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4. Brechin Landscape Capacity Study

4.1 Landscape Assessment

Natural Heritage Zone (SNH 2002):

Eastern Lowlands

Regional Landscape Character Type (LUC 1997):

Broad Valley Lowland

Landscape Character Unit (LUC 1997):

Strathmore

4.1.1 Landscape Character Assessment

The landscape and visual analysis is shown on figure 4.1.

Brechin is located within the Strathmore Landscape Character Unit of the Broad Valley Lowland Landscape Character Type of the Tayside Landscape Character Assessment. The fertile and favourable climate in Strathmore has led to a predominance of arable farming.

From a distance, Strathmore appears as a very broad, flat-bottomed valley enclosed by the Highland Foothills to the north; the rising sweep of the Sidlaws' north-facing dip slope to the south and the Low Moorland Hills to the east. Where estate planting survived, for example around Glamis, the strath landscape is rich and textured and particularly colourful during spring and autumn. Rectilinear fields are typically bounded by hedges and less typically drystone dykes. These were commonly associated with field boundary trees. Unfortunately many of these features have fallen into disrepair and/or been lost due to agricultural improvements since the 1950's. Where trees have been lost, the landscape appears open and expansive with rectangular fields punctuated by a scatter of large farmsteads.

The prosperity in farming in Strathmore tends to limit the occurrence of woodland in the landscape.

4.1.2 Landscape Setting

Brechin lies on the floor of the Strathmore immediately to the north of the River South Esk.

Whilst woodland cover within Strathmore is limited, around Brechin, it is more abundant than much of Strathmore for a number of reasons.

Woodland typically occupies the banks of the River South Esk. The way the river meanders almost as much as one kilometre from its general line of passage together with visual prominence of some of its steeper banks, gives the woodland associated with the River South Esk a significantly higher prominence than would otherwise be the case. The River South Esk is a Special Area of Conservation.

To the south of Brechin, located within a meander of the River South Esk is Brechin Castle. The policy woodlands in particular build upon the landscape woodland framework located along the line of the River South Esk. Policy woodland of the estate extend across the southern edge of Brechin and southwards for around one and half kilometres and link to the policies of Kinnaird to the south-east. Brechin Castle and its associated gardens, parklands and woodlands is listed in the Inventory of Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes.

The line of a former railway runs to the north and east of Brechin. The embankments and cutting of this route contains extensive areas of woodland and scrub adding still further to woodland in the landscape. Part of the disused railway contains the Brechin Nature Trail, a path which extends along much of the northern and north-eastern edges of Brechin. Despite being on the edge of the urban area, this is partially screened by the trees and shrubs along the route. The elevated position of the path affords extensive views over attractive countryside to the north and north-east. The quality of the experience when combined with its proximity and accessibility from the urban area make it one of Brechin's most significant recreational assets.

4.1.3 Settlement Form and Pattern

Brechin is one of the oldest towns and ecclesiastical centres in Scotland and is considered to be the ancient capital of The Picts. Reference to the existence of a Monastery at Brechin dated from 990AD. The oldest building is the Christian round tower at the south-west corner of the Cathedral, believed to have been built in the 10th century.

Medieval Brechin grew up to the north of the Cathedral. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the town expanded both eastwards and westwards. Areas of Council housing were built to the east and north-east of the town during the first half of the twentieth century. This extended the urban area up to the former railway embankment at the north eastern urban edge. During the second half of the twentieth century extensive areas of housing were built to the north of the town extending the urban area beyond the disused railway line.

Brechin today is bounded by the embankment of the disused railway line to the north-east. To the north-west the urban area sits below a shoulder of higher ground. The embankment of the A90(T) runs parallel with the north western boundary. The southern boundary is defined by a combination of the River South Esk, Skinner's Burn and the walls and woodland of Brechin Castle Estate.

4.2 Visual Assessment

Refer to figure 4.2 for key to photographs

4.2.1 Views Out or Across Settlement

The most important views out of Brechin are from the Brechin Nature Trail which follows part of the route of the disused railway line to the north of Brechin (see photo 4.1). The trail affords extensive views across open countryside to the north and north-east. However, as a small hillside town views to the open countryside are common.

4.2.2 Views of Settlement

The location of Brechin on a south facing hillside means that views of the town are most widespread from higher ground to the south. This includes the core paths around Burghill. However important views of Brechin from the north from both the A90(T) and other northerly approaches together with core paths to the north, often give views of the town with the steeple of Brechin Cathedral and the specimen tree of Brechin Castle policies as a backdrop (see photos 4.2, 4.3, 4.6 and 4.12).

4.2.3 Approaches

Views from A90(T)

Travelling northwards, views of industrial units within the business park will in time be masked by the woodland recently planted along the roadside. Housing on the western edge of Brechin is visible but its location below a moderate slope substantially helps to soften this edge. This housing is slightly more prominent when travelling southwards. Despite the proximity of the urban area to the A90(T), the favourable topography contributes to giving this urban edge moderate visual strength (see figure 4.2 and photos 4.5 & 4.6).

Approach from West via A935 (Castle Street)

The wooded nature of western Brechin prevents views into Brechin. Accordingly it is only at the 30 mph sign beside the Brechin Castle gate house does one get a strong impression of entering the urban area. This entrance is framed by stone walls and mature trees which also create a very strong visual edge to the settlement. Brechin Business Park is separated from the built edge of Brechin by agricultural land, and currently creates a potentially confusing false sense of arrival, but will in time be corrected with the development of the land allocated at Dubton in the Angus Local Plan Review. (see photos 4.7 and 4.8).

Approach from South via A933 (River Street)

Views of Brechin are not possible until one crosses Brechin Bridge over the River South Esk, which provides a strong gateway to the urban area. The river together with trees and shrubs on its banks creates a strong visual edge to the settlement from this direction (see photo 4.9).

Approach from East via A935 (Montrose Street)

Views of Brechin become possible as one crosses the Den of Leuchland. The housing of Dumachlie Loan are visible to the north with industrial development immediately along the roadside to south. Slight undulations in topography, together with occasional trees close to the urban edge give the edge a moderate visual strength. However development along one side only of this road creates a weak gateway to the urban area (see photo 4.10).

Approach from North-East via U442 (Towards East Pitforthie)

The dense woodland along the disused railway line substantially masks and softens views of Brechin from this approach giving a strong visual edge from this direction (see photo 4.11).

Approach from North via C40 (Towards Mains of Pitforthie)

Views of housing at Golf Park Road are possible after one passes Mains of Pitforthie. From this approach the housing sits below undulating topography giving this boundary moderate visual strength. Woodland associated with the disused railway line as well as trees and woodland at Glencaddam House substantially screen views of Brechin to the south creating a strong visual edge (see photos 4.3 and 4.12).

Approach from North via B966 (Trinity Road)

Glimpses of Brechin are possible north of Unthank. However it is only as one passes the cottage on the western side of the road at Unthank does one gain significant views of the Golf Park Road development. The remainder of the urban area is effectively hidden by mature woodland. The absence of views of Golf Park Road housing from the wider landscape together with woodland to the east gives this urban edge moderate visual strength (see photos 4.13 and 4.14).

Approach from North via C30 (Cookston Road)

Brechin is hidden by the embankment of the A90T until one passes through the underpass. Immediately after the underpass the built-up mass of Brechin lies on lower ground beyond the urban edge. The urban edge is partially screened by the linear gorse shrub along the northern side of the road. On the southern side of the road Carnegie Crop Services contribute to a countryside character before the urban area is entered. The urban edge from this approach has moderate visual strength (see photo 4.15).

Approach from North-West via U415 (Pittendriech Road)

Brechin is hidden by the embankment of the A90(T) until one passes under the underpass. Housing at Banks of Brechin along the Pittendriech Road are situated at the foot of the A90(T) embankment to the north-east of Pittendriech Road only. Despite this, the embankment together with extensive hedges helps create an urban edge of moderate visual strength (4.16).

4.3 Detailed Analysis of Directions of Growth

Refer to figure 4.3 for key to directions of growth analysed below.

4.3.1 North-West and North (north of U415 Pittendriech Road and west of B966 Trinity Road)

The position of Brechin on a south facing hillside has led to the most northerly part of the urban area being at the highest elevation (up to 90m above sea level). This is around 70 metres higher than the lowest parts of the town. The higher ground is typically more visible in the wider landscape, with simply topography and less woodland cover than typically found at lower elevations.

The A90(T) passes Brechin raised on an embankment around 170m from the north-western edge of the town. Despite this proximity, the A90(T) maintains a rural character. East of Cookston Road the area between the embankment and the town contains public informal open space and area of woodland planted as part of the millennium forest. The remainder is in agriculture. This area is visually contained and bounded by the A90(T) embankment and the urban edge and is best suited to urban fringe uses such as parks and woodland, which can provide a buffer to the edge of the town; and preserve the identity of Brechin separate to the A90(T). The location of the woodland and recreational uses adjacent to the settlement lead to them having high landscape value. Landscape character sensitivity is high, but visual sensitivity is considered to be low. Whilst the proximity and elevated position of the A90(T) largely restricts the development potential of this area due to issues of noise and overlooking, there may be scope for some development adjacent to the urban edge, but the inclusion of woodland closer to the A90(T) to act as a buffer would be desirable. Lastly, it is understood that noise mitigation would likely be required as part of any development. Given the elevated position of the dual carriageway, there would be a risk that noise mitigation would in itself be visually intrusive, which may reduce overall capacity. Overall, there is considered to be medium landscape capacity for urban extension within this strip.

Further north, east of C30 (Cookston Road), a shallow but locally pronounced ridge of higher ground crosses west to east from the A90(T) towards Unthank. This part of the landscape is open in character and highly visible in the wider landscape. From the A90(T) travelling southwards, this ridge partially screens views of the northern edge of the town, with the steeple of Brechin Cathedral protruding above the ridge. Burghill is also visible to the south of Brechin (see photo 4.6). An urban extension progressing further onto higher ground would potentially affect the setting of Brechin. However, to the east of C30 (Cookston Road), adjacent to the urban edge, the land is relatively flat and screened by the ridge to the north. There would therefore be the potential for limited development in this area. There is therefore considered to be both high landscape character and visual sensitivity, but with sensitivities reducing to low on the flat ground adjacent to Cookston Road. Landscape capacity for urban extension in this direction therefore ranges from medium to no capacity.

4.3.2 North-East (east of B966 Trinity Road and north of U442 towards East Pitforthie)

The line of the disused railway arcs around the northern and north-eastern edges of Brechin. It is upon an embankment at the B966 end but becomes in cutting as it passes the Glencaddam Distillery, continuing within a shallow cutting until it meets Drumachlie Loan. The route is now core path 053 and part of the Brechin Path Network. The path further connects to core path 054 to Mains of Pitforthie. The disused railway is lined with mature trees which fully encloses the built area of Brechin in this direction. This includes housing, recreation areas, the cemetery and the distillery.

To the north lies open countryside with the ground steadily rising northwards. To the north of the railway is Glencaddam House set within mature policy woodland. A small burn passes either side of Glencaddam House, each lined by trees. The topography in this area is complex and small scale. This combined with the trees and woodlands interspersed with farmland in close proximity to core paths 053 and 054 leads to an area of high scenic value. This area is considered to have both high landscape character sensitivity and landscape value, both of which reduce to medium towards the east. The rising ground north of the disused railway becomes progressively more prominent in the wider landscape thereby increasing visual sensitivity in this direction. There is considered to be no landscape capacity for urban extension in this direction.

4.3.3 East (east of C40 Drumachlie Loan)

Drumachlie Loan is an almost straight road extending directly up the rising ground north of the A935. Towards the south, the Caledonian Railway crosses Drumachlie Loan dividing the eastern side of Brechin into two. Between the A935 and the Caledonian Railway the ground is relatively flat agricultural fields. The Montrose Road Business Park lines the A935 to the south. To the east there is small burn lined with trees and slightly further east is the wooded Den of Leuchland. South of the A935, built development extends east to the Den of Leuchland, therefore either of the two watercourses would provide a strong bounding feature for any future urban extension. This area has low landscape character and visual sensitivity together with medium landscape value due to its proximity to the urban area. This area has high capacity for urban extension.

To the north of the Caledonian Railway, around Drumachlie Farm, the ground starts to gently rise, slightly increasing visibility in the wider landscape. However, trees along the line of the disused railway form a strong bounding feature and would substantially assist in partially screening and framing new development west of the disused railway when viewed in the wider landscape. This area has high landscape capacity for urban extension.

East of the line of the disused railway the landscape is more open with extensive views. Landscape value and visual sensitivity increase correspondingly, leading to medium landscape capacity for urban extension towards the south reducing to low further north.

4.3.4 South (south of A935 Castle Street/ policies of Brechin Castle)

Around one kilometre south of Brechin the land rises abruptly towards Burghill. The River South Esk meanders across the flatter, rolling land between Brechin and Burghill, changing direction abruptly as it meets escarpments of rising ground to both the north and south. Brechin Castle is situated above one such escarpment and bend in the river. The more formal policies of Brechin Castle occupy this area south of Brechin and this area is listed in the Inventory of Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes. The policies contain extensive areas of woodland around the castle itself; along the course of the river and also forming a strong landscape framework more widely with long rectilinear belts of mixed woodland lining public roads and sometimes partially enclosing arable fields. The southern edge of A935 is bounded by policy woodland between the A90(T) junction and the western edge of Brechin. Similarly, an extensive woodland belt lines the eastern side of the B9134 when approaching from the south. The eastern side of the A935 is further defined by the stone wall marking the edge of the more formal area of the policies. This wall continues eastwards along the A935 towards the historic centre of Brechin. This wall defines the extent of the nationally important Historic Garden and Designed Landscape, but the designed landscape extends further west forming a designed landscape of regional or local importance.

The designed landscape aspects of this entire area lead to high landscape character sensitivity and landscape value. Development in this area would appear separate from Brechin. The policy woodlands often provide a good level of screening to areas south of the A935 when viewed from the north. However, there is typically little enclosure from the south to either screen, soften or visually contain development. Therefore when viewed from the higher ground to the south (including core paths 063 and 064 at Burghill), development would be visible south of the policy woodland which currently contains the southern edge of the western side of Brechin, giving rise to medium visual sensitivity. Whilst mitigation which would incorporate extensive woodland planting could partially address visual effects, the erosion of the character of the designed landscape and loss of landscape value would result in low landscape capacity for urban extension.

4.3.5 West (between the A935 Castle Street and A90(T))

The area west of Brechin bounded by the A90(T) and the A935 lies within the Brechin development boundary established by the Angus Local Plan Review (2009). The area includes the Brechin Castle Centre, Brechin Business Park and agricultural land identified as having potential to accommodate new development.

Approximately mid-way between the A90(T) and the A935 a shallow shoulder of land extends westwards. To the north of this rounded ridge, the land gently slopes down towards the A90(T), with the road being elevated on an embankment above the area around Dubton. To the south of the rounded ridge, the land gently slopes down towards the A935. The rounded ridge typically prevents inter-visibility between the A90(T) and the A935.

The Brechin Castle Centre and its associated parkland are located at the western end of the shoulder. This development has been integrated into the rural landscape by the inclusion of landscaping sympathetic to its location close to open countryside and the policies of Brechin Castle. Hedges and trees help break views of parking areas. Between the Brechin Castle Centre and the western edge of Brechin is the Brechin Business Park. Despite its role as a key employment area, this development has also incorporated substantial landscaping and has more of a semi-urban character from the A935. The significant woodland planting close to the A90(T) boundary, in time will soften and break views across the site from the A90(T).

Between the business park and the western edge of Brechin is Dubton. This area is allocated for housing within the Angus Local Plan Review (2009). Whilst the rounded ridge of higher ground continues through this area, the elevated A90(T) to the north has led to some inter-visibility between the A935 and the A90(T). The area is strongly bounded by the residential area of Brechin to the east; the A90(T) embankment to the north; woodland planting associated with the business park to the west; and the A935 and policy woodland to the south. Development as allocated at Dubton would consolidate the urban area. Whilst landform in this area is simple, an area of more complex and smaller scale landforms exist at the south-eastern part of this area, at the headwaters of Skinner's Burn. Landscape character sensitivity is considered to be high in this southern part decreasing northwards. Landscape capacity is considered to be high towards the north becoming low towards the south.

The inclusion of large growing trees on or close to the rounded ridge as it passes through the area would provide a combination of backdrop of development and providing localised visual containment from higher ground to the south and more locally (see photos 4.4 and 4.16). These could be incorporated as small woodlands, groups or lines of trees preferably within public areas with space allowed for the trees to develop without adversely affecting residential amenity. It is important that development is held back from the A90(T) with the inclusion of substantial woodland planting or other open space which can provide a buffer to the edge of the town; and preserve the identity of Brechin separate to the A90(T). The more sensitive area around the headwaters of the Skinner's Burn should remain free from development and be enhanced as part of the wider green network. Small-scale and complex landforms should be retained with additional woodland planting desirable to soften the edge of the housing development at Bearehill Brae. The headwater location together, with it being low lying relative to the area to the north, leads to this area having potential for a sensitively designed sustainable urban drainage system which respects landform and enhanced the green corridor.

Between the Brechin Castle Centre and the business park, the area is used for agriculture and horse grazing. Within this area, there is a line of lime trees along the rounded ridge. These trees are currently around 8 metres in height and further help visually separate the areas to the north and south of the rounded ridge (see photo 4.7). The policy woodland of Brechin Castle which lines the southern side of the A935 further contributes to a good level of visual containment to the south of the rounded ridge. Whilst this area would be visible alongside the A935, views from the wider landscape would be largely screened or softened by a combination of landform, trees and woodland (see photo 4.4). Whilst this area is close to the non-designated designed landscape, it is considered to have less landscape character sensitivity than the southern area of Dubton, where the underlying character is more sensitive to alteration and abutting the designated designed landscape. The northern side of the rounded ridge is more widely visible within the landscape from the north-west. Accordingly, visual sensitivity south of the rounded ridge is considered to be low but typically medium north of the ridge. Overall, landscape capacity is considered to be medium.

If an urban extension is considered west of the business park, retaining the existing landform and lime trees is considered necessary to retain landscape capacity for urban extension. The landform and the line of lime trees have an important role in visually containing development to the south of the rounded ridge. The landform and trees would also provide a strong backdrop to development to the north of the rounded ridge. These trees will continue to grow and their landscape role will increase rapidly. It is further desirable that the trees be incorporated into public realm areas of the development. In addition, it would be desirable that the hedge along the north side of the A935 be retained and supplemented by both specimen hedgerow trees similar to that at the garden centre to continue the rural estate character at least as far east as the existing business park. As with land at Dubton, it is important that development is held back from the A90(T) with the inclusion woodland planting or other open space which can provide a buffer to the edge of the town; and preserve the identity of Brechin separate to the A90(T). Avoiding prominent advertising on properties close to the A90(T) would similarly be desirable.

4.4 Conclusion

Brechin is located on south facing slopes to the north of the River South Esk. To the south, the designed landscape of Brechin Castle provides a strong landscape context for the town, but limits scope for urban expansion in that direction. There is a notable difference in elevation within the town, with the northern edge of Brechin being as much as 70 metres higher than on the lower ground close to the River South Esk. The higher more open character to the north, together with the proximity of the A90(T) limits landscape capacity for urban expansion.

The highest landscape capacity for urban extension lies to the east of Brechin and at Dubton to the west. To the west, there is compelling landscape logic in consolidating the urban area by developing the area at Dubton, linking the existing business park to Brechin. There is also a strong landscape framework locally to help absorb development.

To the east, the lower elevations reduce visibility in the wider landscape and existing bounding features along both watercourses close to the A935 and along the disused railway provide a strong landscape framework within which development could take place.

Beyond these areas, medium landscape capacity exists between the Brechin Castle Centre and the business park.



4.1 View North from Brechin Nature Trail (Core Path 053) ([click here to return to text](#))



4.2 View from Core Path 054 ([click here to return to text](#))



4.3 View from C40 at Core Path 054 ([click here to return to text](#))



4.4 Brechin from Core Path 063, Burghill ([click here to return to text](#))



4.5 View from A90(T) Northbound ([click here to return to text](#))



4.6 View from A90(T) Southbound ([click here to return to text](#))



4.7 Approach from West via A935 (Castle Street) ([click here to return to text](#))



4.8 Approach from West via A935 (Castle Street) ([click here to return to text](#))



4.9 Approach from South via A933 (River Street) ([click here to return to text](#))



4.10 Approach from East via A935 (Montrose Street) ([click here to return to text](#))



4.11 Approach from North-East via U442 (Towards East Pitforthie) ([click here to return to text](#))



4.12 Approach from North via C40 (Towards Mains of Pitforthie) ([click here to return to text](#))



4.13 Approach from North via B966 (Trinity Road) ([click here to return to text](#))



4.14 Approach from North via B966 (Trinity Road) ([click here to return to text](#))



4.15 Approach from North via C30 (Cookston Road) ([click here to return to text](#))



4.16 Approach from North-West via U415 (Pittendriech Road) ([click here to return to text](#))

Figure 4.1 Brechin Landscape and Visual Analysis (click here to return to text)

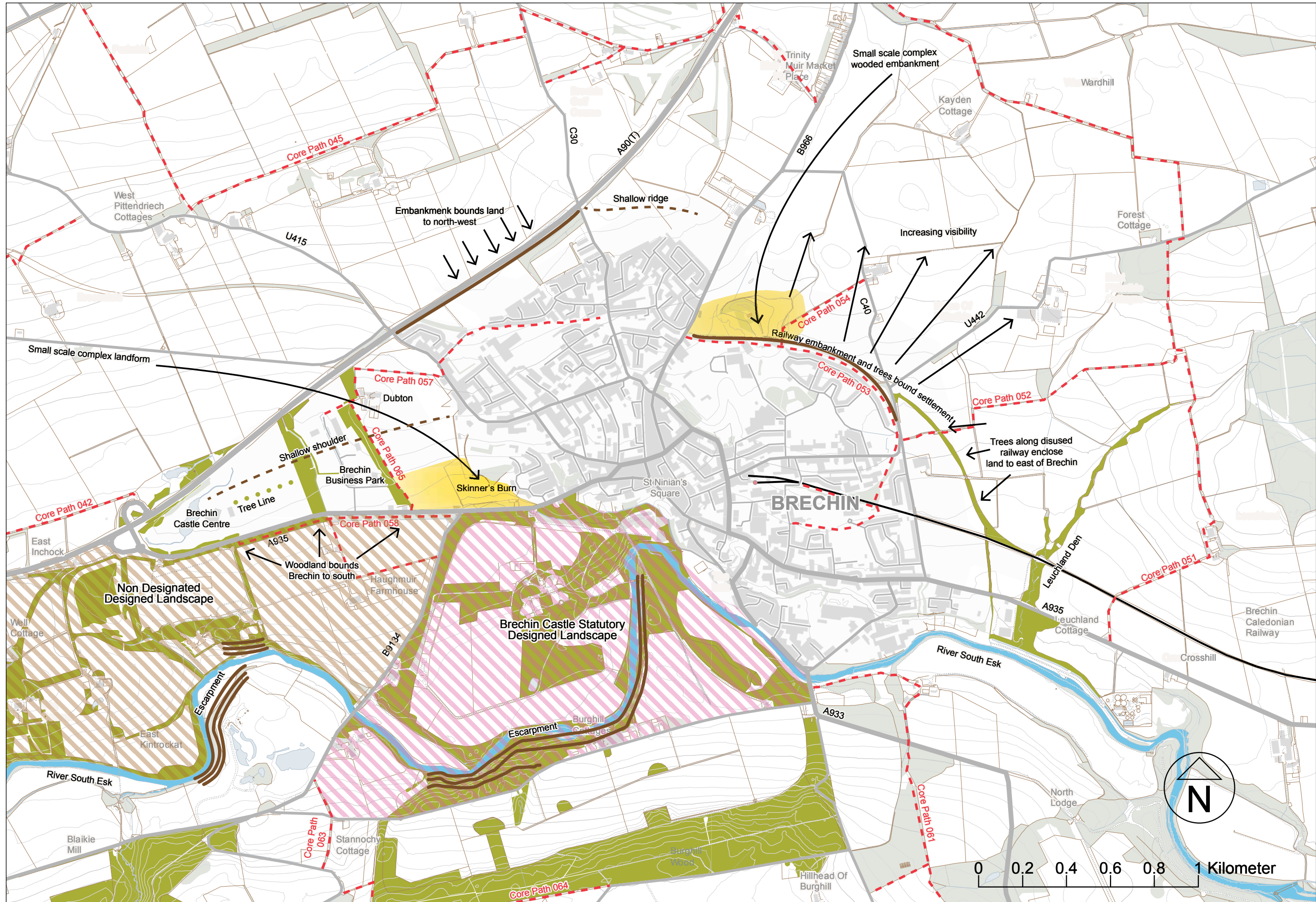


Figure 4.2 Brechin Key to Photographs (click here to return to text)

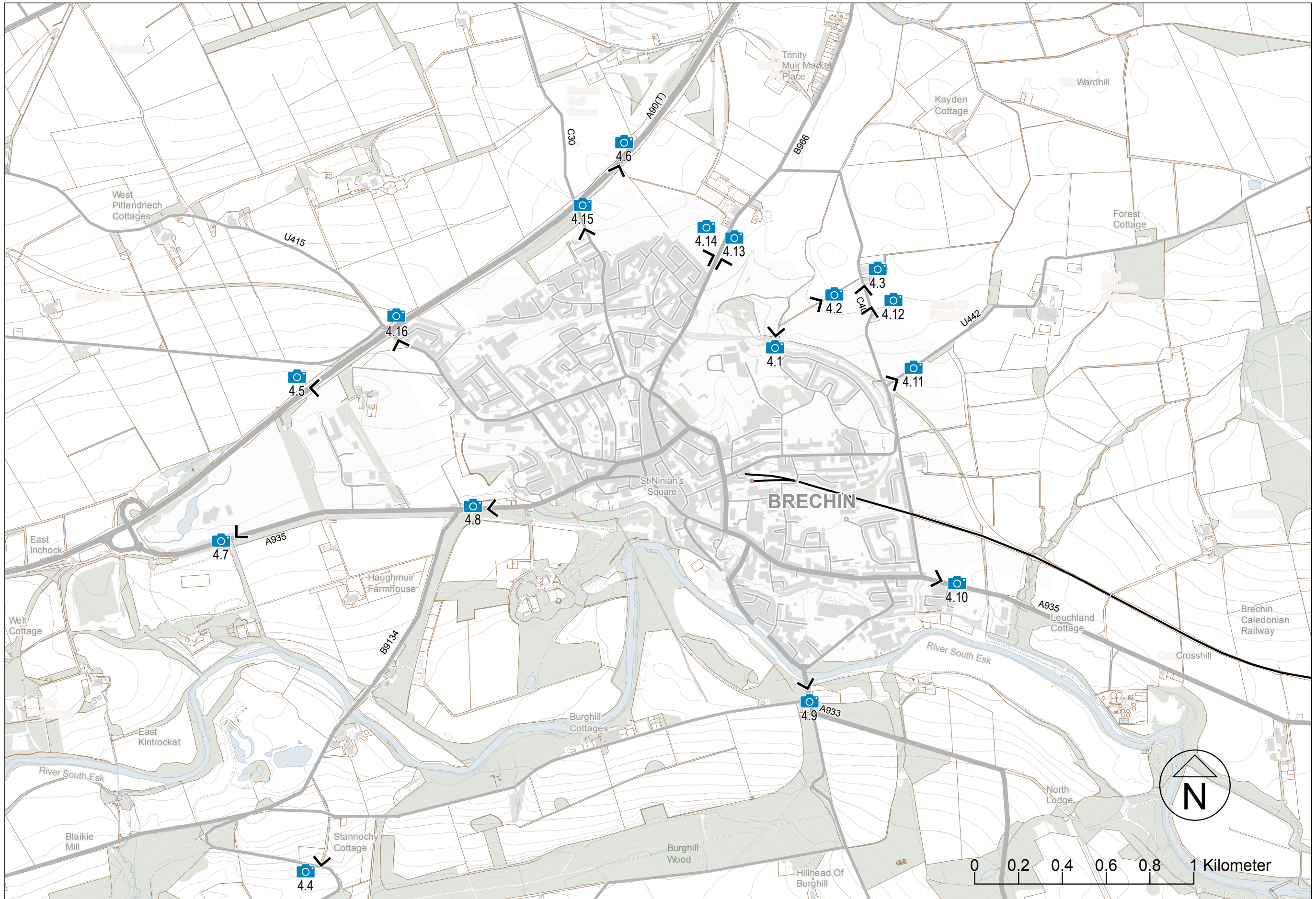


Figure 4.3 Brechin Key to Analysis of Directions of Growth ([click here to return to text](#))

