

HIGH MATHERNOCK BESS

ECOLOGICAL DESK STUDY

VERSION 2

Updates from Version 1:

- Site area reduced from 3.1ha to 2.7ha



High Mathernock

Ecological Desk Study

Client: Harmony HM Limited.

Project/Proposal No: 6117/2957

Version: 3.0

Date: 2024-12-10





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Revision History

Version	Date	Authored	Reviewed	Approved	Notes
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2.0	2024-10-15	J Bongard	D Black	R King	Second version with minor updates
3.0	2024-12-10	J Bongard	D Black	R King	Third version with minor updates

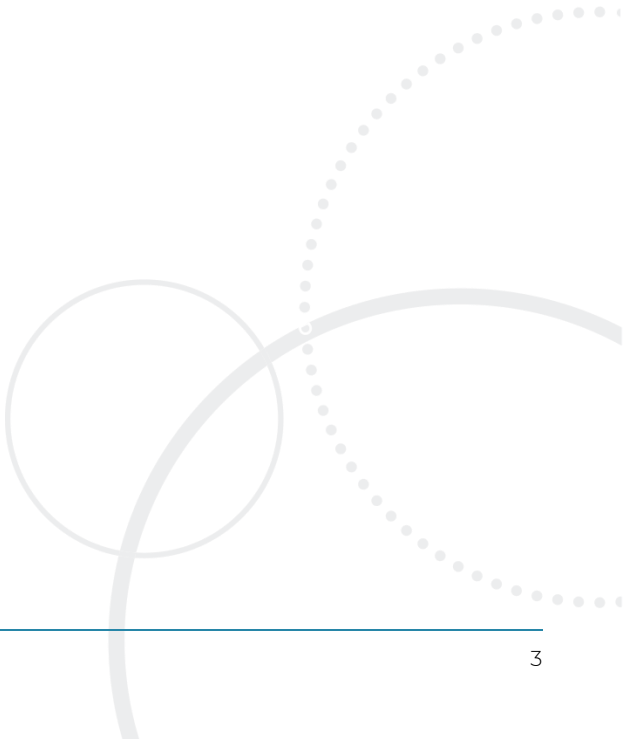
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

ITPEnergised was appointed by Harmony HM Limited to undertake an ecological desk study of an area of land around High Mathernock Farm (the 'Proposed Site'). The Proposed Site comprise sections of farmland located north-west of Kilmalcolm, Inverclyde, with a central OS grid reference of NS 32087 71420.

The ecological desk study identifies and collates existing baseline data on statutory and non-statutory nature conservation designations as well as records of protected or otherwise notable species and habitats within the Proposed Site and the surrounding area. The purpose of the desk study is to identify potential constraints to development and identify where mitigation and/or further survey work may be required to inform a future planning application, as appropriate.

1.2 Site Description

The Proposed Site is located within farmland which slopes gently downwards north to south. The Proposed Site measures ■ hectares (ha) and is located within and comprises entirely of an improved grassland field used for grazing cattle. The wider area is predominantly made up of similar grassland habitats, although the east and north-east habitats comprise scrub, heathland and wet grassland and comprise part of an Inverclyde Site of Importance to Nature Conservation (SINC).

There are no watercourses or waterbodies within the Proposed Site although a small number of watercourses flow south to the south-west of the Proposed Site. There are sections of plantation woodland to the south of the Proposed Site. There are no structures within the Proposed Site, the only structures in the Study Area are an operational wind turbine and associated structures.

2. Legislation, Policy and Guidelines

Key legislation, policy and guidelines relevant to the present assessment are summarised below.

2.1 Legislation

Full consideration has been given to all relevant nature conservation legislation when carrying out this assessment. This includes the following:

- Council Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds (the Birds Directive);
- The Conservation of Biological Diversity (CBD);
- Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the Habitats Directive);
- The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands 1976;
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended);

2.1.1 International Conventions and Directives

2.1.1.1 The Birds Directive (2009/147/EC)

The European Union (EU) Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (2009/147/EC) was first adopted in 1979 and is the primary mechanism for delivering the EU's obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the Ramsar and Bonn Conventions. Collectively, the Birds and Habitats Directives require Member States to take action in order to protect all bird species and their habitats which includes the designation of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) in respect to species listed on Annex I of the Directive.



2.1.1.2 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (the Ramsar Convention) was adopted in Iran in February 1971 and came in to force in the UK in May 1976. The Convention considers the subject area of wetland conservation and comprises three elements of activity:

- The designation of wetlands of international importance as Ramsar sites;
- The promotion of the sustainable use of all wetlands in the territory of each country; and
- International co-operation with other countries to further the sustainable use of wetlands and their resource.

2.1.1.3 The Habitats Regulations

In Scotland, the Habitats Directive is translated into specific legal obligations by the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994. This piece of legislation is commonly referred to as the Habitats Regulations.

The Habitats Regulations cover the requirements for:

- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and SPAs, which are sites that are internationally important for threatened habitats and species; making a network of sites designated together and known collectively as the Natura2000 network;
- Species requiring strict protection – i.e., European protected species; and
- Other aspects of the Habitats Directive including the management, surveillance and reporting for sites in order to ensure the favourable status of species and habitats are maintained.

The Habitats Regulations were most recently amended in 2012.

2.1.1.4 The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

The CBD was adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June 1992, and came into force in December 1993. It was the first global treaty to provide a legal framework for biodiversity conservation. The treaty has three primary goals:

- The conservation of biological diversity;
- The sustainable use of its components; and
- The fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources.

Signatories are required to create and enforce national strategies and action plans to conserve, protect and enhance biological diversity.

The UK Government ratified the convention and published the UKBAP in 1994 and to compliment the UKBAP, separate biodiversity strategies for each of the devolved governments have been subsequently developed, including the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, launched in 2004.

2.1.2 National Legislation

2.1.2.1 The Wildlife and Countryside Act

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) (WCA) is the principal mechanism for wildlife protection in the UK. Schedule 1 of the Act lists bird species that are afforded special protection. The principal designation established under the Act is the citation of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The Act also makes it an offence (with exception to species listed in Schedule 2) to intentionally:

- Kill, injure, or take any wild bird;
- Take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built; or
- Take or destroy an egg of any wild bird.



2.2 Best Practice Ecological Guidance

As part of the ecological desk study, cognisance has been taken of the following good practice guidelines:

- Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine (CIEEM, 2018); and
- Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisals (CIEEM, 2017).

2.3 Biodiversity

2.3.1 National Planning Framework 4

The 2022 UN Convention on Biological Biodiversity Conference of the Parties (COP15) addressed the role of planning through Target 12 of the new Global Biodiversity Framework (Scottish Government, 2023). This incorporates the 2020 Edinburgh Declaration and encourages local government to step up action. Scotland's draft Biodiversity strategy to 2045: tackling the nature emergency identifies 26 of the most urgent actions to achieve nature positive by 2030. These include ensuring positive effects on biodiversity under the National Planning framework are delivered, with development proposals contributing to the enhancement of biodiversity, restoring degraded habitats and building and strengthening nature networks.

Planning therefore has an important role in helping to address our damage to nature. This requires a new approach, one that halts and reverses biodiversity loss and better connects habitats and biodiversity rich areas. Simply minimising damage and replacing lost habitats and species will not address the decline in Scotland's biodiversity.

The Fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) therefore places climate and nature at the centre of the planning system and includes a cross-cutting outcome to improve biodiversity. Policy 1 gives significant weight to the global climate and nature crises to ensure that they are recognised as a priority in all plans and decisions. Policy 3 plays a critical role in ensuring that development will secure positive effects for biodiversity. It rebalances the planning system in favour of conserving, restoring and enhancing biodiversity and promotes nature-based solutions, benefiting people and nature. This policy intends to protect biodiversity, reverse biodiversity loss, deliver positive effects from development and strengthen nature networks, NatureScot (2023a).

2.3.2 Biodiversity Duty Report

Under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, all public bodies are required to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their public responsibilities and duties. Following an amendment to the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011, public bodies are required to publish a publicly available report on the actions they have taken to meet this biodiversity duty. The first report was required to be submitted by 1st January 2015, with the next reporting round in 2018.

2.3.3 Scottish Biodiversity List

Scottish Ministers created the SBL in 2005 to satisfy the requirements under Section 2(4) of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 and to assist public bodies in carrying out conservation of biodiversity, and to provide the general public with information regarding conservation within Scotland. The SBL effectively replaces the UKBAP. The list contains habitats, plants and species which are deemed to be of principal importance to the Scottish population and meet the social and scientific criteria. This report focuses on the scientific value of the SBL entries in version 1.5 of the list (NatureScot, 2020).

2.3.4 Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Launched on 1 April 2004, the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) for Inverclyde, Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire is a partnership initiative between the local authorities and a range of conservation organisations. The LBAP, which includes a range of actions for identified habitats and species to increase local biodiversity, was augmented with new action plans in 2008/09. The LBAP is also used to raise awareness of biodiversity in the area and to involve everyone including local communities, landowners, scientists,



industries and business in the process. The most recent version of the LBAP is Inverclyde's Biodiversity Report 2011-2014 (Inverclyde Council, 2017).

The LBAP identifies key habitats and species each of which has a specific action plan and those of relevance to the Proposed Sites include:

Habitats:

- Dwarf shrub heath;
- Unimproved grassland;
- Rivers and streams;
- Broadleaved and mixed woodland.

Species:

- Greater and lesser butterfly orchids (*Platanthera chlorantha* and *Platanthera bifolia*);
- Common juniper (*Juniperus communis*);
- Spignel (*Meum athamanticum*);
- Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*);
- Waxcaps (*Hygrocybe*);
- Black Grouse (*Tetrix tetrrix*);
- Hen harrier (*Circus cyaneus*);
- Lesser whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*);
- Pipistrelle bat (*Pipistrellus*);
- Otter (*Lutra lutra*); and
- Brown hare (*Lepus europaeus*).

2.3.5 Birds of Conservation Concern 5 (BoCC)

The leading government (JNCC) and non-government conservation organisations in the UK jointly reviewed the population status of the 246 bird species that are regularly found within the United Kingdom, using data from national monitoring schemes. This was most recently done in 2021 (Stanbury *et al.*, 2021). On the basis of seven quantitative criteria, each species has been placed on one of three lists, these being:

- **Red** – red-listed species are those that are globally threatened, have had an historical population decline in the UK from 1800 -1995, a rapid (> or = 50%) decline in UK breeding population over the past 25 years, or a rapid (> or = 50%) contraction of UK breeding range over the past 25 years;
- **Amber** – amber-listed species have had a historical population decline from 1800-1995 but are recovering; population size has more than doubled over the past 25 years, a moderate (25-49%) decline in UK breeding population over the past 25 years, a moderate (25-49%) contraction of UK breeding range over the past 25 years, a moderate (25-49%) decline in UK non-breeding population over the past 25 years, or species with unfavourable conservation status in Europe also known as Species of European Conservation Concern (SPEC); and
- **Green** – green-listed species have no identified threat to their population status.



3. Methods

3.1 Desk Study

The ecological desk study was carried out using a range of publicly available information sources to provide an understanding of the ecological context of the Study Area.

In terms of statutory nature conservation designations, the desk study identified any international designations, such as SPAs, SACs and Ramsar sites. Any national designations, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest SSSIs, National Nature Reserves (NNRs) or Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) were identified within 5 km of the Site boundary. Only ecological (biological) features were considered relevant to the present study. Any non-statutory designations, such as Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA), Local Biodiversity Sites (LBS), Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINCS), RSPB Important Bird Areas, Scottish Wildlife Trust Reserves (SWTR), Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS) or woodland areas included on the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI), were also identified within 2 km of the Site boundary.

Existing records for protected or otherwise notable species (e.g. SBL/LBAP priority species) were identified with 2 km of the centre point of the Site (NS 32087 71420). Only records from the last 10 years were considered relevant to the study.

Glasgow Museums Biological Record Centre is currently experiencing a temporary closure, and hence, we were not able to request data from them. The sources used were the following online databases:

- NBN Atlas (NBN Atlas, 2023);
- NatureScot SiteLink (NatureScot, 2023b);
- Scotland’s Environment Web (SEPA, 2023); and
- Ancient Woodland Inventory (Scotland) (Scottish Natural Heritage, 2018).

4. Results

4.1 Desk Study

4.1.1 Statutory and Non-Statutory Nature Conservation Designations

Two statutory nature conservation designation are present within 5 km of the Site, Renfrewshire Heights and Inner Clyde, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Statutory Nature Conservation Designations within 5 km of the Site

Name	Designation	Distance from Site	Description (NatureScot, 2023b)
Renfrewshire Heights	SPA	2 km south-west	Renfrewshire Heights SPA qualifies under Article 4.1 by regularly supporting a breeding population of European importance of the Annex 1 species hen harrier <i>Circus cyaneus</i> (an average of 10 breeding females annually between 1998 and 2004, 2% of GB).
	SSSI		As per SPA designation.
Inner Clyde	SPA	2.5 km north-east	The Inner Clyde SPA qualifies under Article 4.2 by regularly supporting an internationally important wintering



Name	Designation	Distance from Site	Description (NatureScot, 2023b)
			population of redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i> (1992/93- 96/97 winter peak mean of 2,107, 1% of Eastern Atlantic Flyway, 2% of British). This is one of the highest density wintering populations of redshank in Britain.
	Ramsar		As per SPA designation above.

One area of ancient woodland has been identified within 2 km of the Site boundary as detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Ancient Woodland within 2 km of the Site

Name	Distance to Site	Size (ha)	Type
Strathgryfe	0.99 km south	5.38 ha	Ancient (of semi-natural origin)

Eight non-statutory nature conservation designations are present within 2 km of the Site, including Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) and Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS) as detailed in Table 3 below.



Table 3: Non-Statutory Nature Conservation Designations within 2 km of the Site

Name	Designation & Distance / Direction from Site	Description
Flora of Devol Road	SINC North east of site boundary	<p>A mosaic of wet heathland and acid grassland with local areas of dry heath, bracken and gorse scrub. Grazing (cattle) and drainage have contributed to the variation shown in the heathland communities at the site.</p> <p>Much of the area is covered by purple moor-grass, heather, cross-leaved heath, wavy hair-grass, polytrichum moss, and Sphagnum moss. Local species include milkwort, green-ribbed sedge, jointed rush, soft rush, Yorkshire fog, deer grass, mat grass, common sedge, bog asphodel, common cotton-grass and Devil’s-bit scabious.</p> <p>Rocky outcrops and drier areas support bell heather. Marshy areas support plants such as marsh cinquefoil, marsh pennywort, ragged robin and tufted hair-grass. Local flushes are boggy in character and host a greater abundance of Sphagnum mosses.</p>
Devol Road Upland	LNCS North east of site boundary	<p>There is a mosaic of wet heathland and acid grassland with local areas of dry heath, bracken and gorse scrub. Grazing (cattle) and drainage have contributed to the variation shown in the heathland communities at the site.</p> <p>Much of the area is covered by Purple Moor-grass, Heather, Cross-leaved Heath, Wavy Hairgrass, Polytrichum Moss and Sphagnum Moss. Local species include Milkwort, Green-ribbed Sedge, Jointed Rush, Soft Rush, Yorkshire Fog, Deergrass, Mat Grass, Common Sedge, Bog Asphodel, Common Cotton-grass and Devil’s-bit Scabious.</p> <p>Rocky outcrops and drier areas support Bell Heather. Marshy areas support plants such as Marsh Cinquefoil, Marsh Pennywort, Ragged Robin and Tufted Hairgrass. Local flushes are boggy in character and host a greater abundance of Sphagnum Mosses.</p>
Jock's Craig to Black's Craig	LNCS 0.92 km south-east	<p>This is an upland area partly modified by grazing (cattle and sheep) but retaining a mosaic of wet heathland, dry heathland and acid grassland communities with Bracken, Gorse and rock outcrops.</p> <p>Wet heathland areas support carpets of Polytrichum Moss and Sphagnum Moss with Heather, Purple Moor-grass, Cross-leaved Heath, Round-leaved Sundew, Bog Asphodel and Common Cotton-grass.</p> <p>Drier areas of heathland merge with acid grassland communities and include plants such as Wavy-hair grass, Blaeberry, Tormentil, Heather, Bracken, Bell Heather, Harebell, Mat Grass, Green-ribbed Sedge and Gorse.</p>



Name	Designation & Distance / Direction from Site	Description
		<p>Occasional flushes of an acidic character support Jointed Rush, Marsh Cinquefoil, Marsh Pennyworth, Heth Spotted Orchid, Sphagnum Mosses, Common Sedge, Common Yellow Sedge, Glaucous Sedge and Star Sedge.</p> <p>Tree coverage at Black's Craig includes Rowan and Downy Birch with Alder, Hawthorn and Ash. Fauna recorded at the site includes Common Frog and Snipe.</p>
Crosshill Road Heath	LNCS 1.33 km north-east	<p>This is a site of local interest that comprises areas of acid grassland, Bracken, Heathland, rock exposure, Broom scrub and mire vegetation.</p> <p>The small area of mire habitat grades to marsh and supports a local abundance of Sphagnum Moss with Common Cotton-grass, Bogbean, Water Horsetail, Soft Rush, Jointed Rush, Lesser Spearwort and Marsh Cinquefoil.</p> <p>Areas of acid grassland comprise Mat Grass, Red Fescue, Wavy-hair grass, Devil's-bit Scabious, Harebell, Tormentil and Sweet Vernal Grass. Wetter areas grade to heathland and support Heather, Purple Moor-grass, Blaeberry, Bog Asphodel and Heath Rush, Bell Heather and English Stonecrop occur on rocky outcrops.</p>
Green Water	LNCS 1.59 km south	<p>This is an extensive and important water course corridor forming the survey boundary. The margins, particularly where steeper as in the central stretch, support diverse woodlands, although the sides are open or scrubby for long stretches, particularly to the west. The corridor role of the burn is emphasised by serving as a link between the various feeder tributaries, all supporting similar habitat structures.</p> <p>Woodland canopy includes Oak, Ash, Sycamore, Birch, Hazel, Bird Cherry, Rowan and the numerous ground flora records include more acidic Birch-oak, woodland types e.g., Creeping Soft-grass, Wood Sage, Wood Sorrel, Bluebell, Greater Stitchwort, Broad Buckler Fern, Great Woodrush, Wavy Hair-grass, Honeysuckle but also indicators of more base enrichment e.g., Dog's Mercury, Marsh Hawk's-beard, Primrose, Wood Crane's-bill, Giant Fescue, Wood Melick, Sweet Woodruff and Oak Fern.</p> <p>Local grassland relics add to the diversity with records including Devil's-bit Scabious, Whorled Caraway, Bird's-foot Trefoil, Mouse-ear Hawkweed, Common Heathgrass, Eyebright, Heath Speedwell, Slender St John's Wort, Northern Bedstraw Spignel and Bitter Vetch.</p> <p>The non-native and usually invasive Japanese Knotweed is present around Burnbank Bridge, (NS 322695) and could be monitored.</p>



Name	Designation & Distance / Direction from Site	Description
		<p>The sand martin colony situated within the exposed banking along the Green Water around Burnbank Bridge (NS 325694) is an interesting additional feature to the LNCS.</p>
Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park	LNCS 1.96 km south-west	<p>Main conservation interest in Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park for habitats are active blanket bog, unimproved grassland, standing water, and for species, hen harrier, juniper and black grouse.</p>
Burnbank Water	LNCS 1.97 km south	<p>This is a short stretch of burn (extending to the moorland to the west) with narrow sides, but where locally steep, supporting some relic woodland elements. Woody cover includes older Sycamore, Ash and Rowan but tends to be scrubby with Rowan, Willows, Hawthorn and Broom plus local strands of Bracken. Ground flora is waivable with some woodland elements (e.g., Wood-sorrel, Wood Sage, Great Woodrush, Dog's Mercury and various ferns. Below, some tall herbs including Meadowsweet, Valerian and Wood Crane's-bill. Local areas of more open margins with various grassland herbs also occur (e.g., Bir's-foot Trefoil, Harebell, Tormentil, Common Cat's-ear etc).</p> <p>Burnside, after Gateside Bridge, is initially scrubby with Hazel, Rowan, Ash, Sycamore and Broom and limited associates (e.g., Great Woodrush, Common Violet, Wood-sorrel, Pink Purslane, Yellow Flag Iris and ferns) but becomes mature woodland to the east with much Beech plus Sycamore, Ash and Pine over poached grassland.</p> <p>The Burnbank Water has a relatively important local ecological position as a wildlife habitat corridor.</p>
Craigmarloch Wood	LNCS 1.97 km east	<p>There is a mature plantation of Sessile Oak and Sycamore with Scot's Pine, Birch, Rowan and Ash. The understorey is dominated by Bracken in several areas but also includes Bluebell, Wood Sage, Foxglove, Yorkshire Fog, Creeping Soft-grass, Heath Bedstraw and Wood Sorrel.</p> <p>In sections where Scot's Pine has fallen, heathland is regenerating with Birch.</p> <p>At the northern edge of the wood there is scattered Gorse and relic heathland communities of Heather, Mat Grass, Sweet Vernal Grass, bell Heather, Blaeberry, Purple Moor-grass and Common Cotton-grass. Wetter areas support Round-leaved Sundew, Bog Asphodel, Heath Spotted Orchid, Soft Rush and Common Sedge.</p>



Name	Designation & Distance / Direction from Site	Description
		A local area of swamp vegetation is dominated by Bottle Sedge with Water Horsetail, Soft Rush and Jointed Rush. Local areas of marsh host Marsh Cinquefoil and Marsh Pennywort.



4.1.2 Invasive Plant Species

There are no records of non-native, invasive species within 2 km of the Site.

4.1.3 Protected or otherwise notable species

There are no records of protected or otherwise notable animal species within 2 km of the Site.



5. References

Inverclyde Council. Inverclyde, Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire Local biodiversity Action Plan. Available online at: <https://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/planning-and-the-environment/planning-policy/natural-heritage/biodiversity-and-natural-heritage-designations> (accessed August 2023).

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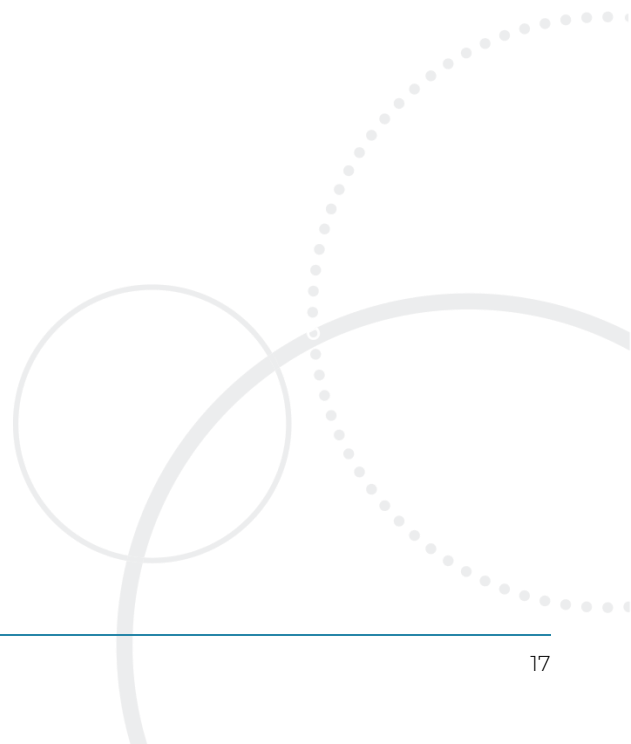
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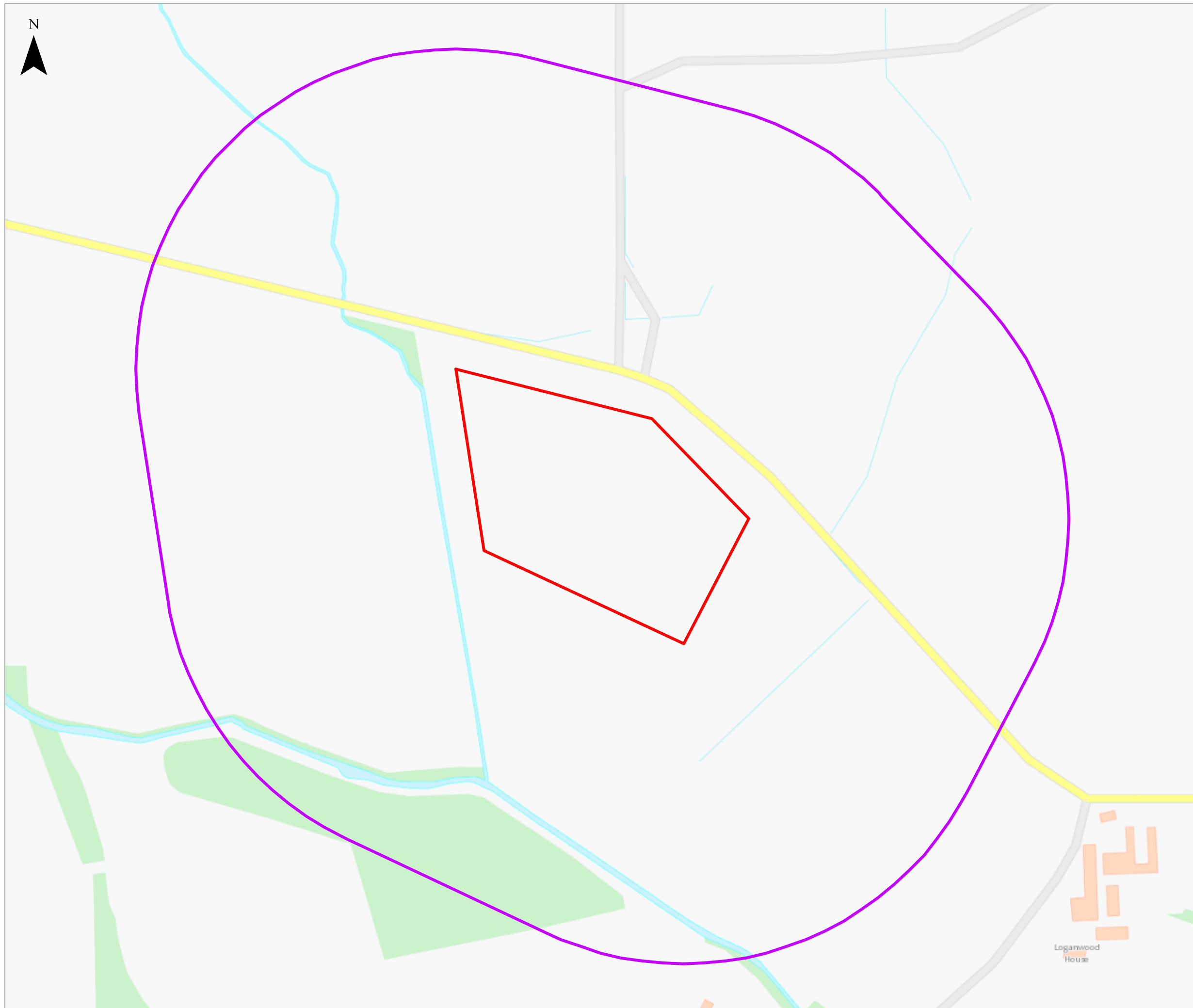
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6. Drawings

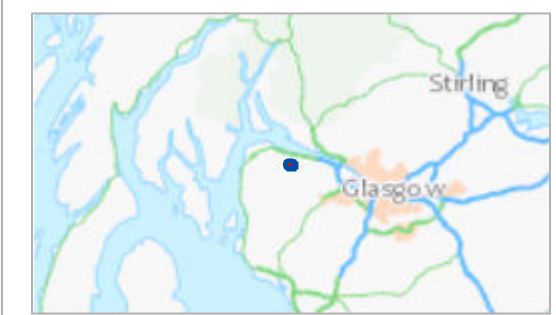
Drawing 1: Site Location





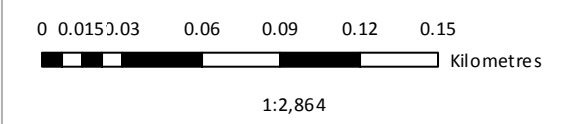
KEY

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- Area 1 250m buffer



Coordinate System: British National Grid
 Projection: Transverse Mercator

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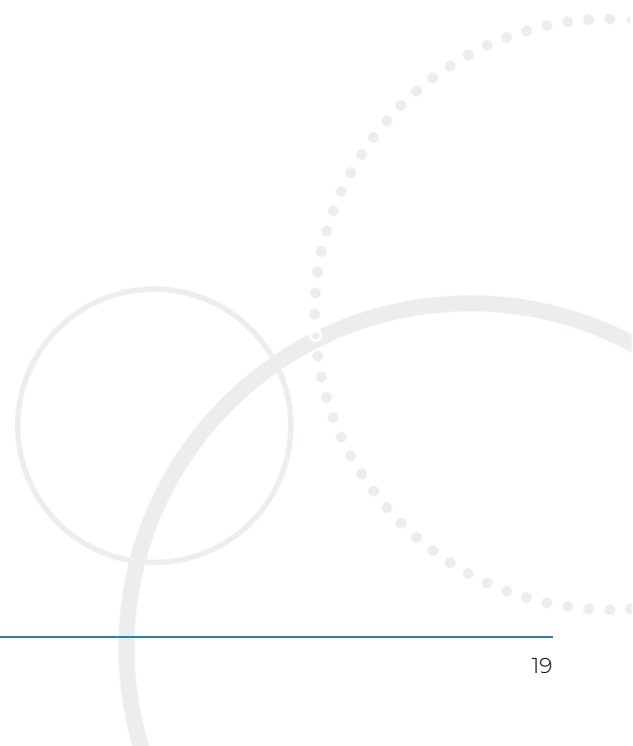
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 Ecology and Ornithology Surveys

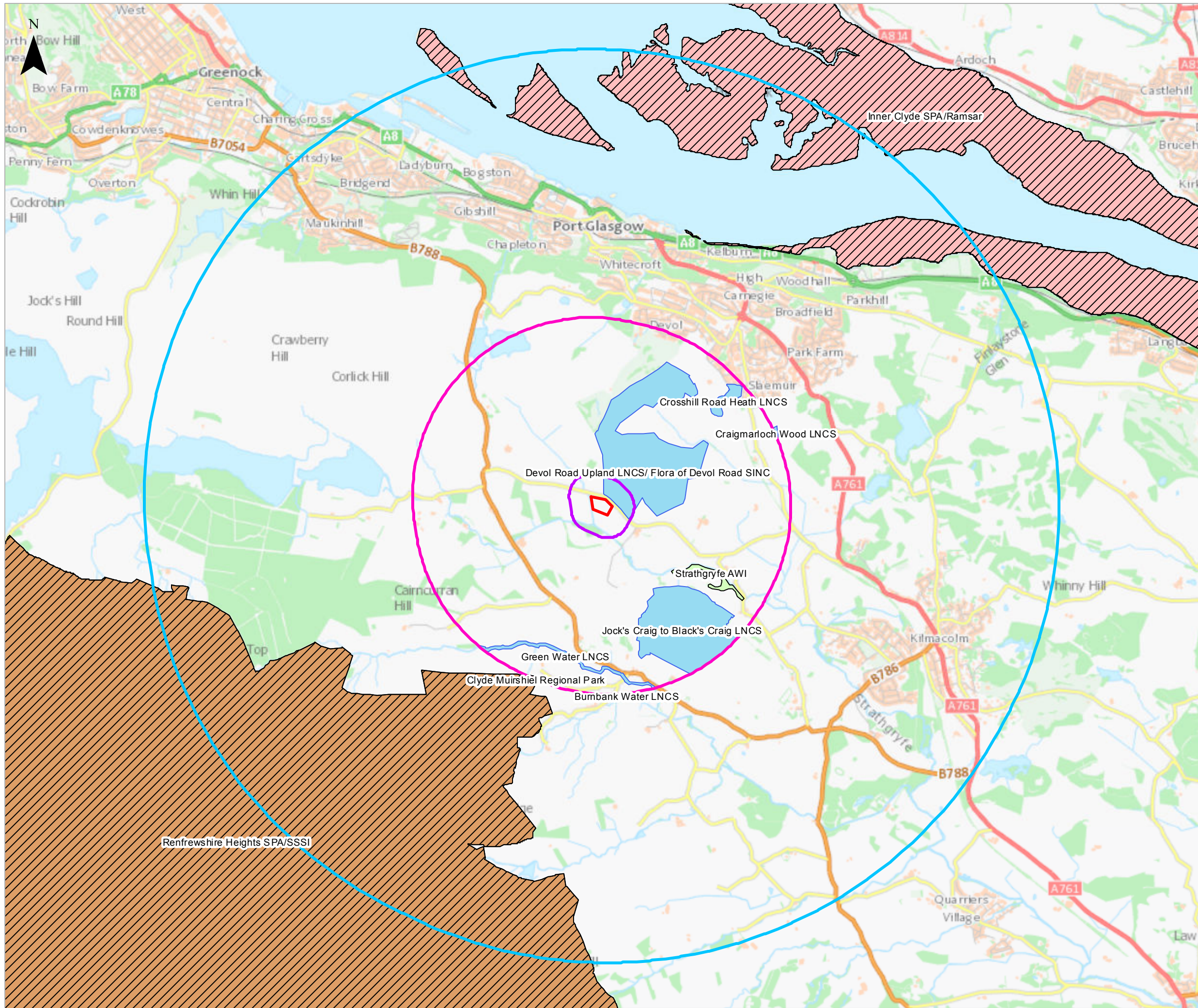
Drawing 1: Site Location

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Drawing 2: Nature Conservation Designations





KEY

- Site boundary - Area 1
- Area 1 250m buffer

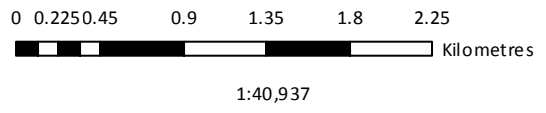
Designations

- 2 km buffer
- 5 km buffer
- Ancient Woodland Inventory
- Ramsar
- Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation & Local Nature Conservation Sites
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest
- Special Protection Areas



Coordinate System: British National Grid
Projection: Transverse Mercator

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High Mathernock
Ecology and Ornithology Surveys

Drawing 2: Nature Conservation Designations

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