local residents along Wards Road and Fairfield Avenue, and pedestrians on Wards Road, Mayne Farm Road and Core Path EG36.

The following table sets out the findings of the appraisal in terms of the sensitivity of each receptor, the magnitude of change as a result of the proposed development and the level of effect in respect of the sensitivity rating combined with the magnitude of change rating.

Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude of change	Level of effect
Agricultural land	medium	medium	moderate
Hedgerows	medium	low	minor
Distinctive Knolls LCU	medium high	medium high	major
Viewpoint 1: Ward's Road west	medium – road users medium high – pedestrians and residents	medium	major
Viewpoint 2: Ward's Road east	medium – road users medium high – pedestrians and residents	medium low	moderate
Viewpoint 3: Mayne Farm Road	medium high	medium high	major
Viewpoint 4 : Mayne Farm Road Junction	medium high	medium high	major
Viewpoint 5: Path to Mayne Farm	medium high	medium high	major
Viewpoint 6: Edgar Road	medium	medium	moderate
Viewpoint 7: The Wards	medium high	medium low	moderate

The appraisal has found that the effects of the proposed development on the surrounding landscape and visual receptors would mostly be limited in terms of the level of effect, and limited in terms of geographical extent, with all effects contained within the local area. This finding relates to the following factors:

- The containment of the settlement of Elgin by surrounding hills which creates a bowl shape and reduces the wider extent of visibility;
- The presence of built development along Wards Road to the north of the site which prevents visibility extending in this direction;
- The presence of The Wards Wildlife Site to the east of the site which forms a buffer zone and helps screen the site from the town to the east and north-east;
- The presence of the new Elgin High School which makes a notable increase to the urban influence on the existing western settlement boundary;
- The presence of residential development at Fairfield Avenue within the northern part of the site which has already altered the baseline character of this urban/rural fringe;
- The enclosure of the elevated and wooded knoll to the south which prevents visibility of the proposed development extending in this direction;
- The enclosure afforded by the distinctive knolls and mature tree cover on the site;
- The responsive approach to laying out development in this landscape by keeping the most sensitive knoll tops and knoll sides free from development;
- The inclusion of substantial areas of open space and woodland planting which will create a landscape setting and reduce the overall effect of the built development.

In terms of effects on landscape receptors, the site constitutes a very small proportion of the much wider Coastal Farmlands LCT, but occupies a much larger proportion of the Distinctive Knolls LCU. While the proposed development would have a notable effect on the character of this LCU, the responsive design of the layout would ensure that the key characterising features of this landscape, namely the top and prominent sides of the knolls and associated woodland and tree cover, would be retained as an integral feature of the masterplan. Furthermore, mitigation planting would enhance the character by creating greater depth and substance to the woodland provision.

In terms of effects on visual receptors, the major effects that have been assessed relate principally to the close proximity of the viewpoints to the proposed development, with three of the four being located on the site. While there is already an influence from the surrounding urban edges and existing development on the site, the proposed development would further alter the character from rural to urban. These effects would be moderated to some extent through the retention of key landscape features, including prominent areas of open space and woodland. Other features of the design which would assist its integration within the landscape setting include the creation of positive frontages and

inclusion of integral spaces to reduce the density of development and retain a connection with the wider rural area.

This report concludes that while some notable effects may arise as a result of the proposed development, these will occur within the localised area of the site and will be mitigated to some extent by the responsive design of the layout.

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