

PROFILE

14.1 The rural area of Falkirk Council has a population of around 12,900. For the purposes of housing land requirements, the Structure Plan divides the area into two, north and south, with the Forth and Clyde Canal as the boundary. There are 18 identified village communities:

Rural South

Allandale
Avonbridge
Blackness
California
Greenhill
Limerigg
Muirhouses
Shieldhill
Slamannan
Standburn
The Loan (Muiravonside)
Whitecross

Rural North

Airth
Dunmore
Letham
Skinflats
South Alloa
Torwood

14.2 The villages are varied in character. The southern Braes villages of Avonbridge, Limerigg, Slamannan, Standburn, and Whitecross are former mining communities which have experienced population and economic decline. They enjoy attractive settings but have suffered from physical isolation and lack of investment. Local authority housing generally predominates. Shieldhill is the exception, experiencing large scale private housing growth since 1980. The northern villages are more diverse, enjoy better access to the larger towns and are generally more prosperous. Airth is the largest, and has been subject to planned expansion under the previous Rural Local Plan. Several of the villages have significant built heritage protected by Conservation Area status.

14.3 The landscape of the rural area is equally varied, from the flat carseland along the Forth Estuary through the landward river valleys at the centre of the area, to the uplands in the south and west. This supports a mosaic of important wildlife habitats.

14.4 The economy of the rural area was traditionally based on the primary activities of mining, agriculture, forestry and water supply, but all these activities have declined. Rural employment opportunities are very limited and the majority of economically active rural residents commute to the urban centres for work.

14.5 The previous planning approach to the area has been one of revitalisation based on key village development and rural enhancement. This identified the key villages of Airth, Slamannan and Avonbridge as a focus for housing growth.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

14.6 The Falkirk Council Structure Plan provides for:

- 550 houses to be built in the Rural North area from 2001-2020, with 409 in the Local Plan period to 2015;
- 450 houses to be built in the Rural South area from 2001-2020 (excluding SIRRs), with 331 in the Local Plan period to 2015.
- Slamannan and Whitecross to be Special Initiatives for Residential-led Regeneration;
- The former Manuel Works, Whitecross identified as a Strategic Development Opportunity;
- General protection of the open countryside from development not requiring a rural location; and
- Support for regeneration initiatives targeted at the villages of Slamannan, Limerigg, Avonbridge and Standburn.

KEY LOCAL ISSUES

- 14.7 The key issues for the rural area are:
- The need to meet Structure Plan housing land requirements in a way which is sensitive to village character;
 - The need to stimulate regeneration in villages experiencing population and economic decline;
 - The need to improve the environment of the villages;
 - The need to retain and improve local services and community facilities within the villages;
 - The need to take account of infrastructure constraints such as drainage capacity in determining where growth can take place;
 - The need to protect, enhance and improve access to the natural and built heritage of the rural area;
 - The need to safeguard village communities from the adverse effects of mineral extraction and waste management; and
 - The need to encourage diversification of the rural economy in a sustainable way.

LOCAL PLAN SUMMARY

- 14.8 The Local Plan proposes the following key provisions for the Rural Area:
- Housing land requirements in the Rural North area to be met by existing commitments and further growth at Airth, Letham and Torwood;
 - Housing land requirements in the Rural South Area to be met through existing commitments and new allocations in the villages of Avonbridge, Limerigg, California, Standburn and Shieldhill;
 - Major residential-led regeneration comprising significant housing, economic development opportunities and community uses in Slamannan and Whitecross;
 - Continuing the general policy presumption against new development in the open countryside, unless a specific need for a rural location is demonstrated;
 - Identification of opportunities for village enhancement;
 - Detailed identification of the broad area of search for opencast coal within the south of the Council area;
 - Promotion of opportunities for sustainable tourism, particularly associated with the canals;
 - General policy support for renewable energy developments in the countryside, subject to proposals satisfying a range of detailed criteria; and
 - Safeguarding of land for a number of strategic road proposals within the rural area.
- 14.9 Each of the 18 rural villages is covered by its own village statement. The intention of this chapter is provide an overview to the general strategy being adopted for the rural area.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Environmental Enhancement

- 14.10 In terms of the Local Plan's broad priorities for environmental enhancement, village centres, village conservation areas, rural road corridors and the Greenspace Initiative/Central Scotland Forest will be the priorities for investment. Proposals for individual village communities are included within the village statements.

Built Heritage

- 14.11 Five of the rural villages - Airth, Allandale, Dunmore, Letham and Muirhouses - contain Conservation Areas. Listed buildings comprise concentrations in the villages of Airth, Dunmore and Muirhouses, groups focused around historic country houses, and a wide variety of other castles, churches, houses and industrial structures scattered across the rural area. Archaeological sites are dominated by the Roman period and the Antonine Wall. Further information can be found in the individual village statements and Appendices 3 and 4.

Natural Heritage

- 14.12 Natural heritage features within the rural area are identified and protected under a range of designations. These include Green Belt, Areas of Landscape Value, and the range of international, national and local nature conservation designations. Habitats of particular local importance, such as the estuary, wetlands, woodlands and bogs, have been highlighted through the Local Biodiversity Action Plan process. These resources are considered in more detail in Chapter 3, and the relevant policies are Policies EQ19-EQ30.
- 14.13 Mineral extraction is an activity which can have significant impact on the environmental quality of rural communities. The issue is considered in more detail in Chapter 3, and Policies EQ31-EQ39 seek to ensure that mineral extraction is sensitive to local communities and the environment.

14.14 Environmental Enhancement - Proposals and Opportunities

14.14.1	EN.RUR01	Skinflats
	Opportunity:	Potential Local Nature Reserve
	Agency:	Falkirk Council
	Comments:	Opportunity to designate part of SSSI as a Local Nature Reserve, with associated visitor access, facilities and interpretation. The Habitats Regulations will apply to any detailed proposal (see tests in Policy EQ24 (1)).

SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES

Housing

14.15 The population of the rural area grew by about 7.8% over the period from 1991-2001 and by 7% from 2001-2008. However, relatively large percentage increases in the villages of Airth and Shieldhill have masked decline in all of the other villages. The Structure Plan housing requirement for the Rural North area seeks to maintain present population levels. The requirement for the Rural South area would see a small decline, although this will be compensated for by the regeneration initiatives in Slamannan and Whitecross.

14.16 The Structure Plan requirement will be met as follows:

Rural South	
Requirement 2001-2015 (including 10% flexibility)	364
Completions 2001-2009	129
Commitments (2009/2010 HLA + other committed sites)	271
Windfall/small sites allowance (2009-2015)(4 p.a.)	24
Shortfall to 2015	25
New Allocations	232
Rural North	
Requirement 2001-2015 (including 10% flexibility)	450
Completions 2001-2009	299
Commitments (2009/2010 HLA + other committed sites)	136
Windfall/small sites allowance (2009-2015)(4 p.a.)	24
Shortfall to 2015	40
New Allocations	180

14.17 In the Rural South area, a shortfall exists to 2015, and priority has been given to modest new allocations to augment existing commitments in the villages of Avonbridge, Limerigg, California and Standburn to assist regeneration and halt population decline in these communities. Two other rural regeneration villages identified in the Structure Plan - Slamannan and Whitecross - are identified as Special Initiatives for Residential-led Regeneration, within which very substantial housing growth will be allowed for in addition to the base housing requirement, subject to the requisite infrastructure and masterplanning requirements set out in the relevant settlement statements.

14.18 In the Rural North area, a shortfall exists to 2015 and Airth, Letham and Torwood have been assessed as the preferred locations for further growth, such growth being commensurate with the scale and function of the settlements identified and respecting their environmental qualities and capacity to absorb additional development. Most growth is directed to the village of Airth, which has the largest population and the most comprehensive range of services of the northern villages, and where a continuation of the previous successful growth strategy would be appropriate.

14.19 The presumption against new build housing development in the countryside, unless required to support a rural economic activity, or forming appropriate infill, will continue to be applied through Policy SC3.

14.20 Housing proposals and opportunities related to the villages are contained in the village statements. Those located outwith the villages are listed below.

14.21 Housing - Proposals and Opportunities - Housing Land Audit Sites

14.21.1	H.RUR01	Dunmore Park
	Capacity:	40
	Developer:	Private
	Status:	Outline Planning Permission - Expired
	Comments:	Housing development in the policies of Dunmore Park Estate linked to restoration of the Category B-listed Dunmore Park House. Development proposals require to be sensitive to the landscape setting of the house and estate which is included in the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes and covered by a Tree Preservation Order.

14.21.2	H.RUR02	Denovan Mains Farm
	Site Area:	0.9 hectares
	Capacity:	7
	Developer:	Mr Graham
	Status:	Detailed Planning Permission
	Comments:	Conversion of farm buildings and new build plots.

14.22 Housing - Proposals and Opportunities - Other Commitments

14.22.1	H.RUR03	Kersie Mains Farm, South Alloa
	Site Area:	0.2 hectares
	Capacity:	6
	Developer:	Mr Sherriff
	Status:	Detailed Planning Permission
	Comments:	Conversion of farm buildings to 6 units with garage block.

Recreation and Community Facilities

14.23 Issues related to recreation and community facilities within the villages are dealt with under the village statements. In general, there is a problem with the maintenance of rural services, in the face of declining population.

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

- 14.24 The traditional rural employment sectors of agriculture and primary industry have seen major contraction over recent years. Unemployment and social exclusion, particularly within the southern villages, is a continuing issue. Most rural residents commute to the urban centres for work. The challenge is to diversify the economy of the villages and the countryside in a way that is compatible with maintaining and improving the quality of the rural environment.

Tourism and Countryside Recreation

- 14.25 Tourism offers one of the most promising areas for economic growth and diversification in the rural area. There is scope for the development of countryside recreation and tourist facilities of an appropriate type and location, particularly where it can link with wider initiatives such as the Central Scotland Forest, the Council's Outdoor Access Strategy, the Canal Corridor Development Framework, and the Council's tourism priorities generally. Policy EP16 sets out the criteria that will be applied to development proposals in the countryside whilst EP17 provides guidance on development related to the canal network.

Business and Industry

- 14.26 New businesses of an appropriate type and scale will be encouraged within the villages. However, demand for industrial land is limited and it has not been considered appropriate on the whole to allocate new business sites in all of the villages. Small scale opportunities for home-working may arise from the growth in electronic communications. Within the countryside, new businesses must generally demonstrate a need for a rural location, as set out in Policy EP5.
- 14.27 Following the closure of the Manuel Works near Whitecross in 2001, the Structure Plan identifies the former works as a Strategic Development Opportunity. While new housing will play a major element in this regeneration, business, industrial, commercial and leisure uses will be vital elements of the proposals, providing jobs for local people and ensuring the development does not become a commuter village. More detailed proposals will be advanced through the preparation of the masterplan.

14.28 Economic Development - Proposals and Opportunities

14.28.1	ED.RUR01	Muiravonside Country Park
	Opportunity:	Tourism/Countryside Recreation
	Agency:	Falkirk Council
	Comments:	Development plan to be prepared to determine future priorities and investment in facilities.
14.28.2	ED.RUR02	Causewayend Basin
	Opportunity:	Canal-related Development
	Agency:	British Waterways/Private
	Comments:	Existing basin provides opportunities for operational canal node incorporating mooring and other canal-relating facilities. Suitable access needs to be created and adjacent Almond Bing Wildlife Site requires to be safeguarded.

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT & INFRASTRUCTURE

Road Network

- 14.29 The rural area will be affected by a number of trunk, strategic and local road improvements proposed over the period of the Local Plan. These have been discussed in Chapter 6. Some of these are closely related to settlements or villages and are noted under the relevant settlement or village statement. Others are noted below.

Walking and Cycling

- 14.30 The relative remoteness of the rural communities within the Council area somewhat reduces the potential for walking and cycling as a means of accessing the main commercial and employment centres. Nonetheless, the safeguarding and development of the core path network should provide opportunities for some functional trips, and well as the recreational use more usually associated with rural paths.

Water and Drainage

- 14.31 A number of the villages within the rural area have capacity issues in relation to the small waste water treatment plants which serve them, lack of a connection to a public sewer or potential water supply issues. Details of potential constraints are identified under the relevant settlement or village statement.

Coastal Defences

- 14.32 The integrated management of the coastal zone has become increasingly important. This is covered in general terms within Chapter 3 and under Policy EQ28.
- 14.33 The future management of coastal defences is a particular issue. Along the developed coast at Grangemouth assessment of requirements is underway; at Bo'ness defence works are complete. Along the undeveloped coast at Skinflats/Bothkennar, a new reserve was opened during 2010 by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). This has created a habitat for wildlife whilst allowing the Forth to flood the area as part of a flood management programme.

Water and Drainage

- 14.34 The overall strategy for waste management in the Council area is set out in the Area Waste Plan as explained in Chapter 6. The Local Plan attempts to address the land use implications of the Area Waste Plan through Policies ST17-19. A number of waste management facilities are located in the rural area and, in terms of Policy ST18, these will be the preferred locations for new facilities. In particular, Policy ST17 indicates the safeguarding of land at Avondale, Polmont for the future expansion of the existing landfill facility.

14.35 Sustainable Transport & Infrastructure - Proposals and Opportunities

14.35.1	TR.RUR01	M80/A80(T) Haggs to Stepps
	Proposal:	Upgrading to Motorway
	Agency:	Transport Scotland
	Comments:	Upgrading commenced in 2009 with completion in 2011. In addition, upgrading of slip roads and A803 junctions may be needed to mitigate impacts from Banknock SIRR, funded by developer contributions.
14.35.2	TR.RUR02	A801 Avon Gorge Crossing
	Proposal:	Bridge Crossing and Approach Roads
	Agency:	Falkirk Council/West Lothian Council
	Comments:	Route now determined and planning permission secured. Funding issues still to be resolved. Project forms an element of Grangemouth Freight Hub National Development.
14.35.3	TR.RUR03	A9 Hollings
	Opportunity:	Road Realignment
	Agency:	Falkirk Council
	Comments:	Further improvement of bend on A9 between Torwood and Pleian. Not currently included in capital programme.
14.35.4	TR.RUR04	A883 Headswood
	Opportunity:	Road Realignment
	Agency:	Falkirk Council
	Comments:	Scheme not currently included in capital programme.
14.35.5	TR.RUR05	Avondale
	Proposal:	Landfill Facility
	Agency:	Shanks Avondale
	Comments:	Operational phased controlled landfill site.
14.35.6	TR.RUR06	Avondale Extension
	Proposal:	Extension of Landfill Facility
	Agency:	Shanks Avondale
	Comments:	Planning permission granted in 2008 for extension to landfill. Now operational. A site to the east, Avonbank, is safeguarded as a potential extension to Avondale subject to satisfactory planning and environmental assessment.
14.35.7	TR.RUR07	Avondale West
	Proposal:	Materials Recycling Facility
	Agency:	Shanks Avondale
	Comments:	Approval of reserved matters granted in 2008.

- 14.35.8 **TR.RUR08 River Avon Heritage Trail**
Opportunity: Path Creation
Agency: Central Scotland Forest Trust/Falkirk Council
Comments: Trail complete between Avonbridge and Linlithgow Bridge and formally opened in August 2006. Consideration currently being given to westward extension from Avonbridge and north from Linlithgow Bridge.
- 14.35.9 **TR.RUR09 Falkirk – Bonnybridge – Denny**
Opportunity: Strategic Pedestrian/Cycle Route
Agency: Unknown
Comments: Major opportunity for link between settlements via disused railway line. Major structures required to bridge gaps at the Bonny Water, Roughmute and M876.
- 14.35.10 **TR.RUR10 A905 South Alloa - Glensburgh**
Opportunity: Strategic Pedestrian/Cycle Route
Agency: Falkirk Council
Comments: Opportunity to promote remote cycleway along east side of A905 from the Council boundary to Airth, from Airth to Bowtrees, and from Skinflats to Glensburgh. Could contribute to strategic links around the Forth as well as providing local links for the villages of Airth, Dunmore and Skinflats. Feasibility study carried out. Detailed design in 2006.

