

Place and Environment - Natural Environment

PE13 Green and Blue Network

1. The Council will support the delivery of the Central Scotland Green Network in the Falkirk area, and Falkirk Greenspace: A Strategy for Our Green Network, through the development and enhancement of a multi-functional network of green and blue components and corridors as set out in the Spatial Strategy;
2. Within the green and blue network the key priorities of biodiversity, outdoor access, landscape character enhancement, climate change, placemaking and serving disadvantaged communities will be promoted, with particular reference to the opportunities detailed in the Proposals and Opportunities Schedule; and
3. New development should contribute to the green and blue network, where appropriate, through the integration of green infrastructure into masterplans or through enabling opportunities for green and blue network improvement on adjacent land, in accordance with SG05 'Green Infrastructure and New Development'.
4. The seven community growing sites identified at Appendix 1 (Proposal GN24) shall be safeguarded from development unless proposals can demonstrate, on a case-by-case basis, that there is no longer a proven demand for allotment space.

4.13 The Spatial Strategy sets out in broad terms how the Central Scotland Green Network, a national development within NPF3, will be implemented in the Falkirk area. The spatial focus will be on a series of green and blue network components and corridors which are illustrated in Map 3.2. The thematic priorities are set out in the Falkirk Greenspace Strategy. Policy PE13 supports the implementation of the Spatial Strategy, which will be through specific projects promoted by the Council and other partners, but also through the inclusion of green infrastructure such as landscaping, open space, habitats, active travel and sustainable water management in new development.

PE14 Countryside

1. The Urban and Village Limits defined on the Proposals Map represent the limit to the expansion of settlements. Land outwith these boundaries is designated as countryside. Development in the countryside will be assessed in terms of the relevant countryside policies for specific uses (HC05 and JE05);
2. Development proposals in the countryside for uses not covered by policies for specific uses will only be permitted where:
 - It can be demonstrated that they require a countryside location;
 - They constitute infill development; or
 - They utilise appropriate existing buildings.

Detailed guidance on the application of these criteria will be contained in Supplementary Guidance SG01 Development in the Countryside;
3. Development proposals in the countryside should additionally demonstrate that their scale, siting and design is such that there will be no significant adverse impact on the rural environment, having regard to other policies on the natural and historic environment, and design guidance in Supplementary Guidance SG01 'Development in the Countryside'.

4.14 The countryside is defined by the area outwith the urban and village limits. The strategy of the LDP is to direct new development in the rural area to existing villages in order to sustain their vitality and support existing village services and infrastructure. In so doing it seeks to prevent sporadic and intrusive development which could have a detrimental impact on the character of the countryside. However, there will be circumstances where development in the countryside will be appropriate.

PE15 Green Belt

1. The following areas are designated as Green Belt:
 - Falkirk/Stenhousemuir/Grangemouth/Laurieston Corridor;
 - Polmont/Grangemouth/Bo'ness/Linlithgow Corridor;
 - Falkirk/Larbert/Denny/Bonnybridge Corridor;
 - Callendar Park and Woods.
2. The purpose of the Green Belt is:
 - To direct development to the most appropriate locations and support regeneration;
 - To protect and enhance the character, landscape setting and identity of the settlement, including maintaining their visual separation;
 - To protect and provide access to open space.
3. Within the Green Belt, development will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that the proposal satisfies the relevant countryside policies, and it can be demonstrated that it will not undermine any of the purposes of the Green Belt as set out in (2) above.

4.15 The Green Belt forms an important part of the Spatial Strategy for the area. The primary purpose in the Falkirk area is to safeguard the identity of communities by preventing development which would reduce their visual separation. It provides a stronger presumption against development than the 'countryside' designation, and a more long term indication of the future shape of settlements. It forms a series of connected wedges between the main settlements. The protection of landscape setting and recreational greenspace around towns are important related objectives.

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PE16 Protection of Open Space

1. Development which will result in the loss of open space will only be permitted where:
 - There is no adverse effect on the character or appearance of the area, particularly through the loss of amenity space planned as an integral part of a development;
 - There will be no significant adverse effect on the overall recreational provision in the local area, taking account of the Council's open space standards (as defined within the Open Space Strategy), or the loss will be compensated for by qualitative improvements to other open space in the local area commensurate with its recreational value. Guidance on how loss of open space should be compensated is set out in Supplementary Guidance SG05 'Green Infrastructure and New Development';
 - The area is not of significant ecological value; and
 - Connectivity within, and functionality of, the wider green network is not threatened and public access routes in or adjacent to the open space will be safeguarded.
2. Where development would also involve the loss of outdoor sports facilities, it must additionally be demonstrated that:
 - The proposed development is ancillary to the principal use of the site as an outdoor sports facility; or
 - The proposed development involves a minor part of the outdoor sports facility which would not affect its use and potential for sport and training; or

- The outdoor sports facility which would be lost would be replaced by a new facility of comparable or greater benefit for sport and in a location which is convenient for its users, or by the upgrading of an existing outdoor sports facility to provide a better quality facility either within the same site or at another location which is convenient for its users and which maintains or improves the overall playing capacity in the area; or
- The Council's pitch strategy and consultation with Sportscoil has shown that there is a clear excess of provision to meet current and anticipated demand in the area, and that the site could be developed without detriment to the overall quality of provision.

4.16 Open space is vital to the quality of places, and fulfils a range of purposes including recreational, landscape, ecological, surface water management and active travel. The Council has prepared an Open Space Strategy, which is based on a detailed audit of its parks and open spaces, and sets out a vision, standards and priority actions for improving the open space resource. The Open Space Strategy recognises that there is an abundance of open space across the Council area, and that the main issue is one of quality rather than quantity. Not all open space performs a useful function. There may be opportunities to release open space which is of little or no value for alternative uses, including community growing, as part of beneficial development. Policy PE16 provides criteria for assessing potential losses of open space, and ensuring that open space of value continues to be protected or that, if there would be a loss of recreational amenity, this will be compensated by qualitative improvements to other open space in the vicinity. The policy will apply to all audited open spaces, as shown on the Proposals Map, but also to other smaller, incidental areas of open space. There are additional specific criteria for outdoor sports facilities, which are taken from Scottish Planning Policy. Outdoor sports facilities include playing fields, athletics tracks, golf courses, tennis courts and bowling greens.



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PE17 Open Space and New Development

New development should contribute positively to the provision of open space in the area and support the objectives of the Open Space Strategy. Accordingly:

1. Where appropriate, proposals for new development should include public open space to create a sense of place, integrate the site with the wider green network, promote physical activity, sport and active travel, enhance biodiversity, and manage water within the site; and
2. Where the quantity, quality or accessibility of recreational and sport open space and play facilities in the locality is insufficient to meet the recreational needs of proposed new residential development, as informed by the standards in the Open Space Strategy, the proposal should address the identified deficiencies through either the provision of new on-site recreational and sport open space, or contributions to the improvement of off-site open space.

The detailed planning and design of new open space within new developments, including the methodology for determining and addressing recreational open space deficiencies, should accord with SG05 'Green Infrastructure and New Development'.

4.17 New development should generally incorporate open space. The provision of open space should be guided by a design-led approach which captures the specific character and opportunities presented by the site, and looks at how open space can contribute to sustainability and placemaking in the development. The recreational needs of residents should also be addressed with reference to the standards set out in the Open Space Strategy. Where there are local deficiencies in provision these can be met either through new open space on the site, or financial contributions to upgrade existing off-site open space. SG05 'Green Infrastructure and New Development' provides more detailed guidance on the methodology for determining the provision of open space within developments.

PE18 Landscape

1. The Council will seek to protect and enhance landscape character and enhance landscape quality throughout the Council area in accordance with Supplementary Guidance SG09 'Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Designations';
2. Development within Local Landscape Areas should be designed to minimise any adverse effects on the landscape character and scenic interest for which the area is designated ; and
3. Development proposals which are likely to have significant landscape and visual effects must be accompanied by a landscape and visual assessment demonstrating that, with appropriate mitigation, a satisfactory landscape fit will be achieved.

4.18 The Falkirk area has a varied landscape, whose quality and character is important to the setting of settlements, and the area's image and identity. Local Landscape Areas (LLAs) identify the most important local landscapes (Denny Hills, Slamannan Plateau/Avon Valley and South Bo'ness). However, in line with the European Landscape Convention, there is a need to recognise the value of all landscapes within the area, and to take account of this in assessing development proposals. Supplementary Guidance SG09 'Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Designations' therefore provides information on forces for change, sensitivities and development guidance for all Landscape Character Areas.



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PE19 Biodiversity and Geodiversity

The Council will protect and enhance habitats and species of importance, and will promote biodiversity and geodiversity through the planning process. Accordingly:

1. Development likely to have a significant effect on Natura 2000 sites (including Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, and Ramsar Sites) will be subject to an appropriate assessment. Qualifying interests of a Natura 2000 site may not be confined to the boundary of a designated site. Where an assessment is unable to conclude that a development will not adversely affect the integrity of the site, development will only be permitted where there are no alternative solutions, there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including of a social or economic nature and compensatory measures are provided to ensure that the overall coherence of the Natura network is protected. Where the site has been designated for a European priority habitat or species, consent can only be issued in such cases where the reasons for overriding public interest relate to human health, public safety, beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment or for other reasons subject to the opinion of the European Commission (via Scottish Ministers);
2. Development affecting Sites of Special Scientific Interest will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that the overall objectives of the designation and the overall integrity of the designated area would not be compromised, or any significant adverse effects are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of national importance;
3. Development likely to have an adverse effect on European protected species; a species listed in Schedules 5, 5A, and 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended); or badgers as per section 10 of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, will only be permitted where the applicant can demonstrate that a species licence is likely to be granted;

4. Development affecting Local Nature Reserves, Wildlife Sites, Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation and Geodiversity Sites (as identified on the Proposals Map and in Supplementary Guidance SG08 'Local Nature Conservation and Geodiversity Sites'), and national and local priority habitats and species (as identified in the Falkirk Local Biodiversity Action Plan) will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that the overall integrity of the site, local habitat or local species population will not be compromised, or any adverse effects are clearly outweighed by social or economic benefits of substantial local importance;
5. Where development is to be approved which could adversely affect any site, habitat or species of significant local nature conservation value, the Council will require appropriate mitigating measures to conserve and secure future management of the relevant natural heritage interest. Where habitat loss or fragmentation is unavoidable, the creation of replacement habitat to compensate for any negative impacts will be required, along with provision for its future management. Where adverse impacts on locally important species are unavoidable, measures to protect and enhance the wider local population of that species will be required; and
6. All development proposals should conform to Supplementary Guidance SG07 'Biodiversity and Development'.

4.19 Biodiversity is the variety of life that exists on earth. Public bodies have a duty under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 to further the conservation of biodiversity. An important part of this is the safeguarding of identified sites, habitats and species which are protected under national legislation, and international obligations such as the Habitats and Bird Directives. In addition, the Falkirk area has a system of non-statutory local nature conservation sites (Wildlife Sites, Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation and Geodiversity Sites) and a Local Biodiversity Action Plan which identifies a number of priority species and habitats.

4.20 Policy PE19 provides general support for biodiversity as a consideration within the planning process, and sets out the level of protection which will be afforded to the hierarchy of sites, species and habitats. Supplementary Guidance SG07 'Biodiversity and Development' provides guidance on how biodiversity should be safeguarded and promoted through development, including the control of non-native invasive species on development sites. Supplementary Guidance SG08 'Local Nature Conservation and Geodiversity Sites' provides further information on the non-statutory local sites which have been reviewed through LDP2.

