

FALKIRK

Local Development Plan



Technical Report 6 (Revised): Green Belt

April 2013



Falkirk Council

Falkirk Local Development Plan

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Green Belt

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Green belts have been a key spatial planning tool in Britain since the 1950s, designed originally to check the physical sprawl of large metropolitan areas and prevent urban areas from merging with one another. In the Falkirk Council area, green belt has been used since the 1960s to manage urban growth, and although somewhat different in form to the ring-shaped green belts around the cities, it has nonetheless been an important feature of planning policy in the area.
- 1.2 The strategic basis for current green belt policy in the area was set in the Falkirk Council Structure Plan 2007, with detailed policy and boundaries set in the Falkirk Council Local Plan 2010. Through these plans, the strategic purpose and coverage of the green belt was reviewed to cover the period up to 2020. The preparation of the Falkirk Local Development Plan (LDP), which will replace the Structure and Local Plan with a single document and which looks forward to 2034, requires a further review of the role and extent of the green belt, as part of consideration of the future spatial strategy for the area. This will be influenced by the Scottish Planning Policy (SPP), published in 2010, which revises national guidance on green belts previously contained in SPP21.
- 1.3 This report is intended to provide the evidence base for the Council's approach to green belt in the Main Issues Report and Proposed Plan of the LDP. It:
- Outlines national guidance on green belt in the SPP;
 - Outlines the history of the evolution of green belt in the Falkirk area;
 - Outlines existing green belt policy in the development plan;
 - Reviews the current green belt in terms of its character, function and boundaries, highlighting issues and pressures which must be considered through the LDP; and
 - Identifies options for the future of the green belt in the area, including the continuing need for green belt and, if it is to be retained, whether there is a need to amend its boundaries.

2. Scottish Planning Policy

- 2.1 National planning policy on green belt is contained in the relevant section (paragraphs 159-164 within the Scottish Planning Policy, published in February 2010). The guidance may be summarised as follows.

Purpose

- 2.2 The purpose of green belts is to:
- Direct planned growth to the most appropriate locations and support regeneration
 - Protect and enhance the quality, character, landscape setting and identity of towns and cities

- Protect and give access to open space within and around towns and cities
- 2.3 The prevention of coalescence, which historically has been a key role of green belt in Falkirk, is also a legitimate purpose.
- 2.4 Green belts should not be used to protect natural heritage resources or to safeguard land for major uses such as airports.
- 2.5 Land should only be designated as green belt where it contributes to the settlement strategy for an area. Not all greenfield land will be green belt, and most settlements do not have, or need green belts because other policies, such as countryside policies, provide an appropriate context for decision making.

Form

- 2.6 Green belts can encircle settlements, but can also take other forms including buffers, corridors, coastal strips and wedges.

Role of Development Plans

- 2.7 Outwith the city regions, as is the case with the Falkirk Council area, local development plans should:
- establish the need for a green belt,
 - identify specific boundaries, and
 - set out the policy for development within the green belt, including appropriate uses.
 - consider whether land previously designated as green belt should be identified for development.

Boundaries

- 2.8 Green belt boundaries should:
- Reflect the long term settlement strategy, ensuring settlements can accommodate planned growth, if necessary by creating areas between the settlement envelope and the green belt for urban growth.
 - Be clearly identifiable on the ground using strong physical features (rivers, tree belts, main roads, railways), rather than less robust features such as hedges and field enclosures
 - Exclude existing settlements and major institutional or commercial establishments.

Appropriate Development

- 2.9 Appropriate development within the green belt could include agricultural development, woodland, forestry, horticulture, appropriate recreational uses and essential infrastructure. Uses which would not normally be consistent with green belt policy may be permitted if it is a national priority or to meet an established need where there is no other suitable site. Intensification of established uses may be appropriate.

3. History of Green Belt in Falkirk

Origins

- 3.1 A green belt was first designated in the Falkirk area in 1962 through a modification by the Secretary of State to the County Development Plan. It stretched in a broad arc from Kinnaird in the north to Polmont in the east. The original objectives of the green belt were to protect areas of countryside and maintain the physical separation of Falkirk and Grangemouth in particular. Various strategic releases were made to the green belt through amendments to the County Development Plan in the 1960s and 1970s.

Rural Local Plan 1983

- 3.2 The first consolidated version of the green belt under the present development plan system appeared in the Rural Local Plan 1983. The Rural Local Plan 1983 widened the objectives to include protection of good agricultural land, segregation of urban and rural uses and to provide a corridor for essential services. The coverage of the green belt was extended into the Kinneil area in the east and to the west of Skinflats in the north.

Central 2000 Structure Plan 1992

- 3.3 Central 2000: The Structure Plan for Central Region, approved in August 1992, broadly confirmed the existing areas of green belt and required that further areas were identified to prevent the coalescence of Falkirk with Larbert / Stenhousemuir / Carron / Carronshore. It also required the green belt to protect the landscape setting of Callendar House. At this stage the key objectives of the green belt were to prevent the coalescence of settlements and to protect the landscape setting of towns.

Rural Local Plan 1994

- 3.4 The areas of green belt required by Central 2000 were defined in detail through the Rural Local Plan adopted in 1994. In addition to preventing coalescence and protecting landscape setting, the Local Plan supported the principle of the green belt to provide areas of countryside recreation and underlined the commitment to the enhancement of the green belt through the Greenspace Initiative.

Green Belt Revisions 1995-2001

- 3.5 Since the Rural Local Plan was adopted in 1994 there have been some changes to the green belt boundary in subsequent reviews of settlement-based Local Plans. Through the Bo'ness Local Plan 1995 the green belt was extended to the east to provide a long term buffer between Bo'ness and the village of Muirhouses. Through the Falkirk Local Plan 2000 the Falkirk-Grangemouth green belt was adjusted to accord with the alignment of the new Northern Distributor Road and to accommodate the replacement Graeme High School. At the same time the green belt was extended to the east of Langlees to match the Urban Limit. Through the Polmont Local Plan 2001, a site at Gilston was released for strategic business development purposes, as required by the Central 2000 Structure Plan.

Falkirk Council Structure Plan 2002 (Alteration 2007)

- 3.6 The Falkirk Council Structure Plan, originally approved in 2002, and altered in 2007, endorsed the continuing role of the green belt in the area, and emphasised its long term nature. In addition to those strategic areas identified previously, Schedule ENV.1 and the Key Diagram in the Structure Plan required the further areas of green belt between: Falkirk and Bonnybridge; Denny and Bonnybridge; and Bo'ness and Grangemouth
- 3.7 The first two areas extended the principle of green belts into the west of the Council area for the first time, recognising the proximity of, and the need to maintain the integrity and setting of Denny, Bonnybridge and Falkirk. The third area recognises the proximity of Grangemouth and Bo'ness and the need to safeguard against coalescence of these two communities.
- 3.8 No changes were made to green belt policy in the 2007 Alteration to the Structure Plan, other than a detailed requirement that land in the vicinity of the Falkirk Stadium be removed from the green belt.

Falkirk Council Local Plan 2010

- 3.9 The Falkirk Council Local Plan, adopted in 2010, defined the boundaries of the new areas of green belt required by the Structure Plan. It also reviewed the boundaries existing areas of green belt, but left them largely unaltered as it was considered that required development to 2020 could be accommodated within the existing boundaries. The only changes were the removal of the stadium site at Westfield, Falkirk, which was specifically sanctioned by the Structure Plan, and a minor adjustment at Glensburgh, Grangemouth.
- 3.10 The green belt policy, EQ20, was comprehensively revised from the previously version to clarify the relationship with general countryside policy.

4. Current Development Plan Policy

- 4.1 Current green belt policy is set out in the Falkirk Council Structure Plan 2007 and the Falkirk Council Local Plan 2010.

Falkirk Council Structure Plan 2007

- 4.2 Green belt policy is set out in ENV.2 and Schedule ENV.1 of the Structure Plan. The Structure Plan emphasises the importance of 'maintaining the identity of the individual communities which make up the Council area by preventing coalescence and protecting their landscape setting'. It states that 'areas of urban fringe experience strong pressures for development, which have been contained in particular key locations by the Green Belt', and that 'it is intended that protection will continue to be afforded to the identity and setting of settlements by a system of Green Belts'. Local Plans will define detailed Green Belt boundaries and 'in order to ensure the long term robustness of such boundaries, a balance will have to be struck between containment and growth needed to fulfil the Development Strategy'.

POLICY ENV.2 - GREEN BELT

There will be a system of Green Belts in the areas generally described in Schedule ENV.1 and indicated on the Key Diagram. Within these there will be a long term presumption against development in order to prevent the coalescence of settlements, protect their landscape setting and avoid prejudicing future proposals for landscape enhancement and countryside recreation.

The detailed boundaries will be defined in Local Plans, having regard, where appropriate, to the Strategic Development Opportunities set out in Policy Econ.1 and Schedule Econ.1 and other structure plan policies.

Schedule ENV.1: Strategic Countryside and Landscape Protection

Type of Protected Area	Purpose/Function	General Locations
<i>Green Belt</i>	<i>To separate and provide a setting for settlements with opportunities for recreation</i>	<i>Between Falkirk and Larbert Between Falkirk and Carronshore Between Grangemouth & Polmont /Laurieston</i>
	<i>Priority area for enhancement</i>	<i>East of Stenhousemuir Between Bo'ness & Polmont/Linlithgow Between Falkirk & G'mouth Between Falkirk & Bonnybridge Between Denny & Bonnybridge Callendar Park and Wood Between Bo'ness & G'mouth</i>

Falkirk Council Local Plan 2010

- 4.3 The policy covering green belt in the Falkirk Council Local Plan is Policy EQ20 which states:

There will be a strong presumption against development in the Green Belt except where it can be demonstrated that:

- (1) The proposal satisfies Policy EQ19 and any relevant countryside policies as set out in Table 3.3; and*
- (2) The proposal will not undermine the role of the Green Belt by detracting from its existing landscape character; reducing the visual separation between settlements; or compromising its existing or potential future use for countryside recreation.*

Where proposals satisfy these criteria, developer contributions to landscape improvement, access and countryside recreation will be sought in accordance with Policy EQ21.

- 4.4 Policy EQ20 emphasises the general presumption against development within green belts and states that exceptions to this presumption can only be made where two criteria are met. Criterion (1) cross references to the general countryside policies of the plan, and requires such policies to be met in the first instance. Criterion (2) then set out further requirements which relate back to the primary purposes of the green belt as set out in the Structure Plan Policy ENV.2, i.e.

- to protect the landscape setting of the relevant towns

- to prevent the coalescence of settlements; and
 - avoid prejudicing proposals for landscape enhancement and countryside recreation.
- 4.5 The Local Plan sets out the detailed boundaries of the green belt on the Proposals Map.
- 4.6 The Council's overall approach to green belt and the detailed green belt boundaries in the Local Plan were subject to various objections and were scrutinised as part of the Local Plan inquiry held in 2009. The Reporter endorsed the Council's position, with the exception of two recommended changes: the reinstatement of an area of green belt to the east of the Falkirk Stadium; and the removal of green belt at Roughlands Farm, Stenhousemuir. The Council accepted the former recommendation, but rejected the latter.

5. Green Belt Review: Overview

Form and Extent

- 5.1 The current extent of the green belt in the Falkirk Council area is shown in Figure 1. It covers approximately 47 sq.km, or around one sixth of the Council area, stretching from Denny in the west to Bo'ness in the east, and north as far as the Kincardine Bridge. For the purposes of this review, it has been divided into four areas: Central; Northern; Western; and Eastern.
- 5.2 The green belt generally takes the form of wedges of countryside which separate the various distinct but closely spaced settlements which form the urban structure of the area. These wedges vary in width from nothing up to about two miles. There are four key pinch points: where the Carron Road crosses the River Carron between Falkirk and Stenhousemuir; at Westfield, between Falkirk and Grangemouth, where the removal of the Falkirk Stadium from the green belt has created a discontinuity; at Laurieston, where the outlier of Callendar Park is detached from the main Grangemouth-Polmont green belt; and Junction 4 of the M9.
- 5.3 A green belt comprised of wedges is consistent with the SPP. Most significantly, it does not wrap entirely around the network of settlements, but separates them, meaning that, although the green belt generally follows the urban edge, there is plenty of theoretical scope for the urban area to expand. However, the consequences for individual settlements vary. Grangemouth for example is encircled by green belt, as, almost, is Bo'ness. Although Larbert/Stenhousemuir has green belt only to the south and east, other physical constraints to the north and west, mean that green belt effectively constrains its future growth, once current committed development is complete. Denny, Bonnybridge and Banknock, Falkirk and the Polmont Area are less constrained.

Function

Avoiding Coalescence

- 5.4 The separation of settlements has historically been the primary function of the green belt in the Falkirk area, and remains the main criterion for designation.

Indeed the Structure Plan defining the green belt within Schedule ENV.2 in terms of pairs of settlements which should be kept apart. This reflects successive settlement strategies which have emphasised the importance of maintaining the identity of individual communities, rather than letting them merge into a single urban area. It should be noted, however, that a large area of the green belt to the east of Stenhousemuir does not specifically serve the 'separation' function.

- 5.5 The green belt has been fairly successful at keeping communities apart, although it is being threatened in at least two locations: at the Falkirk Stadium; and around Junction 4 on the M9. It could be argued that other constraints such as floodplains, pipeline corridors, and other physical barriers such as motorways and railways have been factors in this process, and might continue to secure a measure of separation even if the green belt did not exist.
- 5.6 Although the prevention of coalescence is no longer seen by the SPP as a primary purpose of green belts, it remains a legitimate role. The continuing use of green belt to separate communities in the Falkirk area will depend on whether the separate identity of towns remains a key part of the emerging vision and spatial strategy of the LDP.

Managing Urban Growth

- 5.7 Managing and directing urban growth, and promoting regeneration with the urban area has also been an important function of the green belt. During the 1980s and 1990s, strict curbs on the outward growth of the Falkirk and Larbert/ Stenhousemuir in particular facilitated the regeneration of large brownfield sites created by the decline of traditional industries. More recently, the green belt has particularly reinforced settlement strategies in Larbert/Stenhousemuir and Bo'ness, directing growth to preferred sites at Bellsdyke/Hill of Kinnaird and Drum Farm/Bo'ness Foreshore respectively.
- 5.8 There is a question as to whether this function could be performed equally by Urban Limits. However, there is no doubt that green belt status, underpinned as it is by national policy, gives such land a greater level of protection.

Protecting and Enhancing Landscape Setting

- 5.9 Protecting the landscape setting of settlements is a further stated function of green belts within national policy and in the local Falkirk area context. This function is in some ways more problematic in so far as the landscape quality of the much of the green belt is relatively poor, whilst other areas of urban fringe – for example south Falkirk - which are arguably of greater landscape value are not designated. It is clear that landscape quality has not been a prime criterion for green belt designation in the past. However, some locally important landscape features are undoubtedly safeguarded by green belt. Landscape character and quality within the component parts of the green belt is discussed in section 6.

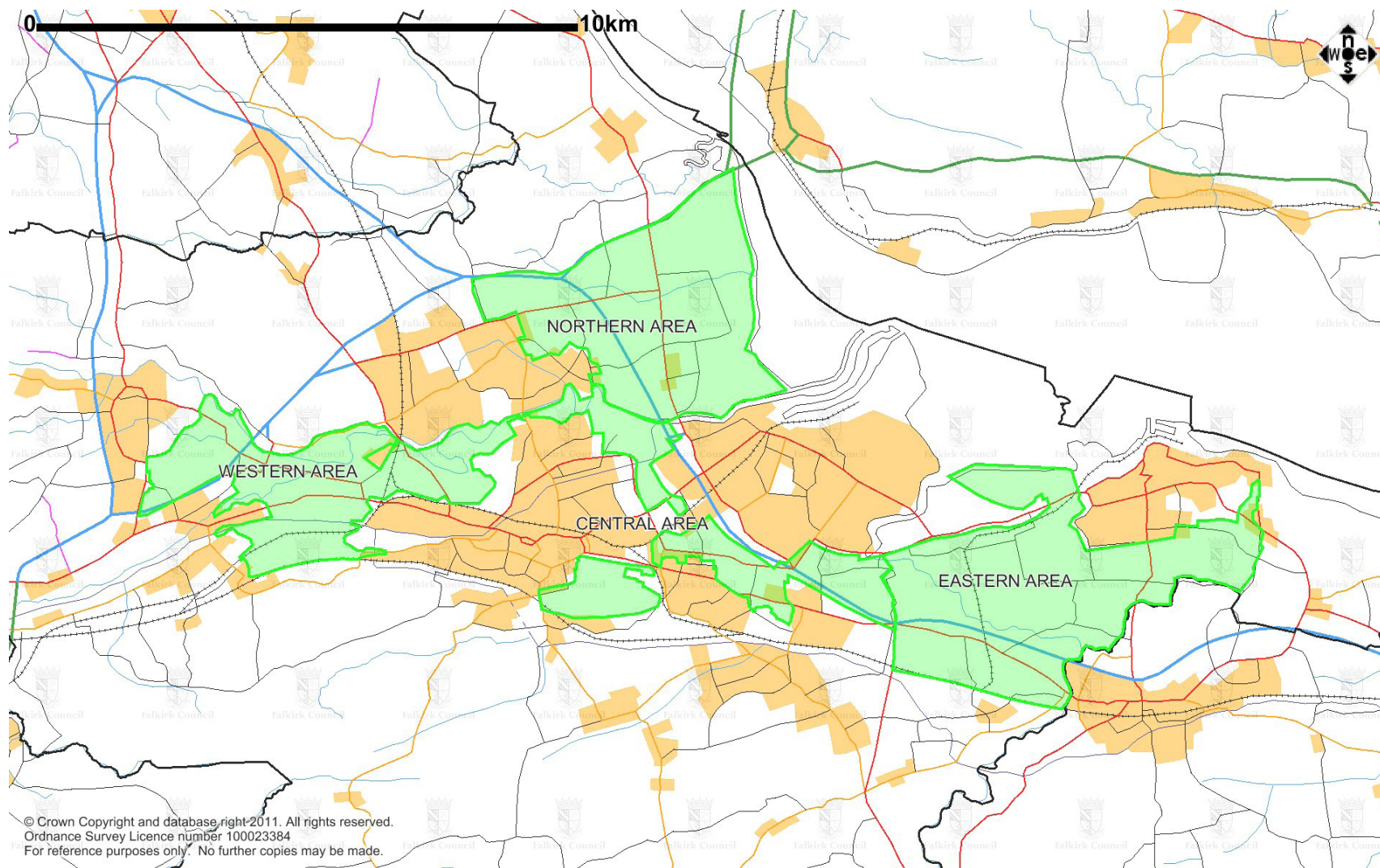


Figure 1 Current Green Belt in Falkirk Council Area

- 5.10 The designation of green belt to promote landscape improvement is another dimension of its landscape role. Historically, green belt was criticised as a negative policy tool which could prevent development happening, but could not actively enhance the landscape. However, in recent years there has been a much greater focus on positive management. In the Falkirk Council area, this found expression in the Falkirk Greenspace Initiative which, since 1993, has significantly improved the quality of the urban fringe through extensive programmes of woodland planting and management. It should be noted that the Greenspace Initiative had a wider spatial coverage than the green belt, and much of the investment, for example in the south Falkirk area, has been outwith the green belt. Indeed in the future it is likely to be green networks, such as the Central Scotland Green Network, which form the policy tool through which positive management of landscape is driven.

Providing Areas for Countryside Recreation

- 5.11 This is a further traditional function of green belt in the Falkirk area. Green belt land hosts a range of recreational uses such as parks, community woodlands, golf courses etc as well as a large number of outdoor access routes, many of which are now included in the Core Paths Plan. Outdoor access provision has been greatly extended under the Greenspace Initiative and the Outdoor Access Strategy. Again, however, it should be noted that the outdoor access investment has extended over the urban fringe as a whole, and has not been focused particularly on the green belt.

Providing a Corridor for Services

- 5.12 This was a stated purpose of the green belt in the Rural Local Plan, with the Falkirk - Grangemouth – Polmont corridor in particular providing a route for a number of strategic pipelines. However, this is no longer considered a significant function in the Structure Plan.

Relationship with Other Environmental Designations and Constraints

- 5.13 Green belt is one of a number of environmental designations and constraints operating in the countryside around towns. It is important to understand the role of these designations and their relationship to green belt as part of a re-assessment of the continuing relevance of green belt. From one perspective, if land is protected from development through other means, then the rationale for green belt may be reduced. A plethora of overlapping designations with similar objectives can be unnecessary and confusing. From another perspective, green belt can complement or reinforce other designations.

Urban Limits/Countryside

- 5.14 In the Falkirk Council area, the outward growth of settlements and sporadic development in rural areas has historically been controlled through Urban and Village Limits. Land beyond these Limits is designated as countryside. Whilst there is some overlap and potential confusion between green belt and countryside, the policy intention is that green belt provides a stronger and longer term policy presumption against development in areas where there are special reasons for resisting urban growth. Urban Limits are subject to review every time a local plan is prepared (in theory every five years) whereas green belt is reviewed at longer intervals. Nonetheless, there is a viewpoint that

green belt in the area is unnecessary since its functions can effectively be carried out by Urban Limits and countryside policies.

Falkirk Greenspace and the CSGN

- 5.15 The Falkirk Greenspace Initiative was conceived in 1993 as a partnership between the Council, Central Scotland Forest Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage and Scottish Enterprise. Its primary aim was to improve the landscape and recreational use of the urban fringe in a comprehensive way. The long term objective is to create an attractive wooded landscape, which includes local path networks, encircling Falkirk and neighbouring settlements. As previously noted, there has been major investment in woodland planting and management and access creation in the intervening period. Falkirk Greenspace was integrated into successive local plans, and in particular the Falkirk Council Structure Plan where it is shown on the key diagram enveloping all of the main settlements east of the M80. Local plan have shown constituent project opportunities on their proposals maps.
- 5.16 Clearly, Falkirk Greenspace has assumed the green belt function of enhancing landscape quality and promoting countryside access and recreation. Whilst the mapped Greenspace area has a similar coverage to the green belt, there are some notable differences.
- 5.17 The concept of multi-functional green networks is now being promoted through the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN). The Council is looking at how Falkirk Greenspace can be extended and refined to form the local expression of the CSGN.
- 5.18 Whilst there is scope for confusion between green belts and green networks, and whilst some of their functions may overlap, it is clear that they can be complementary. On the other hand, if it was decided that green belt was no longer an appropriate designation for the area, the green network, suitably defined, could provide an alternative policy tool, emphasising positive linkages between greenspace around settlements, rather than separation of settlements.

Areas of Great Landscape Value (AGLV)

- 5.19 AGLVs recognise and protect locally important landscapes. The only area of overlap with the green belt is in south Bo'ness where it could be argued that the two designations fulfil a landscape protection function and there is some policy duplication. However, the focus of the green belt is on controlling the long-term growth of Bo'ness (i.e. an urban focus) whereas the purpose of the AGLV is to recognise landscape quality and distinctiveness over a wider area, irrespective of its relationship to the town.

Antonine Wall World Heritage Site (WHS) Buffer Zone

- 5.20 The Antonine Wall WHS Buffer Zone is designated to protect the setting of the Antonine Wall WHS. There is substantial overlap with the green belt, notably the sections of the buffer zone from Kinneil to Callendar Park in the east, and from Falkirk to Bonnybridge in the west. The green belt designation undoubtedly does reinforce the buffer zone in these areas, and its removal might make the buffer zone more vulnerable. However, supplementary

guidance on the WHS is in preparation which should make clarify the role of the buffer zone.

Floodplains

- 5.21 Certain parts of the green belt lie within the 1:200 year flood envelope as shown on SEPA's indicative coastal and fluvial flood maps. In these areas, flood risk is a factor which represents a major physical constraint to development, and therefore potentially renders green belt designation unnecessary. The main areas where flood plains overlap with green belt are along the Forth at Skinflats and Kinneil Kerse, and along the River Carron from Denny to Grangemouth. However, the flood envelope rarely extends as far as the green belt, and so could not be seen as an effective substitute.

Prime Agricultural Land

- 5.22 There is a fair amount of overlap between the prime agricultural land resource and the green belt. The key locations are to the east from Bo'ness to Polmont; to the west between Falkirk and Denny/Bonnybridge; and to the south and north-east of Stenhousemuir. It can be argued that green belt provides a useful additional protection for this resource, although it is not part of its stated objectives in national or local policy.

Development Pressures

- 5.23 The green belt continues to be subject to development pressure, both in terms of the outward spread of settlements, and more sporadic developments which may be free-standing, or extensions to existing uses. These are evident from planning applications, representations to the Falkirk Council Local Plan, and 'expressions of interest' received in connection with the local development plan. They are illustrated in Figure 2.

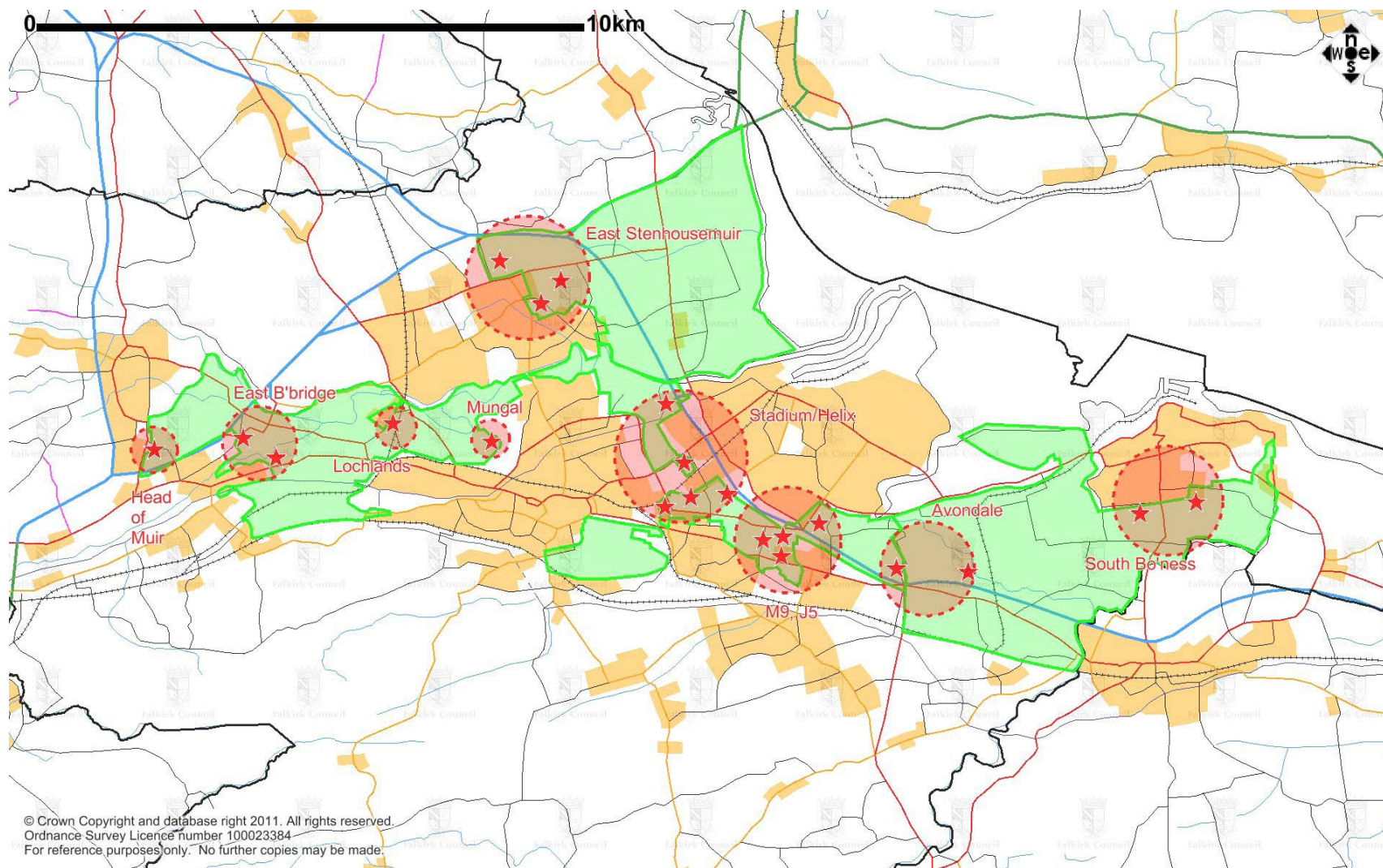


Figure 2 Development Pressures in the Green Belt

- 5.24 The main strategic pressures may be summarised as:
- Commercial/leisure development pressures in the M9 corridor, particularly in the Central area;
 - Residential development pressures, particularly to the south of Bo'ness, east of Stenhousemuir, and east of Denny/ Bonnybridge;
 - Mineral/waste/landfill pressures in the Avondale/Inveravon area; and
 - Pressures for ad hoc intensification or expansion of existing businesses in the green belt

These pressures are explored in more detail in the area by area analysis that follows.

6. Green Belt Review: Northern Area

Location

- 6.1 The northern area is bounded to the north by the M876/A876, to the east by the Forth Estuary, to the south by the River Carron and to the east by the Urban Limit of Stenhousemuir, which includes the strategic land release at Bellsdyke/Hill of Kinnaird.

Landscape

- 6.2 East of the M9, the area comprises primarily the flat, low lying carseland adjacent to the Forth Estuary (Coastal Margins/ Grangemouth – Bo'ness Flats as identified in the Stirling to Grangemouth LCA). The carseland is very open and relatively treeless with large scale rectilinear fields, few hedges and a few steadings linked by minor roads. Dominant features include the various road corridors and electricity power lines which run through or adjacent to the area, views of the Grangemouth industries to the south, and views to the Ochil Hills to the north.
- 6.3 West of the M9, the landscape is more varied and interesting (Lowland River Valleys/Falkirk Denny Urban Fringe). To the north, the topography rises up gently to the urban edge of Stenhousemuir. North of the Bellsdyke Road, tree belts and specimen trees form the attractive remnants of policy woodland associated with Kinnaird House, and protected by a TPO. Again, views north to the Ochils are significant. To the south, the edge of Carronshore presents a more untidy edge, but again there are attractive elements of former policy woodland associated with Carron House, adjacent to the River Carron

Land Use

- 6.4 The land use is predominantly agricultural apart from some scattered dwellings and the village of Skinflats.

Function

- 6.5 The function of this part of the green belt has been primarily to control the eastern spread of Stenhousemuir, directing growth towards the Bellsdyke/Hill of Kinnaird area, and to protect its landscape setting to the east. The area has relatively little role to play in terms of avoiding coalescence.

Other Constraints

- 6.4 Much of the eastern part of the area is floodplain associated with the Forth and the Carron. Pipeline corridors run alongside the M9. the Firth of Forth SPA and SSSI lies adjacent on the mudflats to the east, and extends into the south eastern part of the area.

Boundaries

- 6.5 Generally, boundaries are well-defined by strong physical features: the M876/A876 to the north, the estuary to the east and the River Carron to the south. To the west, the boundaries at Stenhousemuir are generally robust, formed by local roads. Around Carronshore, the boundary is formed by the backs of residential and industrial premises.

Issues and Pressures

- 6.6 The following issues have been identified:
- The contribution of much of **the carseland to the east of the A905** to the function of the green belt is questionable. This area is in any case heavily constrained by flood risk and the SPA/SSSI. Its removal from the green belt is an option.
 - **Kinnaird, Bensfield and Roughlands**, on the eastern edge of Stenhousemuir, are under continuing pressure for residential development. In the case of Kinnaird and Bensfield, robust alternative boundaries could be constructed, but these would represent very large scale releases with significant landscape implications which would have to be considered in the context of the settlement strategy for Larbert/Stenhousemuir. Roughlands would be a much smaller, more localised readjustment, involving moving the boundary out to Webster Avenue. This received support from the Reporter at the previous local plan inquiry (although not accepted by the Council at that time), and could present an option if a modest amount of additional housing land was required in the area.

7. Green Belt Review: Central Area

Location

- 7.1 The central area forms a narrow arc of land extending from the River Carron at Langlees in the north-west to Junction 4 of the M9 in the south east. It is bounded to the south and west by the urban area of Falkirk, Laurieston and Polmont, and to the north and east by the urban area of Grangemouth.

Landscape

- 7.2 The area falls within the Lowland River Valleys/Falkirk-Denny Urban Fringe landscape unit in the Strirling-Grangemouth LCA.
- 7.3 The north western part of the central area, from Langlees south to Laurieston, comprises the flat, low lying carseland between Falkirk and Grangemouth. The landscape is dominated by infrastructure in the form of the elevated M9, other major distributor roads, railway embankments, power lines, the sewage

treatment works at Dalderse, and the Forth & Clyde Canal as it makes its exit out to the Carron. The urban edge is mainly formed by industrial sheds and storage yards. Two relatively recent components which have transformed the landscape quite significantly are the Falkirk Stadium at Middlefield, and the extensive, maturing community woodland planted under the Falkirk Greenspace Initiative at Abbotshaugh, Dalderse and Middlefield.

- 7.4 From Laurieston eastwards, the carseland continues, but is bounded to the south by an east-west escarpment, on top of which the urban areas of Laurieston and Polmont sit. The line of the Antonine Wall follows the top of the escarpment. The escarpment is dissected by various watercourses, and is complemented by tree belts which give it a partially wooded appearance from the motorway. Once again the motorway, particularly Junction 5, other roads, and power lines are dominant features. There are also clusters of urban development around the junction, notably at Beancross and Inchyra. The backcloth of industrial Grangemouth is particularly evident in the eastern part of the area.
- 7.5 Callendar Park and Wood forms an outlier to the main part of the green belt, covering the designed landscape of Callendar House, and its wooded policies which rise up behind Falkirk form an attractive backcloth to the town.

Land Use

- 7.6 The land use within this part of the green belt is fairly diverse. As noted above, there are extensive new areas of community woodland to the north west. Agricultural fields on the carse are used for grazing or are currently unused. Leisure and recreational uses, both rural and urban forms, are prominent – Falkirk Stadium, the cluster of hotels/ restaurants/garden centre around Junction 5, Grangemouth golf course, Polmonthill ski slope and Millhall fishery, and Gray Buchanan Park. Grandsable cemetery and Dalderse sewage treatment works are also significant uses.

Function

- 7.7 The primary function of this part of the green belt is to separate the urban areas of Falkirk, Grangemouth, Laurieston and Polmont. This role can be particularly appreciated from the M9, A9 and A905. There is also a subsidiary function of separating Laurieston/Westquarter from Polmont, whilst Callendar Park/Wood helps to separate Falkirk from Reddingmuirhead.
- 7.8 There is also landscape function, particularly in the protection of the partially wooded escarpment which provides an attractive setting for Polmont, and Callendar Park & Wood which is an important part of Falkirk's landscape setting. Clearly the area has a strong recreational aspect, which is set to intensify under the Helix proposals.

Other Constraints

- 7.9 The Antonine Wall WHS traverses the southern part of the area, and its buffer zone covers nearly all of the eastern part of the area. Callendar Park/Wood is a designed landscape and wildlife site.

Boundaries

- 7.10 Boundaries are fairly robust, formed generally by roads, railway embankments, the River Carron or urban edges. The boundary to the north east of the Falkirk Stadium is the exception since it is formed by the notional future extent of the stadium development, rather than any physical feature on the ground.

Issues and Pressures

- 7.11 The following issues have been identified:
- The **Helix project** is focussed on this part of the green belt, and will carry on the work of landscape and recreational enhancement started by the Greenspace Initiative. The Helix will introduce more intensive recreational use, more formal landscapes, allotments, public art, and potentially pressure for a variety of associated development. Whilst this will make it a more attractive and useable greenspace, it may challenge the traditional function of the green belt as an area of separation where built development is discouraged.
 - The **Falkirk Stadium** has contributed to fragmentation of the green belt in this area. There is likely to be continuing pressure for development in the residual area of green belt to the north east of the Falkirk Stadium. This area, surrounded on three sides by development, was the subject of debate at the local plan inquiry, and was ultimately recommended for retention as green belt by the reporter.
 - At **Caledon Business Park**, planning permission has been granted for an extension of business use into the green belt to the east of Bog Road. Consideration needs to be given to whether any amendment of the green belt boundary should be made to reflect this as yet unimplemented permission.
 - **Junction 5 of the M9** is a key pinch point around which are clustered a variety of tourism related uses, existing and consented, at Beancross/Inchyra. Pressure remains for further urban uses in this area. Should recognition be given to this cluster, and its further expansion, either by removing it from the green belt, or acknowledging as a legitimate opportunity for controlled urban use within the green belt?

8. Green Belt Review: Eastern Area

Location

- 8.1 The eastern area extends from Junction 4 of the M9 to the village of Muirhouses, wrapping round the southern and western side of Bo'ness. It is bounded to the south by the main Glasgow-Edinburgh railway line and the Council boundary with West Lothian. To the north the A904 forms the boundary, with an outlier extending out over the Kinneil Kerse foreshore to the Forth Estuary.

Landscape

- 8.2 The area falls within the Coastal Margins/Bo'ness Coastal Hills landscape unit in the Stirling-Grangemouth LCA. The Kinneil Kerse outlier is within the Coastal Margins/Grangemouth to Bo'ness Flats unit.
- 8.3 This part of the green belt is characterised by attractive rolling hills of elevation 50-150 meters, with a general downslope towards the Forth Estuary. The high point is Airngath Hill at 171 meters, to the south of Bo'ness. The western section is dominated by the incised valley of the River Avon, to the east of which is the active landfill site at Avondale. Apart from Kinneil Woods, to the west of Bo'ness, and the wooded gorge of the River Avon, woodland is generally confined to shelter belts or lines of roadline or hedgerow trees. Open arable/ pasture fields are medium to large in scale, bounded by hawthorn/beechn hedges. Steadings tend to be set prominently on hill tops.
- 8.4 The Kinneil Kerse outlier is flat, low lying land at the edge of the estuary, reclaimed by landfilling over many years. At its western end is a lagoon. Scrub woodland is colonising parts of the area.

Land Use

- 8.5 The area is predominantly agricultural, with exception of the Avondale landfill at the western end, Kinneil Wood, and West Lothian golf course which overlooks Bo'ness on the northern slopes of Airngath Hill. The Bo'ness and Kinneil Railway runs through the area.

Function

- 8.6 This part of the green belt is intended to separate Bo'ness from Polmont and Linlithgow, whilst the Kinneil Kerse outlier separates Bo'ness from Grangemouth. A narrow extension at Muirhouses helps to maintain the gap between the village and Bo'ness. The protection of the landscape setting of Bo'ness is a further important role.

Other Constraints

- 8.7 The area north of the River Avon is designated as an AGLV. The Antonine Wall WHS and buffer zone cover the section between Bo'ness and Polmont. The Kinneil Kerse area is partly covered by the Firth of Forth SPA/SSSI, and also lies largely within the floodplain of the Forth. Much of the land south of Bo'ness is prime agricultural land.

Boundaries

- 8.8 Boundaries are fairly robust, with the Glasgow-Edinburgh railway line providing the edge to the south, and the A904, the estuary and the urban edge of Bo'ness provide the northern boundaries.

Issues and Pressures

- 8.9 The following issues have been identified:

- There are ongoing residential development pressures to the **south of Bo'ness**, notably at Bo'mains Farm. Any release of a strategic scale here will have serious implications for the landscape setting of the town. The existing green belt boundaries along Crawfield and Borrowstoun Road provide strong edges and it would be difficult to find an equally robust boundary without retreating to the tree belt at the top of the ridge overlooking the town.
- The **Avondale landfill**, which has expanded eastward, represents a significant visual presence in the green belt. Whilst it will be progressively restored, future extensions are possible and a proposed materials recycling facility has planning permission. To what extent is its recognition as a major waste management facility compatible with green belt designation?
- **Kinneil Kerse** is a relatively newly designated area of green belt. Given other constraints which affect it, it has very limited development potential, and so its protection by green belt could be seen as unnecessary. Decisions over this section of green belt need to be considered alongside the future of the adjacent Kinneil Kerse safeguarded site for petrochemical industry, which is no longer required through national policy.

9. Green Belt Review: Western Area

Location

- 9.1 The western area extends from Mungal Farm, Falkirk in the east along the valleys of the River Carron and the Bonny Water to Denny and Bonnybridge in the west. It is bounded to the north by the urban area of Larbert/Stenhousemuir and the B905 Larbert-Denovan Road, and to the south by Falkirk Grahamston-Glasgow railway line and the Edinburgh-Glasgow main line.

Landscape

- 9.2 The area falls within the Lowland River Valleys/Falkirk-Denny Urban Fringe landscape unit in the Stirling-Grangemouth LCA.
- 9.3 The natural landscape is dominated by the relative flat, open valleys of the Carron and the Bonny Water. The Forth & Clyde Canal also runs east-west through the area. Mature woodland plantations at Roughcastle and Chacefield occupy ridges and provide important and highly visible linear skyline features. However, the landscape is generally fragmented and degraded by a range of sporadic urban uses, the M876, overhead power lines, operational and disused railway lines.

Land Use

- 9.4 Whilst agricultural use predominates, there are substantial pockets of industrial use, for example at Stirling Road, Lochlands and Roughmote. A major electricity sub-station and sewage treatment works are located to the east of Bonnybridge. Cemeteries are located at Falkirk and Hills of Dunipace, golf courses at Carmuir and Bonnybridge, with playing fields at Stirling Road.

Function

- 9.5 The principal function is to separate the settlements of Larbert, Falkirk, Denny and Bonnybridge, and to protect the landscape setting of these communities. An ancillary function is to protect views from the Falkirk Wheel, which is the foremost tourist attraction in the area. There is also substantial recreational and access provision in the area.

Other Constraints

- 9.6 The Antonine Wall WHS and buffer zone affects the southern part of this section of green belt. The floodplain associated with the Carron and the Bonny Water is also a constraint, as is a pipeline corridor running north-south through the area.

Boundaries

- 9.7 Boundaries generally follow strong features such as railway lines, roads, watercourses or urban edges. At Mungall, Falkirk and Mydub, Denny, green belt edges have been formed in conjunction with future development proposals which are not currently marked by strong physical features.

Issues and Pressures

- 9.8 The following issues have been identified:
- There are residential development pressures to the **east of Bonnybridge and Denny**, specifically along the Falkirk Road and at Head of Muir.
 - There are pressures to extend the **Mungall Farm** development into the green belt.
 - The presence of **substantial pockets of industrial use** present a challenge to green belt objectives in terms of their urbanising effect. There may be pressures to expand these uses in the future which would further threaten the purpose of the green belt

10. Strategic Options

- 10.1 Having reviewed the overall character and function of the green belt, and examined in greater depth its constituent parts, the following are considered to be the principal options for consideration through the LDP. Not all of these are mutually exclusive, and they provide a menu from which suitable alternatives can be defined for inclusion in the Main Issues Report.

Status Quo (Option 1)

- 10.2 This would involve maintaining the green belt with its current boundaries. It could be argued that the green belt has recently been assessed through the local plan process and that, given its long term nature, further change would undermine confidence in it. This position would be dependent on whether the chosen settlement strategy could be delivered without any green belt release.

Green Belt Restructuring (Option 2)

- 10.3 This would involve significant changes to the designated area to align it more consistently with stated green belt objectives. Two examples might be:
- (i) **removal of the green belt east of the A905 at Skinflats** . This would be the basis that this area makes no contribution to green belt objectives in relation to managing urban growth, avoiding coalescence, or protecting landscape setting;
 - (ii) **introduction of green belt to the south of Falkirk and Polmont**. This would be on the basis that the landscape setting of the southern edge of these settlements is worthy of protection and that the growth of these settlements could be more effectively managed through an encircling green belt. This would signal a significant shift in the form and purpose of the green belt away from wedges separating settlements to a more all enveloping green belt designed to manage urban growth. This would considerably affect the flexibility inherent in the spatial structure of the green belt at present.

Strategic Green Belt Release (Option 3)

- 10.4 This would involve the selective large scale release of green belt on the urban fringe to accommodate future development needs. They would be designed to provide land for major growth in certain settlements, a long-term indication of the direction of growth in such settlements, or to provide major new economic development opportunities. The need for such releases will, of course, be determined by the preferred spatial strategy, but possible strategic releases include:
- (i) **North East Stenhousemuir** – to allow for further significant long-term growth in the Larbert/Stenhousemuir area
 - (ii) **South Bo'ness** - to allow for further significant long-term growth in the Bo'ness area
 - (iii) **M9, Junction 5** – to allow for an additional growth point for economic activity within the M9 corridor.
 - (iv) **East Bonnybridge** – to allow for further long term growth in the Bonnybridge area

Minor Green Belt Releases (Option 4)

- 10.5 These would be more limited releases, designed to provide short term flexibility in the residential/business land supply, or where small-scale changes would achieve a more rational and defensible boundary. Again the need for additional housing business land would have to be justified in relation to the spatial strategy, but possible minor releases include:
- (i) **Roughlands Farm, Stenhousemuir** – a potential rationalisation of the green belt boundary east of Stenhousemuir.
 - (ii) **Kinglass Farm, Bo'ness** – a potential release to the north of Borrowstoun Road and the existing Kinglass housing development
 - (iii) **Bog Road, Laurieston** – a potential rationalisation of the green belt to the east of the Bog Road Industrial Estate to recognise the consent which has been granted for Caledon Business Park.
 - (iv) **Lochlands Industrial Estate, Larbert** – a potential release to the east of Lochlands Loan to provide further scope for development of this successful industrial estate.

Green Belt Deletion (Option 5)

- 10.6 Deleting the green belt as a policy tool in the area is an option. Indeed this was suggested within the draft Falkirk Council Structure Plan in 2000. There might be two rationales for such a step. Firstly, as part of a high growth agenda, green belt might be seen as an impediment and inimical to such growth. Secondly, the designation might be seen as unnecessary, in that all the current purposes of green belt could be achieved through other designations. In particular, Urban Limits could manage growth and prevent coalescence, whilst the green network could promote positive change and management in the landscape around towns.

11. MIR Preferred Option

- 11.1 The preferred option in the MIR was a combination of Option 2(i) (removal of the green belt east of the A905 at Skinflats) and Option 4(ii) and (iii) (minor green belt releases).
- 11.2 The area at Skinflats does not play any significant role in terms of the wider purpose and objectives of the green belt in the area, and its removal will help to provide more focus to the policy and designation.
- 11.3 The two minor green belt releases are consistent with the preferred growth strategy for the area which promotes modest settlement expansions. The proposed change at Bo'ness would provide additional flexibility in the land supply in that settlement. The preferred strategy of consolidation for Larbert/Stenhousemuir means the option of green belt release at Roughlands has been rejected. The change at Bog Road, Falkirk is a rationalisation of the boundary which recognises the planning consent for Caledon Business Park.

12. Proposed Plan

- 12.1 Further adaptation of the MIR preferred option has taken place for the Proposed Plan.
- 12.2 Option 4(iv) is a further small scale change which has been added in order to provide scope for the extension of Lochlands Industrial Estate.
- 12.3 A more major green release has also been included at East Bonnybridge (Option 3(iv)) to reflect the Council's support for mixed use development, including housing and sports/recreation facilities in this location.

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