

INTEGRATION OF NEW DEVELOPMENTS INTO THE LANDSCAPE

FINAL REPORT: FORRES

May 2005

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1 INTRODUCTION

This study was commissioned by Moray Council in December 2004 as one of a series of studies undertaken to assess the potential effects of new development on the character of the landscape surrounding five settlements in Moray. The five selected settlements were Buckie, Elgin, Forres, Keith and Lossiemouth. The studies were jointly funded by the Council and Scottish Natural Heritage, both of whom were represented on the study management group.

This report presents the findings of the assessment undertaken for Forres. The brief is included in full in Annex One. However, the two principal objectives of the studies are to:

- undertake an assessment of the potential effects on landscape character of settlement expansion onto areas of land identified by developers as having development potential. These have been lodged with the council as development bids. Landscape character in this context should include the setting and visual amenity of the town, and the potential relationship in terms of layout and experience between the existing settlement and any proposed expansion
- identify opportunities for landscape enhancement, which will primarily focus on how best to integrate proposed new development into the landscape and ensure that it would work well with the character and layout of the existing settlement. In addition, however, the brief requests landscape enhancement and mitigation proposals at town 'gateways', therefore we have concluded that this part of the study is likely to encompass the setting of the town more widely.

This study addresses landscape and visual issues only, and does not take into account other planning considerations. It builds on strategic guidance offered in the Moray Landscape Character Assessment carried out by Turnbull Jeffrey Partnership in 1998, which was commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage, the Moray Council and the Highland Council. It also draws upon relevant sections of the published good practice Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and on the consultant's experience of other work in this and related fields.

The study represents the views of the consultant, Alison Grant, Landscape Architect who carried out this work in association with Carol Anderson, Landscape Architect, and should not be attributed to either of the sponsor agencies.

2 SCOPE OF STUDY

This study addresses landscape and visual issues only, and does not take into account other planning considerations. As a result it cannot be used in isolation to allocate sites which are either appropriate or inappropriate for development. Rather, the landscape assessment seeks to explain clearly the landscape considerations which are relevant on a site by site basis, with a view to informing the Council and contributing to the development of a locational strategy.

In undertaking this study, 'development' was assumed to mean domestic scale residential development of five houses or more, or where appropriate, industrial development associated with the expansion of existing industrial sites.

When developing proposals, it was assumed that best practice, as outlined in relevant Scottish Executive guidance notes, would be undertaken in relation to building design. However, where appropriate issues of density, size, scale and mass, orientation and layout and access routes which were relevant to the landscape sensitivity of particular sites were identified. On rare occasions, where exceptional design quality was identified as being particularly relevant to site development, this was also noted.

The development bids assessed were generally located on the outskirts of existing settlements. Development bids were only considered where they would expand the existing settlement and adjacent neighbourhoods, not where they would create the focus for a new settlement.

When considering enhancement proposals, opportunities were identified to create structure and a landscape setting for the bid sites considered most appropriate in landscape terms for development. Additional enhancement measures were also proposed where they would assist in providing a landscape structure for long term settlement expansion.

In addition, however, landscape enhancement proposals also offered opportunities to consolidate or expand informal recreation use and proposals which would enhance the approach and sense of arrival to the town. Where appropriate, within the setting of the town more generally, opportunities to enhance the landscape character through the application of current initiatives promoting particular farming and forestry management practices were also identified.

3 METHODOLOGY

Good design begins with well located and appropriately sited development. Good landscape design is based on a thorough understanding of landscape character and taking a creative approach to identifying the positive opportunities for change in the landscape. The methodology developed for this study aims to identify the advantages and opportunities to develop and enhance the landscape of the settlements, while advising on how best to accommodate change.

This section outlines the methodology used to assess the possible consequences on the landscape character of development bids lodged with the Council. It also explains the process by which proposals for landscape enhancement were identified.

3.1 Background to Methodology

Landscape assessment for settlement expansion is a process through which opportunities for development which are likely to contribute to the character and creative development of the settlement can be identified. The process also aims to maintain those characteristics of the existing landscape which contribute positively to the setting, character and quality of the environment of the settlement. The process of assessment also helps identify where and why development would be visually intrusive in the landscape, or detrimental to significant landscape characteristics, the scenic quality or the distinctive attributes of the existing settlement.

The process incorporates a number of assessments:

- firstly, to identify the key landscape characteristics of the landscape setting and the distinctive attributes of the settlement and explain why they are considered important;
- secondly, to assess the potential impact that buildings on the bid sites proposed for development will make on these characteristics and qualities and to make recommendations on which proposed development sites will minimise adverse impacts and enhance positive opportunities; and
- finally, drawing on the analysis, it may be possible to identify additional potential development sites, not yet subject to development bids, but where adverse impacts on landscape character will be minimal, sometimes aided by landscape enhancement measures

3.1.1 Role of Professional Judgement

Professional judgement is used to assist in all the above assessments. Some landscape features will contribute to distinctive landscape character, reinforce local cultural identity, or are assessed as being important land marks or built features. Some areas may have a very distinctive landscape character which contributes to sense of place, are an important recreation resource or contribute to the setting of the town. Other areas may be considered too distant, visually separate or perceptually detached to be incorporated into the existing settlement, although they may be able to form a distinct new neighbourhood. Yet other features or character types may have the potential to play a role as part of a new development, perhaps contributing to the sense of arrival at the new outer limit of the settlement, or as part of the network of open space within new development. Professional judgement is also used to assess potential impact of development on these attributes of the landscape, and to identify opportunities and constraints.

3.2 Summary of the Assessment Process

While there are common strands of approach within most landscape assessments, the process is tailor made each time to address the specific needs of the brief, the landscape and the type of development under consideration. The method of assessment for settlement expansion and landscape enhancement developed to meet this brief is outlined in more detail in Annex Two, but is summarised below:

3.2.1.1. *Survey and Analysis of Strategic Context*

- a survey and analysis of landscape context and strategic landscape and visual character for the settlement as a whole, accompanied by maps of 1:25 000 scale. This section includes the subdivision of the landscape around each settlement into appropriate 'Study Areas', within which the detailed assessments have been carried out.

3.2.1.2. *Detailed Analysis of Each Study Area*

First of all, the report presents the findings of the assessment of the development bids, including:

- the survey and analysis of relevant landscape issues
- an assessment of the potential impacts – positive and negative – of development on those attributes of the landscape character and experience which are most likely to be affected by settlement expansion, presented in a matrix
- the identification of landscape and visual opportunities and constraints to settlement expansion

- an assessment of the appropriateness of the development bids lodged with the Council, and any measures required to mitigate potential development or prepare sites for future development. These are presented as ‘Development Site Recommendations’ for each study area

For each study area this assessment is then followed by proposals for mitigation and landscape enhancement, which is presented as:

- an assessment of existing positive and negative landscape characteristics
- an assessment of landscape change
- an identification of opportunities and objectives for enhancement

The above analysis is accompanied by maps at 1: 10 000 scale for each study area.

3.2.1.3. Conclusions

- For each settlement, there is a summary of the findings, presented as conclusions and strategic options for long term development of the settlement as a whole, and accompanied by a map of 1:25 000 scale

4 FORRES: SURVEY AND ANALYSIS OF STRATEGIC CONTEXT

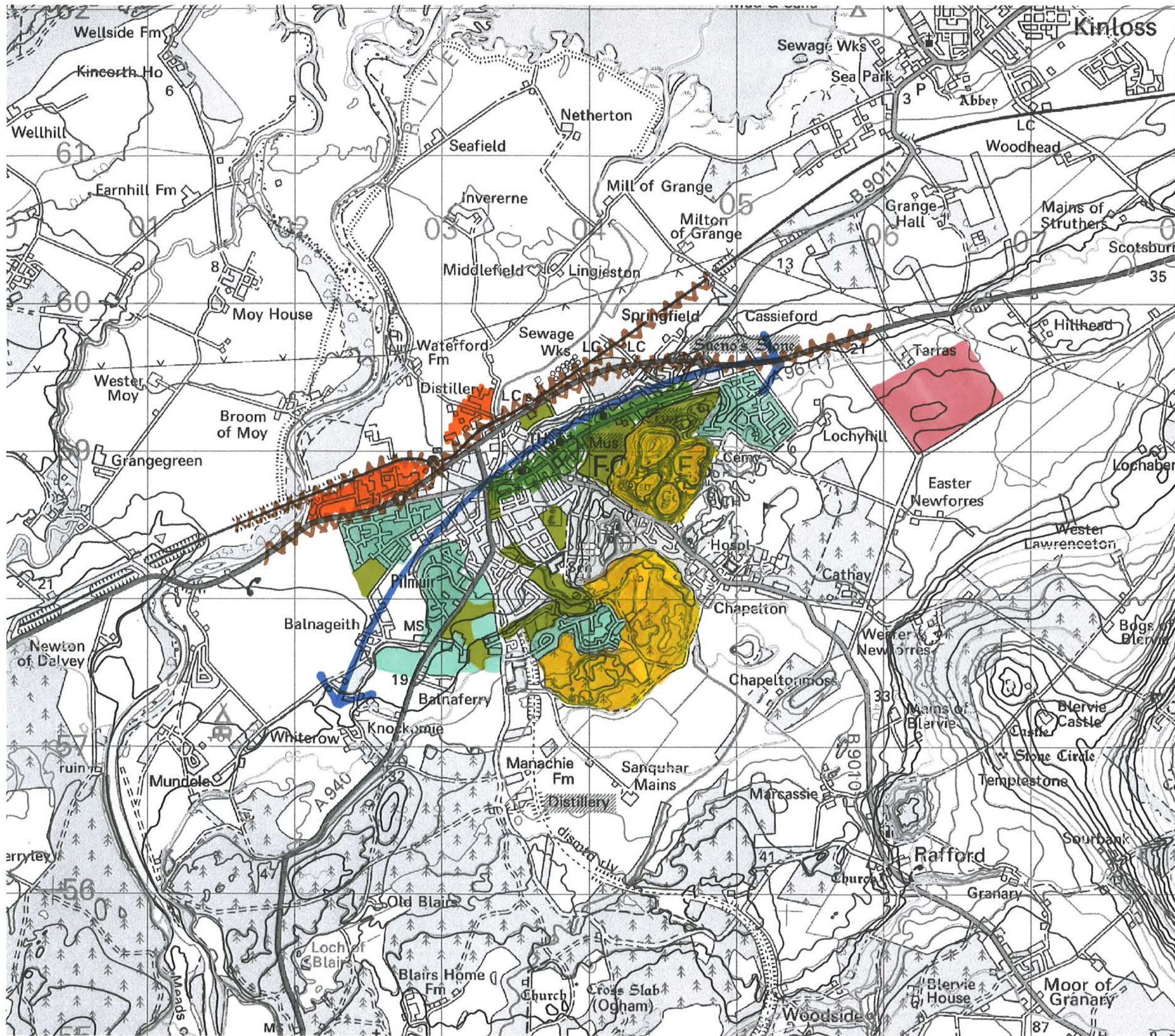
4.1 **Context: The Existing Settlement**

Forres is located on slightly rising ground between a vast level coastal plain to the north and a series of distinctive low, wooded hills to the south. The original form of the settlement is relatively linear, extending round the base of the low hills from the crossing of the Burn of Mosset. It is the focus of the intersection of key roads and also has a railway station.

The edge of the settlement is generally well defined: largely restricted by rising slopes to the south and the infrastructure of road and rail to the north. As a result the settlement has in the past tended to extend laterally, east and west, along the edge of the flood plain, and directly onto the flood plain, with approximately one third of the town lying in the River Findhorn or Burn of Mosset one in two hundred year floodplain. More recent development has also expanded the settlement south, into woodland and more undulating land from.

Key characteristics of the settlement include:

- the fine backdrop of prominent hills which reinforce the southern settlement edge and are also extensively used for informal recreation
- the town has an outward orientation, as it curves around the base of low hills and overlooks the extensive coastal plain
- the linear character of the old town, which forms a primary focus for retail activity at the town centre
- the unity of the arrangement of residential, retail and industrial areas, each of which occupy distinct parts of the town which avoids excessive fragmentation
- the vulnerability of low lying parts of the settlement to flooding, which can be extensive
- the positive contribution made by the Burn of Mosset and the Sanquhar lochs as well as the many green spaces within the settlement, some of which are related to new development
- the positive contribution made by the substantial areas of woodland around the outskirts of the settlement to the setting of the town



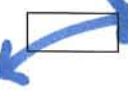




INTEGRATION OF NEW DEVELOPMENT INTO THE MORAY LANDSCAPE

Forres




THE EXISTING SETTLEMENT

Scale 1:25 000

Settlement Structure

-  Forres extends in a broadly linear form between the rising land to the south and the low lying coastal plain to the north
-  Industrial development is located largely in one area on the outskirts of town
-  The old town is linear in character and a focus for retail activity
-  Recent development has extended the town laterally east and west, and south onto level land contained by steeper slopes
-  Forres Enterprise park is separate to the town and the focus for industrial and office buildings

Landscape Survey

-  Open space within the settlement
-  Prominent wooded hills contain the settlement to the south
-  The A96 and the railway contain the settlement to the north

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