



Helensburgh & Cardross Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment

PREPARED FOR:
Argyll and Bute Council

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1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

- 1.1.1 Stantec was commissioned by Argyll and Bute Council in January 2025 to undertake a landscape sensitivity and capacity assessment of areas of Green Belt land around the Helensburgh and Cardross settlements.
- 1.1.2 The assessment of landscape sensitivity to housing development uses a criteria based process to ensure consistent and transparent analysis of sensitivity, drawing on spatial analysis and field based surveys. Detailed information on the methodology used in the study can be found in Chapter 3.

1.2 Purpose

- 1.2.1 The purpose of this study is to provide an assessment of the extent to which the character and quality of the landscape around the settlements of Helensburgh and Cardross, is in principle, susceptible to change as a result of introducing built development.
- 1.2.2 The study concentrates on understanding the sensitivities to development and does not address potential landscape capacity in terms of the quantity of built development, as this is a further stage of assessment that is dependent on a much wider range of considerations other than landscape and visual effects (such as highways impact, ecological effects, archaeological constraints and other environmental and sustainability factors) and consideration of cumulative development, landscape objectives and thresholds of acceptable change.
- 1.2.3 The study highlights likely landscape and visual sensitivities within each assessment area and provides a broad landscape character based assessment rather than a site level assessment as might be required for a planning application.



2. Scope

- 2.2.1 This assessment forms a key component of Argyll and Bute Council's Strategic Development Framework (SDF) process, which seeks to guide sustainable growth and development across the region. Fundamentally, the SDF is an exercise in determining what is possible in terms of population growth and physical change, ensuring that planning decisions align with the unique characteristics of each settlement within the local authority area.
- 2.2.2 Helensburgh, with a population of 13,500, plays a critical role in the regional economy, serving as:
- A major employment hub, being home to the Clyde Naval Base at Faslane.
 - A desirable commuter town for Glasgow, benefiting from a direct rail connection.
 - A key shopping and service centre for surrounding coastal communities.
 - A popular destination for tourists and day-trippers from Glasgow and its conurbation.
- 2.2.3 As an attractive and sought-after location, Helensburgh has consistently drawn private sector development interest. However, growth has been moderated by the adopted Development Planning Strategy. The current LDP identifies the agreed Council approach to pursue a planned strategic long term expansion within the Helensburgh area which will help facilitate long term economic and population growth, there is now a strategic need to identify sustainable and deliverable sites.
- 2.2.4 This strategic planned process will help address the deliverability of sites within the Development Plan. It provides a clear and evidence-based framework for guiding development, ensuring that future growth is:
- Sustainable – Minimising adverse effects on landscape character and visual amenity.
 - Strategic – Aligning with local infrastructure capacity and connectivity.
 - Deliverable – Ensuring that identified sites are viable and capable of meeting housing needs.
- 2.2.5 By assessing the landscape sensitivity of the areas surrounding Helensburgh and Cardross, this study contributes to the SDF's long-term vision and helps shape planning decisions that balance growth aspirations with landscape protection and community well-being.



3. Background

3.1 Helensburgh

- 3.1.1 Helensburgh is a coastal town located within the Argyll and Bute Council area, approximately 25 miles northwest of Glasgow. Positioned on the northern shore of the Firth of Clyde, it enjoys a scenic south-facing aspect with views across the estuary to the Cowal Peninsula, Isle of Bute, and Arrochar Alps. Historically part of Dunbartonshire, it lies near the boundary between the urbanised Central Belt and the rural Highlands, close to settlements like Dumbarton (8 miles southeast) and the Gare Loch (2 miles west). With a population of around 13,000-15,000, the town spans roughly 5 square kilometers, blending urban and suburban landscapes shaped by its planned grid-iron layout established in 1776.
- 3.1.2 The town's physical geography features a gentle slope rising from the Clyde waterfront (5-10 meters above sea level) to about 100-150 meters in its northern residential areas, offering elevated vistas over the estuary. To the north, it is framed by the Luss Hills within the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park, with peaks like Beinn Chaorach providing shelter and a dramatic backdrop. The Firth of Clyde defines its southern edge, historically supporting maritime activity via its pier and nearby Craigendoran terminal, while the Gare Loch to the west adds a naval dimension with HMNB Clyde at Faslane, 6 miles northwest. Small watercourses like the Millig Burn enhance its green spaces, such as Hermitage Park.
- 3.1.3 Its natural setting includes sandy beaches, wooded areas, and proximity to Loch Lomond (10-12 miles northeast), reinforcing its appeal for recreation and tourism. Two of the town's three Conservation Areas—The Hill House in the upper north and Upper Helensburgh spanning broader residential slopes—capitalise on this topography, integrating large plots and tree-lined streets into the urban fabric.
- 3.1.4 Accessibility is a key feature, with the A814 coastal road linking east to Dumbarton and west to Garelochhead, and the A818 connecting northward to the A82 trunk road for Glasgow and the Highlands. Rail services are robust: Helensburgh Central Station on the North Clyde Line offers a 50-minute trip to Glasgow, while Helensburgh Upper Station on the West Highland Line connects to Oban and Fort William. Glasgow Airport, 22 miles southeast, is within an hour's reach.
- 3.1.5 In a wider context, Helensburgh sits near the Highland Boundary Fault, marking a geological shift from Lowland plains to Highland ruggedness, visible in its transition from coast to hills. Part of the Clyde coastal region, it avoided industrialisation, preserving its residential charm, once dubbed the "Garden City of the Clyde." Today, it functions as a service hub for rural Argyll, a commuter base for Glasgow, and a tourist draw with attractions like The Hill House. Its strategic location, natural beauty, and historical connectivity continue to define its role as a bridge between urban and rural Scotland.

3.2 Cardross

- 3.2.1 Cardross is a large village also located within the Argyll and Bute Council area, approximately 3 miles east of Helensburgh. Positioned on the northern shore of the Firth of Clyde, it lies along the coastal plain near where the River Clyde begins to widen into its estuarine form, offering views south towards the Renfrewshire hills and the distant Cowal Peninsula. Historically part of Dunbartonshire, Cardross is situated close to the urban-rural divide between the Central Belt and the fringes of the Highlands, with a population of around 2,000-2,500 and a compact area of about 1-2 square kilometers.
- 3.2.2 The village's physical geography features a flat to gently sloping coastal landscape, sitting at an elevation of approximately 5-20 meters above sea level near the Clyde shore, with the terrain rising slightly northward towards low hills. To the north, the Kilmahew Burn valley and the wooded slopes of Carman Hill, part of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Regional Park, form a natural boundary and scenic backdrop, about 2-3 miles away. The Firth of Clyde defines its southern edge, with a shingle foreshore rather than a developed waterfront, reflecting its quieter, less commercialised character compared to Helensburgh. To the west, it neighbors Helensburgh, while to the east, it is about 4 miles from Dumbarton, a larger historic town
- 3.2.3 The village is surrounded by fertile agricultural land and patches of woodland, with the Kilmahew Estate and its ruined castle adding historical and natural interest to the landscape. The nearby Clyde estuary supports diverse birdlife, enhancing its environmental appeal.
- 3.2.4 Accessibility is facilitated by the A814, a coastal road that runs through Cardross, connecting it westward to Helensburgh (5 minutes' drive) and eastward to Dumbarton, with onward links to Glasgow via the A82 (about 30-40 minutes). Cardross railway station, on the North Clyde Line, provides frequent electric train services to Glasgow Queen Street and westward to Helensburgh, making it a viable commuter settlement.
- 3.2.5 In a broader context, Cardross lies just south of the Highland Boundary Fault, with the Lowland plains to its south and the rising Highlands to its north, a transition evident in the shift from coastal flats to the rugged Carman Hill. Unlike Helensburgh, it was not a planned Victorian resort but grew organically as a rural settlement, later absorbing commuter and residential growth. Its proximity to the Clyde made it a minor player in the region's industrial past, though it retains a village feel with a mix of historic stone buildings and modern housing. Today, Cardross serves as a quiet residential community, benefiting from its scenic coastal setting, transport links, and closeness to larger hubs like Helensburgh and Dumbarton, while attractions like the abandoned St Peter's Seminary in the Kilmahew Estate draw niche interest.

3.3 Landscape Character

3.3.1 The study area encompassing Helensburgh, Cardross, and the intervening landscapes along the north shore of the Firth of Clyde is predominantly situated within the Rolling Farmland with Estates - Argyll Landscape Character Type (LCT 04), as defined by NatureScot's Landscape Character Assessment framework. The area's landscape reflects a dynamic interplay of coastal, lowland, and upland influences, shaped by both natural topography and human settlement along the Clyde corridor.

3.3.2 Key characteristics of the LCT are:

- *Broad, rounded ridges with occasional steep banks, knolls and conical upstanding hills.*
- *Flat coastal plain with sandy bays along the Firth of Clyde.*
- *Groups of fairly large, rectangular fields, enclosed by linear shelterbelts and blocks of mixed woodland.*
- *Stone walls, follies, beech hedgerows and estate policy woodlands.*
- *Numerous hedgerow trees, often forming avenues along lanes.*
- *Scattered large farmsteads in countryside.*
- *Urban development on coastal plain and broader vales.*

3.3.3 A description of the LCT is also provided :

Landform

The Rolling Farmland with Estates - Argyll Landscape Character Type is a rolling, verdant farmland landscape characteristic of the hills on the southern edge of Loch Lomond, in the Helensburgh area bordering the upper Firth of Clyde and on the Island of Bute. All parts lie in prominent locations on the Firth of Clyde.

This landscape lies on the Old Red Sandstone of lowland Scotland, immediately to the south of the Highland Boundary Fault. There are prominent conical hills which are local landmarks, upstanding from the gently rounded hills to the north. The broad, shallow vale of the River Leven and the coastal plain and sandy bays fringing the Firth of Clyde are enclosed by steep slopes, often marking the abrupt edges of the ancient raised beaches along this part of the coast.

Landcover

The regular patchwork of large fields is partially enclosed by broadleaf woodlands and straight, angular shelterbelts or stone walls. Lines of hedgerow trees in some of the hedgerows and along local roads give visual emphasis to the pattern of fields and are an important and highly visible landscape element. But there are also many hedgerows without trees and these allow expansive views across the rolling farmland, framed by the woodlands and shelterbelts. The landscape becomes more open on the margins of more elevated land, such as the open ridges of the Kilpatrick Hills. The southern area on Bute is relatively low lying, and has smaller hedged pastures.

Many of the woodlands are estate policies. The area has numerous historic designed landscapes. Their stone walls, gatehouses, beech hedges and specimen trees add to the richness and diversity of the landscape. The small birch-oak woodlands, stands of mature beech trees and clumps of holly on the steep banks of the raised beaches are prominent local landmarks, for example at Toward and Rosneath.

Settlement

The urban areas of Helensburgh and Alexandria are concentrated on the coastal plain and the vale of the River Leven. Rural settlement is relatively sparse as the area is dominated by estates and large landholdings. There are scattered farms and cottages, with some more recent linear development along roads. The rural roads have an unspoilt character and the area is important for tourism. Industry is prevalent in the areas of Dumbarton and Alexandria, especially along the banks of the Clyde and Leven Rivers, where development spreads north to Balloch. The local dark grey stone is lightened by a pinkish tinge in the Helensburgh area. There are a number of landmark historic and archaeological features. The mainland areas are an important contrast to the more developed urban edge of Glasgow to the east and the Inverclyde coast, from which they are highly visible.



4. Argyll and Bute Council Green Belt Landscape Study

4.1 Purpose

- 4.1.1 The Argyll and Bute Council Green Belt Landscape Study (2010), conducted by Ironside Farrar, aims to provide a landscape assessment to justify and refine the extent of the green belt in the Helensburgh and Lomond area. Commissioned in response to the Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) objectives, the study evaluates the landscape value, sensitivity, and boundaries of the green belt to support sustainable development while protecting the character, setting, and identity of settlements. Its key objectives include directing growth to appropriate locations, enhancing the landscape setting of towns, and ensuring access to open spaces. Specifically, it assesses the green belt's contribution to preventing settlement coalescence, maintaining gateways, and identifying opportunities and constraints for development, with a focus on informing long-term settlement strategies.



5. Methodology

5.1 Approach to Assessing Landscape Sensitivity

5.1.1 This section sets out the methodology for the Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment. This includes information on the study area and spatial framework, the key sources of evidence used, the assessment criteria and the process followed.

5.1.2 At present, there is no standard method for assessing the sensitivity of landscapes to development. However, this study's approach is based on the Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity (Scottish Heritage and the former Countryside Agency, 2004).

5.1.3 Paragraph 4.2 of Topic Paper 6 states:

"Judging landscape character sensitivity requires professional judgement about the degree to which the landscape in question is robust, in that it is able to accommodate change without adverse impacts on character. This involves making decisions about whether or not significant characteristic elements of the landscape will be liable to loss... and whether important aesthetic aspects of character will be liable to change."

5.1.4 In this study the following definition of sensitivity has been used, which is based on the principles set out in Topic Paper 6. It is also compliant with the third edition of the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA 3, 2013) as well as definitions used in other landscape sensitivity studies of this type:

"Landscape sensitivity is the relative extent to which the character and quality of an area (including its visual attributes) is likely to change as a result of introducing a particular type of development."

5.1.5 This Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment is a strategic-level study which considers the landscape and visual sensitivity of each area to the principle of built development, without knowing the specific size or exact location of development (as this would be detailed at the planning application level).

5.1.6 A more detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) is likely to be required on a site by site basis in relation to development of any specific sites and/ or to inform masterplanning that will clearly demonstrate a landscape led approach that has informed the site masterplan and provides a detailed assessment of likely effects.

5.2 Study Area

5.2.1 This assessment assesses the landscape and visual sensitivity of the land around Helensburgh and Cardross, all of which lies within the Argyll and Bute Green Belt. The study area has been carefully delineated to ensure a focused and meaningful assessment of the potential for accommodating future development while maintaining the integrity of the surrounding landscape character. Given the context of Argyll and Bute's Green Belt, the study primarily assesses areas of land that directly abut the existing settlement boundaries of Helensburgh and Cardross, as these locations are generally considered the most appropriate for potential Green Belt release to facilitate sustainable growth.

5.2.2 The primary focus of the study is on the built up edges of Helensburgh, Cardross and Colgrain, where strategic growth could be best integrated with existing infrastructure, services, and landscape character. These areas have been identified as the most viable for consideration, given:

- Their proximity to existing transport links, including road and rail infrastructure.
- The availability of supporting services, such as schools, healthcare, and retail.
- The potential to minimise landscape sprawl, merging and fragmentation by concentrating development near established urban areas.
- The ability to reinforce defensible settlement edges, ensuring that any Green Belt release does not result in uncontrolled urban sprawl

5.2.3 In addition to the immediate settlement fringes, the study also considers land situated between Helensburgh, Cardross and Colgrain. While these locations are not directly contiguous with each settlement, they warrant assessment for their strategic role in settlement separation and their potential to accommodate strategic growth while maintaining a balanced and structured urban form. Key considerations for this area include:

- Preserving the visual and physical separation between the two settlements to prevent coalescence.
- Assessing the suitability of landforms for development in terms of topography, landscape character, and visibility.
- Evaluating existing and potential infrastructure routes, particularly along key transport corridors.
- Identifying opportunities for green infrastructure that could enhance connectivity while maintaining a distinct settlement identity.

5.2.4 By defining the study area in this way, the assessment ensures that landscape capacity is evaluated in a structured and strategic manner, balancing development needs with environmental sensitivities and long-term sustainability. This approach aligns with the objectives of the Strategic Development Framework (SDF) and provides a robust evidence base for decision-making regarding future Green Belt release and settlement expansion.

5.3 Landscape Assessment Areas

5.3.1 The overall study area has been subdivided into landscape assessment sub-areas, with the aim of identifying areas with similar characteristics which are therefore likely to be broadly consistent in terms of their sensitivity. These sub-areas have been selected to avoid variation and complexities across each landscape area.



5.4 Criteria for Assessment of Landscape Sensitivity

- 5.4.1 In line with good practice landscape and visual sensitivity is assessed for each landscape area with reference to defined criteria, which are set out in Table 5.1, along with examples to illustrate the different levels of sensitivity so that judgements can be clearly traced back to the underlying landscape baseline.
- 5.4.2 Criteria selection is based on the attributes of the landscape most likely to be affected by development and considered both ‘landscape’ and ‘visual’ aspects of sensitivity. The criterion are:
- **Scale** (the scale of the landscape);
 - **Landform** (the topographical complexity of the landscape);
 - **Landscape pattern and time depth** (the complexity of landscape pattern and the extent to which the landscape has ‘time depth’ – a sense of being a historic landscape);
 - **Natural character** (the presence of natural or semi-natural features that are important to landscape character);
 - **Built character** (the extent that built character contributes to landscape character);
 - **Recreational value** (the value of the area for recreation in which experience of the landscape is important);
 - **Perceptual aspects** (qualities such as rurality, traditional land uses with few modern, human influences, sense of remoteness or tranquillity);
 - **Settlement setting** (the extent to which the area relates or contributes to the form and pattern of existing adjacent settlement, and the character of the adjacent settlement edge);
 - **Visual prominence** (visual prominence of the area and the character of skylines); and
 - **Intervisibility** (the degree of inter-visibility with surrounding designated landscapes and the role the area plays in contributing to valued views)
- 5.4.3 The individual criteria are set out in the tables below. Note that the overall rating is based on professional judgement and in some cases one criterion alone may be sufficient to result in a judgement of high sensitivity but more often it is the interaction of factors.

TABLE 5.1: LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL SENSITIVITY CRITERIA

SCALE		
<i>Landscapes with a small scale, complex and intricate landscape pattern arising from landcover elements including settlement, field pattern or vegetation cover are more likely to be susceptible to change arising from larger scale development than landscapes that are more open and with a simple landcover pattern. Landscapes enclosed by buildings, trees and woodlands can offer more opportunity to accommodate development without affecting landscape character.</i>		
High	Medium	Low
Small scale field pattern or land divisions	Medium scale field pattern or land divisions or a mixture of small scale and large scale fields or land divisions.	Large scale field pattern or land divisions

LANDFORM

Open, distinctive or intricate and complex landforms with sharp changes in level are more likely to be susceptible to change arising from development than flat and indistinct landforms. This criteria also considers whether potential development would interrupt the relationship between distinctive landform features such as escarpments, or prominent hills or open plains. In some locations development would affect skyline character.

High	Medium	Low
Presence of strong topographical variety or distinctive landform features e.g. incised valley with prominent slopes.	Undulating landform or some distinct landform features.	Absence of strong topographical variety. Featureless, smooth, very gently undulating or flat landform.

LANDSCAPE PATTERN AND TIME DEPTH

This considers the historic origin of the landscape area including field pattern. Landscapes with more irregular field patterns, particularly those of historic origin, are likely to be more sensitive to the introduction of modern development than landscape with regular scale field patterns because of the risk of losing characteristic landscape patterns.

High	Medium	Low
Complex. Irregular and varied field patterns (including historic field patterns i.e. piecemeal enclosure with irregular boundaries, ridge and furrow). Landscapes designated for their historic value.	Mixture of simple and complex landscape field patterns.	Simple. Regular or uniform field patterns (mainly of modern origin).

NATURAL CHARACTER

Landscapes with a strong and positive character in good condition and with features worthy of conservation, will be more susceptible to change because of the potential impact on their legibility and upon features and combinations of elements which may be difficult to replace. This applies to landscapes with semi-natural habitats and valued natural features such as woodland and hedgerows with good connectivity.

High	Medium	Low
Frequent occurrence of valued natural features (tree, hedgerows, woodland) or areas of semi-natural habitats.	Areas of valued semi-natural habitats and features in parts of the landscape, whilst other parts are intensively farmed or developed.	Lack of semi-natural habitat coverage or valued natural features. e.g. intensively farmed or areas with high levels of existing development or brownfield sites.

BUILT CHARACTER

This considers the built character of the landscape area with particular reference to the presence of heritage assets that contribute to landscape character (i.e. valued features that may be designated as Conservation Areas, Scheduled Monuments, listed buildings, archaeological features or remains or other features). Landscapes with a high density of historic features important to the character of the area is likely to be more sensitive to the introduction of modern development than areas where such development already exists.

High	Medium	Low
Presence or adjacent to small scale, historic or vernacular settlement or historic features important to landscape character (e.g. Listed Buildings, archaeological features).	Mixture of modern development and historic features important to landscape character.	Presence or adjacent to modern development or contemporary structures that detract from landscape character, e.g. utility, infrastructure or industrial elements.

RECREATIONAL VALUE

The extent to which the experience of the landscape makes an important contribution to the recreational use and enjoyment of an area. Indicators include the presence of features such as nature reserves, country parks, allotments, outdoor sports facilities, public rights of way, green infrastructure corridors, scenic routes and promoted viewpoints.

High	Medium	Low
Landscapes important for access and enjoyment of the landscape e.g. open access land, country parks or outdoor tourist attractions with visitor facilities. Presence of well-connected long distance routes linking centres of population.	Some publicly accessible footpaths. Landscapes with green spaces or recreation areas valued in the local context.	Publicly inaccessible or limited provision of access routes likely to be of community importance.

PERCEPTUAL ASPECTS

Defined by the presence of distinctive, dramatic or striking patterns of landform or land cover, or by strong aesthetic response to qualities such as rural character (traditional land uses with few human influences), perceived naturalness, sense of remoteness or tranquility and wildness.

High	Medium	Low
A rural landscape, remote from visible or audible signs of human activity and modern development.	Some sense of rural character but with some signs of human activity and modern development.	Close to visible or audible signs of human activity and modern development.

SETTLEMENT SETTING

This considers the overall settlement pattern and the nature of the settlement edges. Importantly it considers whether potential development would integrate with the general settlement form/ pattern and how it may affect the character of the existing settlement edge and its functioning relationship with the surrounding countryside.

High	Medium	Low
Contributes positively as an attractive backdrop to adjacent settlement, providing a distinctive element in views that are key to the character of the settlement or forms an important part in the perception of a gap between settlements.	Provides some contribution as a backdrop to the adjacent settlement or plays a role in the perception of a gap between settlements.	Does not provide an attractive backdrop to adjacent settlement or play a separation role.

VISUAL PROMINENCE

This considers the visual prominence of the landscape area, reflecting the extent of openness or enclosure in the landscape (due to landform and land cover), and extent to which potential development would be visible. It also considers the skyline character of the area including whether it forms a visually distinctive skyline (e.g. due to the presence of important landmark features) or an important undeveloped skyline.

High	Medium	Low
Visually prominent. Very open in views from the wider landscape. Forms a visually distinctive skyline, e.g. undeveloped skylines or skylines with important landmarks	A mixture of prominent and non prominent. Semi-enclosed or has some enclosed and some open areas or visually distinctive skylines.	Non-prominent. Visually enclosed landscape screened by landform or land cover. Does not form a visually distinctive skyline, e.g. natural bowls.

INTERVISIBILITY

This considers the role the landscape area plays in contributing to valued views. For example, views to, from and within the setting of designated landscapes, historic and cultural sites and views recorded as important in relation to heritage assets would be considered to pertain a High value.

High	Medium	Low
Strong inter-visibility with sensitive landscapes	Some inter-visibility with surrounding sensitive landscapes or viewpoints.	Little intervisibility with adjacent sensitive landscapes (i.e. Loch Lomond National Park) or marked viewpoints.

5.5 Sensitivity Judgments

- 5.5.1 Each of the ten sensitivity criteria includes a description that highlights the landscape area's characteristics and the potential impact of development. A three-point scale, ranging from 'low' to 'high' sensitivity, is used to indicate how susceptible the landscape's character and quality are to change.
- 5.5.2 When evaluating landscape and visual sensitivity, relevant designations and constraints are considered, as these can influence assessments. While some constraints may not directly impact landscape character or sensitivity, they often coincide with areas that have notable landscape attributes—for instance, designated wildlife habitats that also hold landscape value.
- 5.5.3 The overall landscape sensitivity rating is determined by analysing the range of sensitivities identified and the relative importance of each criterion within the specific area.
- 5.5.4 Landscape sensitivity is the result of a complex interplay of often unequally weighted variable (or criteria). The overall assessment of landscape sensitivity are based on professional judgement, taking account of the interplay between criteria, as well as those which might be more important to the landscape character of any particular assessment area. An area rated as having high sensitivity may do so because it has a relatively high sensitivity to a number of different criteria but it may also do so because of a particularly high sensitivity to just one criterion.
- 5.5.5 The process for defining landscape areas aims to minimise the extent to which significant differences in sensitivity are likely to occur within one area, but in some cases a gradual change in sensitivity can be identified – for example a gradual increase in sensitivity with distance from an existing settlement edge. Limitations in terms of the resolution of the assessment may also mean that different parts of a landscape area are considered to have different levels of sensitivity.
- 5.5.6 Whilst landscape sensitivity assessment results provide an initial indication of landscape sensitivity, it should not be interpreted as a definitive statement on the suitability of individual sites for a particular development or land use change. It is not a replacement for detailed studies for specific siting and design and all proposals will need to be assessed on their own individual merits.

SENSITIVITY	DEFINITION
Low	The landscape lacks distinct character and qualities and has few notable features, or is robust with regard to introducing built development.
Medium	The landscape has some distinctive characteristics and valued qualities, with some sensitivity to change as a result of introducing built development.
High	The landscape has strong character and qualities with notable features which are highly sensitive to change as a result of introducing built development

5.6 Process and Output

STAGE 1: DESKED BASED ANALYSIS

- 5.6.1 Compiling and reviewing all relevant documents and available GIS data to establish the baseline context for the study. This provided a comprehensive understanding of the existing landscape, planning policy framework, and environmental constraints. The desktop assessment was informed by:
- Mapping and GIS data, including land use, topography, and environmental / historic designations.
 - Aerial imagery, historic mapping and other online resources to analyse settlement patterns and landscape features.
 - Landscape Character Assessments (LCAs), providing insights into the area's key landscape characteristics
 - Other relevant studies, assessments, and background documents ensuring a well-rounded evidence base for the study.

STAGE 2: FIELD SURVEY

- 5.6.2 Following the desktop assessment, a structured field survey was undertaken to verify, test, and refine the initial findings. This stage ensured that the study's conclusions were based on real-world observations rather than purely desk-based analysis.
- Each assessment area was visited systematically, with surveyors:
 - Recording on-site observations to validate and refine the desk study outputs.
 - Taking photographs to document key landscape features, settlement edges, and wider views.
 - Assessing landscape sensitivity from publicly accessible locations, including roads and public rights of way.

STAGE 3: EVALUATION AND REPORTING

- 5.6.3 The final stage of the study involved a detailed landscape assessment for each defined assessment area. This step provided a structured and evidence-based evaluation of landscape and visual sensitivity, ensuring a clear rationale for assessing each area's capacity for development. Each landscape area assessment includes:
- An aerial view to illustrate the spatial context and boundaries.
 - Representative photography capturing key characteristics and visual qualities.
 - A description of the area, detailing boundaries, predominant land use, topography, vegetation, and key landscape features.
 - An appraisal of landscape and visual sensitivity, assessed against specific criteria set out in the methodology.
 - A summary justification explaining the reasoning behind the final sensitivity rating, drawing on findings from the individual criteria assessments.
 - Identification of variations in sensitivity, noting specific locations or attributes within each area that exhibit higher or lower sensitivity than the overall rating, where applicable.
 - A plan illustrating the opportunities and constraints to development for each area.

6. Cardross East

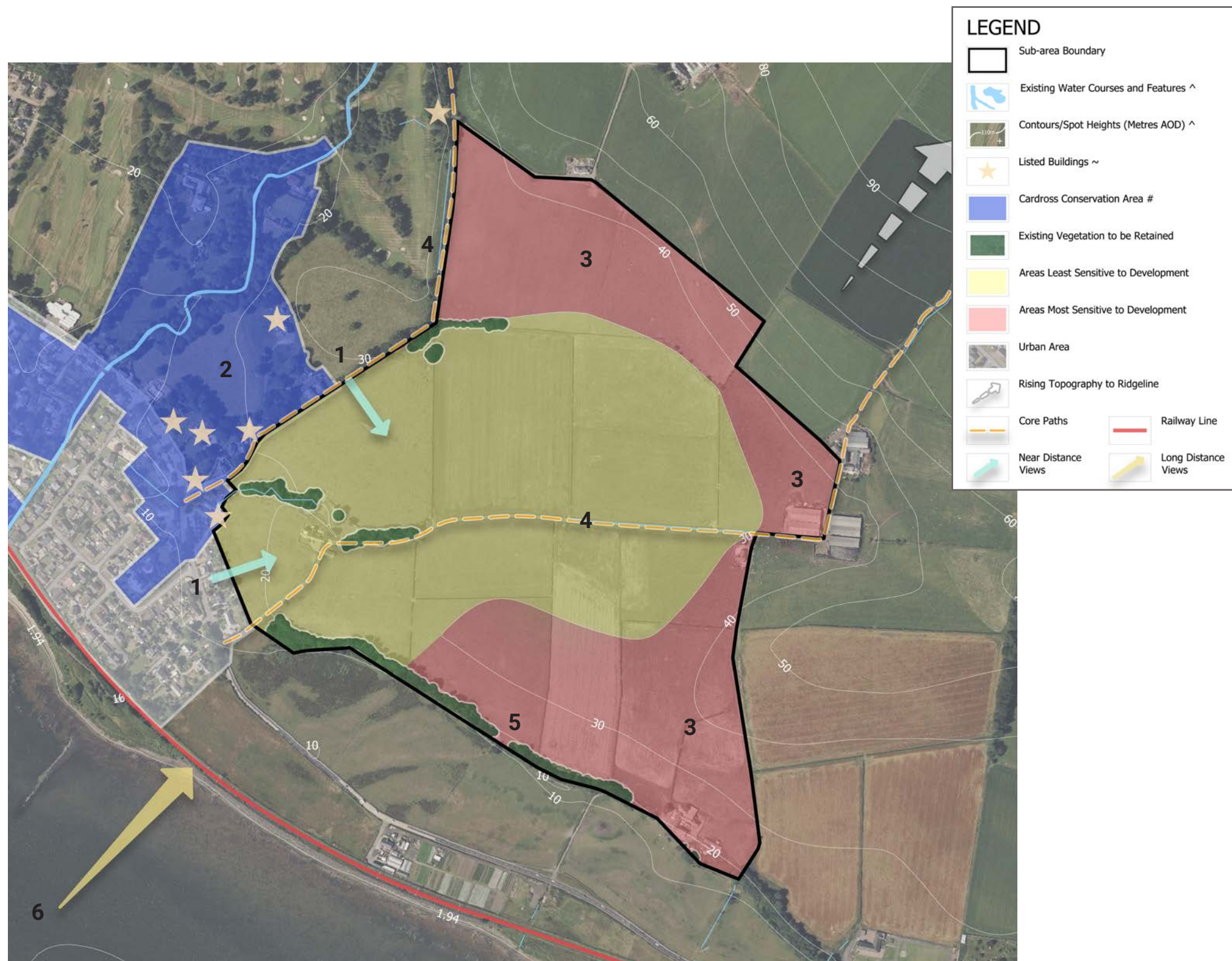


6.1 Description

- 6.1.1 The area is located directly to the east of Cardross, on a hillside running along the edge of Carman Road. It is rolling farmland, set to grazing with mature hedgerow trees which subdivide and semi-enclose the fields, and line some tracks and roads. Many field boundaries are well maintained hedges together with post and wire fences, but derelict drystone dykes are more common at higher elevations. The area's topography is varied and undulating but is predominantly a west facing bowl-shaped hillside running from the limit of enclosed land at the headwall below Carman Muir (150m AOD) to the shores of the Firth of Clyde. It is moderate in its scale. Farmsteads are dotted around the middle slopes, with the old stone steadings redeveloped for housing and new larger scale farm sheds erected to replace them.



CRITERIA	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	SENSITIVITY
Scale	The area has a medium scale, with a rolling, semi-enclosed farmland pattern. Hedgerows provide some enclosure, meanwhile the open west-facing slopes provide containment from the east.	Medium
Landform	The landform is varied and undulating, with a predominantly west-facing, bowl-shaped hillside that slopes from the enclosed land below Carman Muir (150m AOD) down to the shores of the Firth of Clyde.	Medium
Landscape pattern and time depth	Fields in area are simple / regular in shape.	Low
Natural character	Area comprises predominantly pastoral fields that are separated by hedgerows and small amount of trees.	Medium
Built character	Area is influenced by residential properties along Cardross' eastern settlement edge, particularly to the south. Overhead masts also traverse the area. Nonetheless, the area pertains a predominantly rural character. The area is well contained from the Cardross conservation area.	Medium
Recreational value	The area is well connected by Core paths that run along Craigend Road toward Dumbarton, and Carman Road along the sub-areas western boundary.	Medium
Perceptual aspects	The area has some sense of rural character, but perceived naturalness, sense of remoteness and tranquility is undermined slightly by human activity within Cardross to the west.	Medium
Settlement setting	Whilst the area does provide some contribution as a backdrop to Cardross when perceived from long distance views south of the estuary, locally, it is only perceptible from a very limited number of locations within Cardross itself.	Medium
Visual prominence	The majority of this area is very well contained. This area sits within a bowl, whereby views from the north and east are curtailed by the prevailing landform. Views from the south along the A814 are screening by the mature tree belt along the assessment areas southern boundary. To the west, views are obstructed by development within Cardross.	Low
Intervisibility	No intervisibility with adjacent sensitive landscapes.	Low
Overall	The area exhibits a Low to Medium sensitivity to development due to its well-contained landform, limited local visibility, and lack of strong landscape or recreational associations. While it retains some rural qualities, these are moderately influenced by nearby residential development and infrastructure, reducing its perceived naturalness and tranquillity. The absence of intervisibility with sensitive landscapes, along with the presence of screening elements such as tree belts and existing built form, further lowers its sensitivity. However, the area does contribute to longer-distance views as a backdrop to Cardross, and its semi-enclosed farmland character provides some landscape structure that should be considered.	Low - Medium



6.2 Opportunities and Constraints

- 1) Close range views into the sub-area are limited to its immediate vicinity along Carman Road and the rear of properties to the southwest.
- 2) The sub-area is located adjacent to the Cardross conservation area, although shares very limited intervisibility.
- 3) The sub-parcel sits within a distinctive bowl that visually contains it from the wider area to the north and east. Any future development should be sensitive to the prevailing landform and not encroach above the slope.
- 4) Core paths run through and alongside the sub-area, which require preservation
- 5) A wooded localised ridge runs along the sub-areas southern boundary. Any future development should be offset from this ridge to retain the landscape setting of Cardross on its approach from the east along the A814.
- 6) There are long distance views of Cardross from Port Glasgow across the Clyde.

6.3 Landscape Design Principles

- Any future development should tie in with the built character and vernacular of Cardross and its conservation area. This includes preserving traditional structures and architectural detailing, restricting modern development that could negatively impact the historic streetscape, and maintaining open spaces where appropriate.
- Keep building heights modest and avoid intrusive lighting or signage that could visually impact the conservation area.
- Ensure that development remains within the natural bowl-shaped landform, avoiding construction that would breach the upper slopes or create a skyline impact.
- Retain and improve existing core paths, ensuring they remain accessible and well-integrated within development.
- Position green spaces, communal gardens, and tree planting to soften built form and provide a transition between the developed area and the surrounding rural landscape.

7. Cardross North

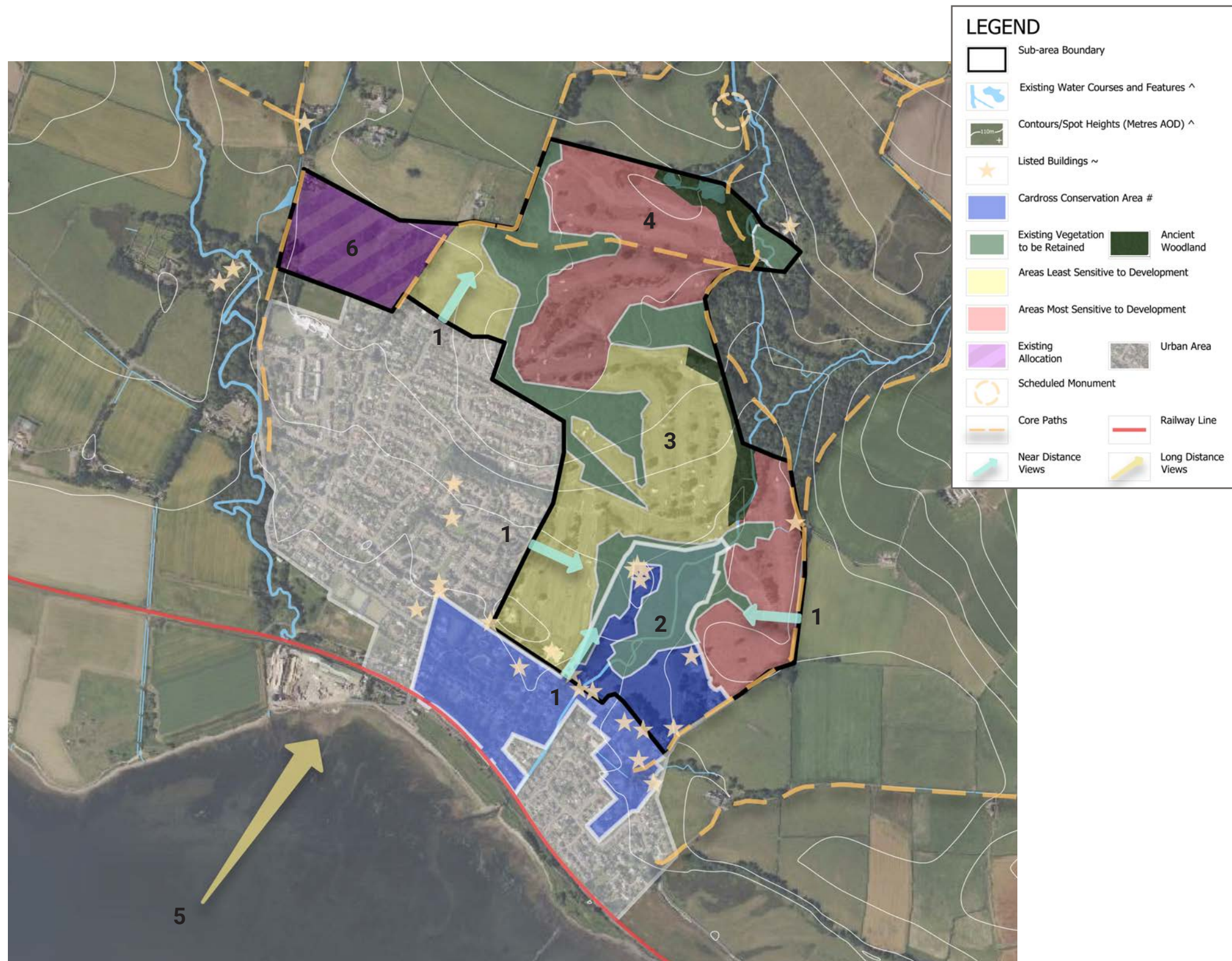


7.1 Description

- 7.1.1 The landscape north of Cardross stretches between Carman Road and Darleith Road, encompassing a landscape of old country houses, estate policies, and large blocks of mature woodland. A significant portion of the area is now a golf course, though remnants of historic pleasure grounds, including follies, cast-iron railings, and overgrown ornamental plants like rhododendron and laurel — still exist. Traditional stone Victorian villas with slate roofs sit high on the hillside, surrounded by mature trees and small paddocks, forming a backdrop to the village's historic core, including the ruined church, manse, and Moore's Bridge. The area partially forms part of the Cardross Conservation Area, with the Kilmahew Burn flowing through semi-natural ancient woodland, offering panoramic views of the Firth of Clyde and Port Glasgow.



CRITERIA	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	SENSITIVITY
Scale	The area has a medium scale, characterised by rolling, semi-enclosed farmland interspersed with large blocks of mature woodland. Estate boundaries, marked by stone walls and tree-lined drives, provide a sense of structure, while the open west-facing slopes offer containment from the east.	Medium
Landform	The landform is varied and undulating, with a predominantly west-facing hillside that slopes from approximately 58m AOD near the village down to the A814 and the shores of the Firth of Clyde. The upper slopes, particularly around the estate grounds, create a sense of elevation and enclosure.	Medium
Landscape pattern and time depth	The landscape pattern is influenced by old country houses, estate policies, and the remnants of historic pleasure grounds. These include stone gateways, follies, cast-iron railings, and overgrown ornamental planting, reflecting a clear sense of time depth and cultural heritage.	Medium
Natural character	The area comprises a mix of pastoral fields, mature woodlands, and tree belts, with semi-natural ancient woodland along the Kilmahew Burn. The combination of tended estate grounds and wilder, overgrown ornamental planting gives the area a medium level of natural character.	Medium
Built character	The built character is influenced by the traditional stone Victorian villas set within the estate grounds. These properties, often accompanied by gatehouses and mews blocks, contribute to the area's historic and rural feel. While the golf course adds a more formal landscaped element, the area retains its predominantly rural character.	Medium
Recreational value	The golf course provides a recreational function, and there are also quiet roads and paths offering informal access through the area. The Kilmahew Burn and surrounding woodlands add to the area's amenity value, though public access is somewhat limited outside of designated routes.	Medium
Perceptual aspects	The area has a strong sense of rural character, reinforced by its historic estate landscape and mature woodland. However, the proximity to the village and the presence of the golf course slightly reduce the sense of remoteness and tranquillity.	Medium
Settlement setting	The area forms part of the backdrop to Cardross, particularly around the oldest parts of the village, including the ruined church, manse, and Moore's Bridge. It contributes to the village's identity and visual appeal, with the estate grounds playing an important role in framing views from the historic core.	High
Visual prominence	The area is relatively well-contained, with mature tree belts and built form limiting views from the south along the A814. The hillside location means the upper slopes are visible from long-distance viewpoints, but internal views are often framed by woodland and stone walls, softening its visual prominence.	Low
Intervisibility	There is limited intervisibility with adjacent sensitive landscapes due to the area's contained nature and screening from tree belts. However, there are longer-distance views across the Firth of Clyde to Port Glasgow.	Low
Overall	The area exhibits a Medium sensitivity to development due to its combination of historic estate landscapes, mature woodland, and its role in the setting of Cardross. While its landform and tree cover provide some containment, the visual and cultural significance of the estate grounds, along with their contribution to the village's character, heighten its sensitivity. The presence of the golf course adds a layer of recreational importance, while the semi-enclosed farmland pattern supports the area's rural identity. Development should carefully consider the historic fabric, visual role, and natural features of this landscape.	Medium



7.2 Opportunities and Constraints

1) Close range views into the sub-area are mostly afforded from Cardross' settlement edge.

2) Cardross conservation area is partly located within the sub-area to the south, within which there are a number of listed buildings including the Commonwealth War Graves. This area is highly sensitive and should remain free of development.

3) A large part of the sub-area is made up of Cardross golf course, which is generally well contained both physically and visually by built development to the west and woodland to the east.

4) The north of the sub-area is more sensitive to development as it contains areas of ancient woodland, is more visually prominent, and is situated within the vicinity of St. Peter's Seminary and the Kilmahew Castle scheduled monument.

5) There are long distance views of Cardross from Port Glasgow across the Clyde.

6) Existing allocation H2002 is situated to the west of the sub-area, which if developed will further contextualise the adjacent parcel to the east in a settlement edge setting.

7.3 Landscape Design Principles

- Improve estate boundaries and tree-lined avenues to strengthen estate character.
- Any future development should be carefully placed so that it respects existing estate features and tree cover. This includes preserving the setting of key heritage assets, including the ruined church and Moore's Bridge.
- Potential to enhance biodiversity through woodland management and sensitive planting around golf course and farmland edge.
- Any future development should be low-profile and well integrated into the landform.

8. Cardross West

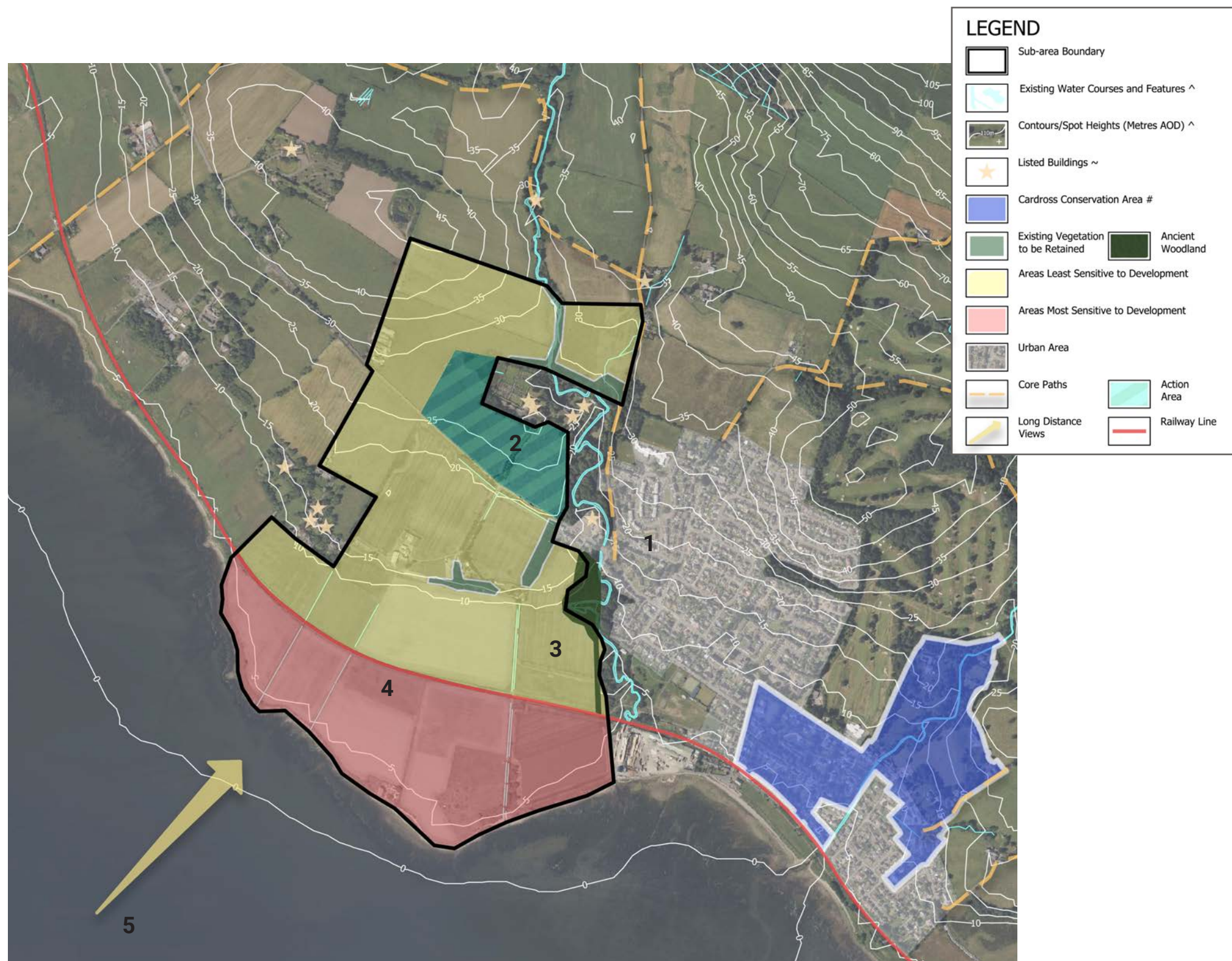


8.1 Description

- 8.1.1 This area, situated on a broad ridge descending from Killoeter Hill, is a rolling rural landscape of medium scale, primarily used for grazing with some arable fields. It is semi-enclosed, with well-maintained hedgerows, extensive drystone dykes, and shelterbelts at higher elevations. Woodland, including Ancient Woodland Inventory sites and an SSSI at Geilston Burn, follows burn corridors and encloses estates. Traditional farmsteads, often diversified with ancillary buildings, form a distinctive settlement pattern along a raised beach landform, overlooking the Firth of Clyde. While predominantly rural in character, the white crematorium and other development with Cardross introduce urban elements. The area has high scenic value, offering expansive views across the Clyde, and maintains a strong sense of place through its traditional architecture, structured field patterns, and varied woodland cover.



CRITERIA	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	SENSITIVITY
Scale	The area is of medium scale, characterised by rolling farmland with semi-enclosure provided by woodland, shelterbelts, hedgerows, and drystone dykes.	Medium
Landform	The landscape consists of a varied, undulating landform, with a broad ridge descending from Killoeter Hill towards the Firth of Clyde. The raised beach landform at lower elevations provides a distinct landscape feature, transitioning from steeper escarpments to flatter arable fields near the railway and coastline.	Medium
Landscape pattern and time depth	The landscape contains estate woodlands, old farmsteads, and remnants of designed landscapes, such as Geilston House and its associated policy woodlands. Historic elements like drystone dykes, mature field boundaries, and tree-lined farmsteads reinforce the sense of time depth and rural heritage.	Medium
Natural character	The area contains a mix of pastoral farmland, semi-natural woodlands, and designed landscapes. Several small woodlands are designated as Semi-natural Ancient Woodland, and Geilston Burn is a designated SSSI. The presence of both managed and regenerating woodland enhances the natural character, while hedgerows and drystone walls contribute to the rural feel.	Medium
Built character	Traditional farmsteads and estate buildings, typically of dressed stone or whitewashed rubble with slate roofs, define the built character. Some farms have diversified with additional buildings, though the rural character remains intact.	Medium
Recreational value	A well-established network of informal and formal paths supports recreational access. The surrounding farmland and estate woodlands offer limited but valuable informal recreation opportunities.	Medium
Perceptual aspects	The area maintains a predominantly rural character, with a balance of enclosed and open spaces. The rolling farmland, tree belts, and estate features contribute to a sense of continuity and place. However, A814, and the more urbanised areas around Cardross introduce contrasting elements that reduce the sense of remoteness.	Medium
Settlement setting	The area plays a significant role in defining the western approach to Cardross, particularly around the raised beach landform and farmsteads, which create a distinctive settlement pattern. The estate landscapes and woodland contribute to the village's visual identity and reinforce its rural backdrop.	High
Visual prominence	The lower, flatter fields are visible from the A814, railway, and Clyde. The upper slopes are more contained by tree cover and rolling topography.	Medium
Intervisibility	The area has limited intervisibility with adjacent sensitive landscapes due to containment from tree belts and topography. However, it offers long-range views across the Clyde towards Port Glasgow.	Medium
Overall	The landscape has Medium sensitivity to development. The raised beach area and lower slopes are particularly susceptible to change due to their openness and role in the settlement's gateway. Some areas however are less sensitive for small-scale development. Any future development should respect the historic fabric, settlement pattern, and rural landscape character while preserving key visual corridors.	Medium



8.2 Opportunities and Constraints

1) The sub-area is largely contained from Cardross to the east by woodland surrounding Geilston Burn.

2) The grounds of Geilston Garden are identified as an Area for Action (A2002 - Safeguarding historic property, consideration of redevelopment and enhancement opportunities). Any future development should therefore respect the setting of Geilston Garden and its approach from the A814.

3) The railway line serves as a defensible boundary between areas of more and less visual sensitivity.

4) There are long distance views of Cardross from Port Glasgow across the Clyde.

8.3 Landscape Design Principles

- Maintain and restore traditional drystone dykes, mature field boundaries and historic farmsteads
- Any future development should protect the built character through the considered use of traditional materials, such as dressed stone and slate roofs, at key locations.
- Conserve and enhance semi-natural woodlands around Geilston Burn.
- Avoid development on raised beach areas south of the railway that are visually prominent and contribute to the settlement gateway.

9. Colgrain

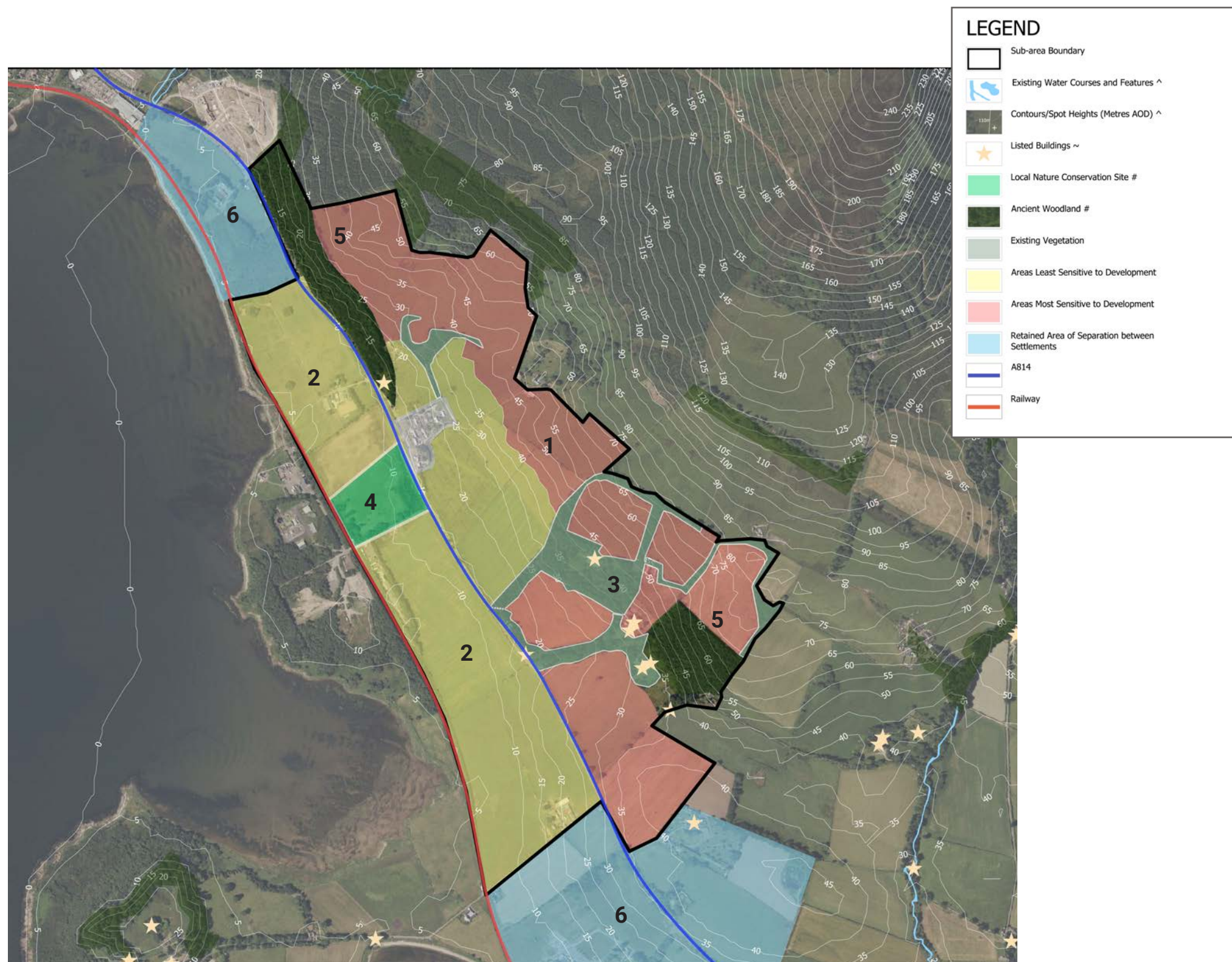


9.1 Description

- 9.1.1 This landscape sub-area follows the Firth of Clyde coastline between Cardross and Helensburgh, blending coastal flats with sloping farmland. West of the A814, the land is flat and boggy, with grazing fields, scrubby woodland, and lower scenic quality due to an equestrian centre and industrial sites. East of the A814, the land rises towards Killoeter Hill and Ben Bowie, featuring grazing fields, traditional farmsteads, and well-maintained hedgerows and drystone dykes. Some woodland is designated as Semi-Natural Ancient Woodland. The Hill of Ardmore visually dominates the area, with wooded crags and historic remnants. Expansive views, rural character, and a network of paths enhance the landscape, though issues like deteriorating drystone dykes and rhododendron spread persist.



CRITERIA	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	SENSITIVITY
Scale	The landscape is medium in scale with a mix of flat coastal terrain to the west and gently sloping farmland to the east. The Hill of Ardmore introduces a more dramatic topographical feature adjacent to the sub-area, visually dominant within the wider setting.	Medium
Landform	The coastal flats along the Firth of Clyde contrast with the rising slopes towards Killoeter Hill and Ben Bowie. The transition from low-lying marshy grassland to upland grazing creates a varied topography, further enhanced by the prominence of Ardmore's wooded crags.	High
Landscape pattern and time depth	This area reflects a historic rural landscape, with traditional farmsteads and field enclosures adding depth to its character. While some farm buildings have been redeveloped into residences, the presence of drystone dykes, hedgerows, and semi-natural woodlands retains a sense of historical continuity.	Medium
Natural character	The coastal grasslands and semi-natural ancient woodlands contribute to the ecological value of the area, with scrubby willow and Juncus colonising wetter areas. Notably, part of this landscape is designated as a Local Nature Conservation Site (LNCS), highlighting a degree of biodiversity importance. However, elements such as rhododendron encroachment and post-and-wire fencing indicate some degradation of natural features.	Medium
Built character	Infrastructure such as the wastewater treatment plant, builders' yards, and equestrian centre disrupts the otherwise rural character. The traditional farmsteads and repurposed buildings offer a contrast, reinforcing the area's agricultural heritage.	Medium
Recreational value	A network of formal and informal paths enhances public access, linking residential areas with the countryside and in particular the Hill of Ardmore. The presence of the equestrian centre provides a recreational function, though it introduces a more fragmented landscape quality.	Medium
Perceptual aspects	The openness of the landscape, particularly towards the Firth of Clyde, creates a strong sense of expanse and exposure. Industrial elements near the A814 somewhat reduce the overall sense of rural tranquillity.	Medium
Settlement setting	The landscape provides a mostly rural backdrop to the approach into Helensburgh along the A814, with its mixture of grazing land and wooded slopes reinforcing the transition from countryside to urban development.	High
Visual prominence	The coastal flats and open farmland are highly visible from the A814. The sloping farmland to the east of the A814 forms part of the backdrop in distant views across the Clyde, however the flatter coastal terrain to the west of the A814 is more visually contained by the Hill of Ardmore and the Birch woodland that contains the wastewater plant.	Medium
Intervisibility	Views across the Firth of Clyde connect this landscape with the wider coastal setting. The elevated slopes also provide views inland towards Killoeter Hill and Ben Bowie, enhancing the area's visual integration with the surrounding countryside.	Medium
Overall	The landscape has Medium to High sensitivity to development, particularly in the open coastal areas, rising farmland, and LNCS, where its rural character and scenic quality are most vulnerable to change. However, areas already influenced by infrastructure and equestrian activities are less sensitive as they are less visually and ecologically intact. Any future development should carefully consider maintaining the open character of the landscape, reinforcing historic patterns, and enhancing the ecological value.	Medium - High



9.2 Opportunities and Constraints

1) Land to the east of the A814 is more visually sensitive to development due to its visual prominence on the slopes of Ben Bowie.

2) The flatter coastal terrain to the west of the A814 is more visually contained by the Hill of Ardmore and the Birch woodland that contains the wastewater plant.

3) The Lyleston House and Keppoch House listed buildings and walled gardens are contained within a well vegetated framework that should be retained,

4) Part of the landscape is designated as an LNCS, which as part of any future development should be retained and enhanced.

5) Areas of Ancient Woodland should be retained and enhanced.

6) The sub-area comprises Green Belt land that is situated between Cardross and Helensburgh. Any future development should provide physical separation from either Cardross or Helensburgh to avoid coalescence.

9.3 Landscape Design Principles

- Maintain views across the Firth of Clyde by keeping key sightlines open and avoiding inappropriate planting or built structures in prominent areas.
- Implement a rhododendron removal strategy in woodland areas to restore native woodland character.
- Preserve and restore existing habitats within the LNCS, ensuring ecological continuity.
- Ensure any new structures are low in height and well-screened to reduce visual prominence, particularly in open coastal area.

10. Helensburgh East

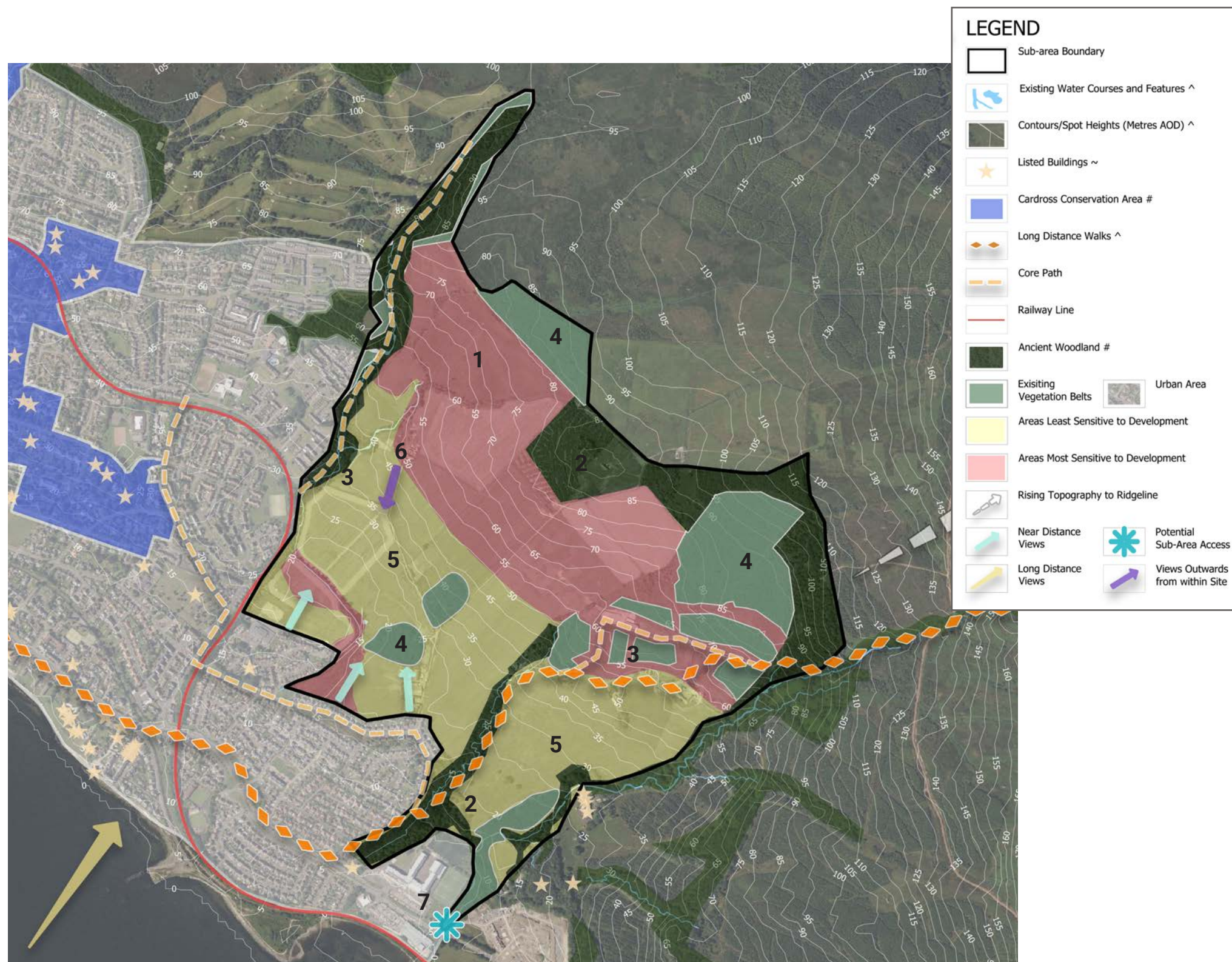


10.1 Description

- 10.1.1 This landscape area consists of rolling farmland on the lower slopes of Ben Bowie, forming the eastern edge of Helensburgh. It extends from 120m down to the A814 and the Firth of Clyde, with moderate-scale fields of semi-improved grassland and some arable crops. Incised wooded ravines, such as Garraway and Red Glens, divide the hillside, while old policy woodlands around Camis Eskan House enclose fields and historic features like stone doocotes and railings. Traditional stone farmsteads with slate roofs sit at around 50m, accompanied by modern agricultural buildings, while smaller cottages are scattered throughout. Well-maintained hawthorn hedges define lower field boundaries, transitioning to drystone dykes and post-and-wire fences at higher elevations. Woodland varies from lime avenues near Camis Eskan to oak and ash along burns, with conifer plantations and regenerating birch encircling the upper slopes of Ben Bowie.



CRITERIA	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	SENSITIVITY
Scale	The area consists of rolling farmland interspersed with wooded ravines and estate woodlands. The landscape is semi-enclosed due to the wooded burns, hedgerows, and drystane dykes, while the open fields provide contrast. The upper slopes of Ben Bowie, with their expansive views, contribute to a larger sense of scale to the north of the area.	Medium
Landform	The landform is gently undulating, sloping from 120m at the limit of enclosed land down to the A814 and the Firth of Clyde. The incised burns, such as Garraway and Red Glens, divide the landscape into a series of smaller compartments, while the raised terraces where farmsteads sit create subtle level steps within the slope.	Medium
Landscape pattern and time depth	Drystane dykes and traditional farmsteads contribute to sense of time depth, however modern agricultural outbuildings and the influence of Helensburgh's settlement edge reduce the strength of this historic character in places.	Medium
Natural character	This landscape has a high degree of natural character, with several significant woodlands designated as Local Nature Sites or listed in the Ancient Woodland Inventory.	High
Built character	The area contains traditional stone farmsteads and slate-roofed cottages, often located at around 50m on level terraces. These are complemented by larger modern agricultural buildings, which can disrupt the historic rural aesthetic. The landscape maintains a predominantly agricultural feel, however is strongly influenced by Helensburgh's settlement edge to the west.	Low
Recreational value	The area provides recreational value through a network of formal and informal paths linking residential areas to the countryside, including Lock Lomond National Park to the north. The wooded burns and estate grounds offer opportunities for walking and access to nature, while the presence of rhododendron invasion in some woodlands reduces their overall accessibility and ecological quality.	Medium
Perceptual aspects	The contrast between the open fields and the incised burns adds visual interest. While the proximity to Helensburgh reduces the sense of remoteness in lower areas, the upper slopes, particularly around Ben Bowie, retain a sense of exposure and natural character.	Medium
Settlement setting	The area forms part of the eastern setting of Helensburgh, acting as a transition between the urban edge and the uplands of Ben Bowie. The wooded burns and policy woodlands provide an attractive backdrop in distant views. The area plays some role in framing views from the town and maintaining a rural approach along the A814.	Medium
Visual prominence	The lower slopes are less visually prominent, while the upper slopes above Camis Eshan House are more exposed and visible from a wider area.	Medium
Intervisibility	The area has limited intervisibility with adjacent landscapes due to the enclosing effect of tree belts and landform.	Low
Overall	This landscape is of an overall Medium sensitivity to development, with the upper slopes and wooded areas higher due to their visibility, scenic qualities, and ecological value. The lower areas have a lower sensitivity, with a stronger capacity to accommodate change while retaining a rural character. The susceptibility of the area is mainly influenced by the rolling topography, the visual prominence of higher elevations, and the presence of important natural and historic features.	Medium



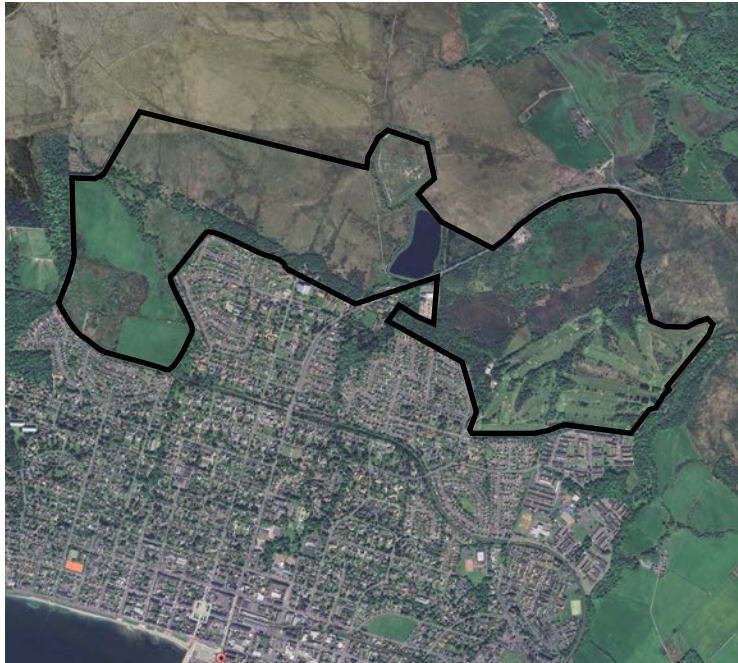
10.2 Opportunities and Constraints

- 1) Higher elevations to the north and northwest of the sub-area are more exposed and visible, making them sensitive to change and limiting large-scale development.
- 2) The sub-area contains and sits adjacent to substantial areas of ancient woodland that require conservation and enhancement.
- 3) Existing Core Path and Long Distance routes through the sub-area provide accessibility to Loch Lomond.
- 4) The sub-area contains blocks of existing vegetation that assist in breaking up the landform in distant views.
- 5) The lower slopes, being less visually prominent and more enclosed, have greater capacity for development.
- 6) Vistas out towards the River Clyde are obtainable from within the sub-area on the upper slopes.
- 7) Access into the sub-area is a constraint, however would be most suitable from the A814 east of Hermitage Academy.

10.3 Landscape Design Principles

- Any future development should lean into Helensburgh's status as the "Garden City of Clyde" through the creation of broad, tree-lined avenues.
- Recreation should be a key driver in the design process, given the sub-area's wealth of natural assets, existing routes, and vicinity to the Loch Lomond National Park.
- Higher density development would be most suitable to the south and west of the sub-area where it is more visually contained and is influenced by the existing urban area.

11. Helensburgh North

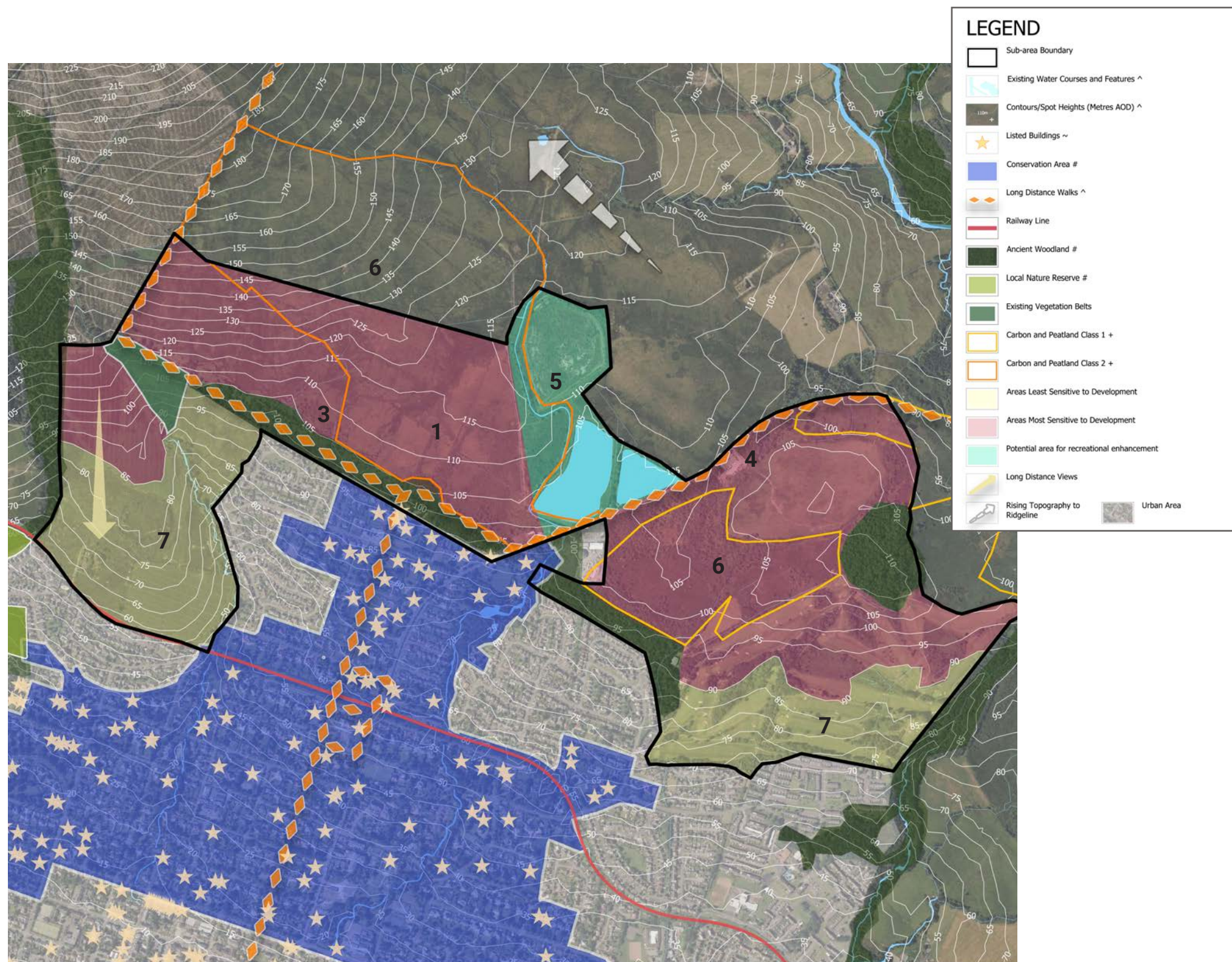


11.1 Description

- 11.1.1 This landscape area comprises a belt of land on the plateau above Helensburgh, surrounding the A818. Bounded by the twin peaks of Ben Bowie and Tom na h-Airidh, it transitions from the town's built-up area at the 100m contour to a relatively wild and open landscape. Characterised by unimproved rough grassland, raised bogs, and regenerating birch woodland, the area also includes remnants of Helensburgh's old water supply, with redundant reservoirs slowly being reclaimed by nature. The Blackhill Plantation forms a distinctive boundary, separating urban development from the moorland beyond. Pylons cross the area, though their visual impact is softened by the vast scale of the landscape. The golf course occupies the southern slopes, offering panoramic views over the Firth of Clyde.



CRITERIA	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	SENSITIVITY
Scale	The area has a large-scale, open landscape with expansive moorland and unimproved grassland dominating the plateau above Helensburgh. The wide extent of this terrain contrasts with the more enclosed Blackhill Plantation and the structured greens of the golf course.	Medium
Landform	The landscape consists of a distinctive ridge rising above Helensburgh, extending into an open plateau that forms the transition between the town and the wilder uplands of Ben Bowie and Tom na h-Airidh. The undulating terrain includes raised bogs, regenerating woodlands, and a network of burns.	Medium
Landscape pattern and time depth	The area's character is shaped by its historic role as a natural backdrop to Helensburgh, with minimal built development. The Blackhill Plantation and old reservoirs reflect historical land use.	Medium
Natural character	The area has a strong natural character, with large sections designated as Local Nature Sites, Semi-Natural Ancient Woodland, or included in the Ancient Woodland Inventory. The mix of moorland, regenerating birch woodland, and remnants of Caledonian pine contribute to its ecological value. However, the civic amenity site and council depot disrupt this character locally.	High
Built character	Few structures exist within this landscape, with the exception of the golf course facilities, a roads depot, a civic amenity site, and a derelict Scottish Water building. These developments contrast with the otherwise natural setting and have introduced urban elements into an otherwise undeveloped area.	Medium
Recreational value	The golf course provides a formal recreational function and a network of paths support public access to the countryside. The reservoirs, though no longer in use, offer opportunities for nature-based recreation.	Medium
Perceptual aspects	This area has a sense of openness, exposure, and wildness, particularly on the plateau beyond the Blackhill Plantation. However, the presence of infrastructure such as pylons and the roads depot reduces the sense of remoteness.	Medium
Settlement setting	The area plays a crucial role in the setting of Helensburgh, forming an undeveloped ridge above the town and marking the transition to open countryside. The Blackhill Plantation serves as a defining boundary between urban and rural areas.	High
Visual prominence	Due to its elevated position, much of the landscape is highly visible from Helensburgh and surrounding areas. The undeveloped ridge is particularly important as it forms the northern skyline of the town, while the golf course, being lower, is less visually exposed.	High
Intervisibility	The area has intervisibility with surrounding landscapes, including views towards Glen Fruin, Loch Lomond, and the Firth of Clyde. Its openness enhances the visual connection between town and countryside.	Medium
Overall	The landscape has Medium to High sensitivity to development, particularly in areas above the 100m contour where the open, natural character is highly susceptible to change. These areas form a key part of Helensburgh's setting and are visually prominent. The lower golf course area has lower sensitivity, as it lies below the Blackhill Plantation and has reduced visibility. There are also areas to the adjacent to Helensburghs northwestern edge with lower sensitivity.	Medium - High



11.2 Opportunities and Constraints

- 1) Maintaining the undeveloped ridge as a distinctive natural backdrop to Helensburgh. Development above the 100m contour risks altering the natural character and skyline of the town.
- 2) The sub-area's ecological and scenic value, combined with its function as a key setting for Helensburgh, limits its capacity for large-scale development.
- 3) Blackhill Plantation serves as a natural boundary that reinforces the urban-rural transition.
- 4) Existing Core Path and Long Distance routes through the sub-area provide accessibility to Loch Lomond.
- 5) Potential for sensitive use of the reservoirs for outdoor activities such as wildlife observation or low-impact water recreation.
- 6) Peat across the sub-area, north of Blackhill Plantation, serves as a key constraint to development.
- 7) Lower lying areas south of the 100m contour / Blackhill plantation are lower in sensitivity due to their visual containment and relationship with Helensburgh's settlement edge.

11.3 Landscape Design Principles

- Maintain the undeveloped ridgeline as a defining feature of Helensburgh's setting, ensuring it remains free from intrusive development. Future development should respect the role of Blackhill Plantation as a boundary feature, reinforcing the distinction between the urban and rural landscapes.
- Use traditional materials and design approaches in any landscape interventions to reflect the character of Helensburgh's Conservation Area.
- Enhance the network of informal and formal paths to improve pedestrian access between Helensburgh and the upland landscape.
- Helensburgh is known for its grid layout which contributes to the distinctive townscape character. Street trees and avenues play a key role in defining the urban landscape, and should be a key consideration in any future proposals.

12. Summary of Findings

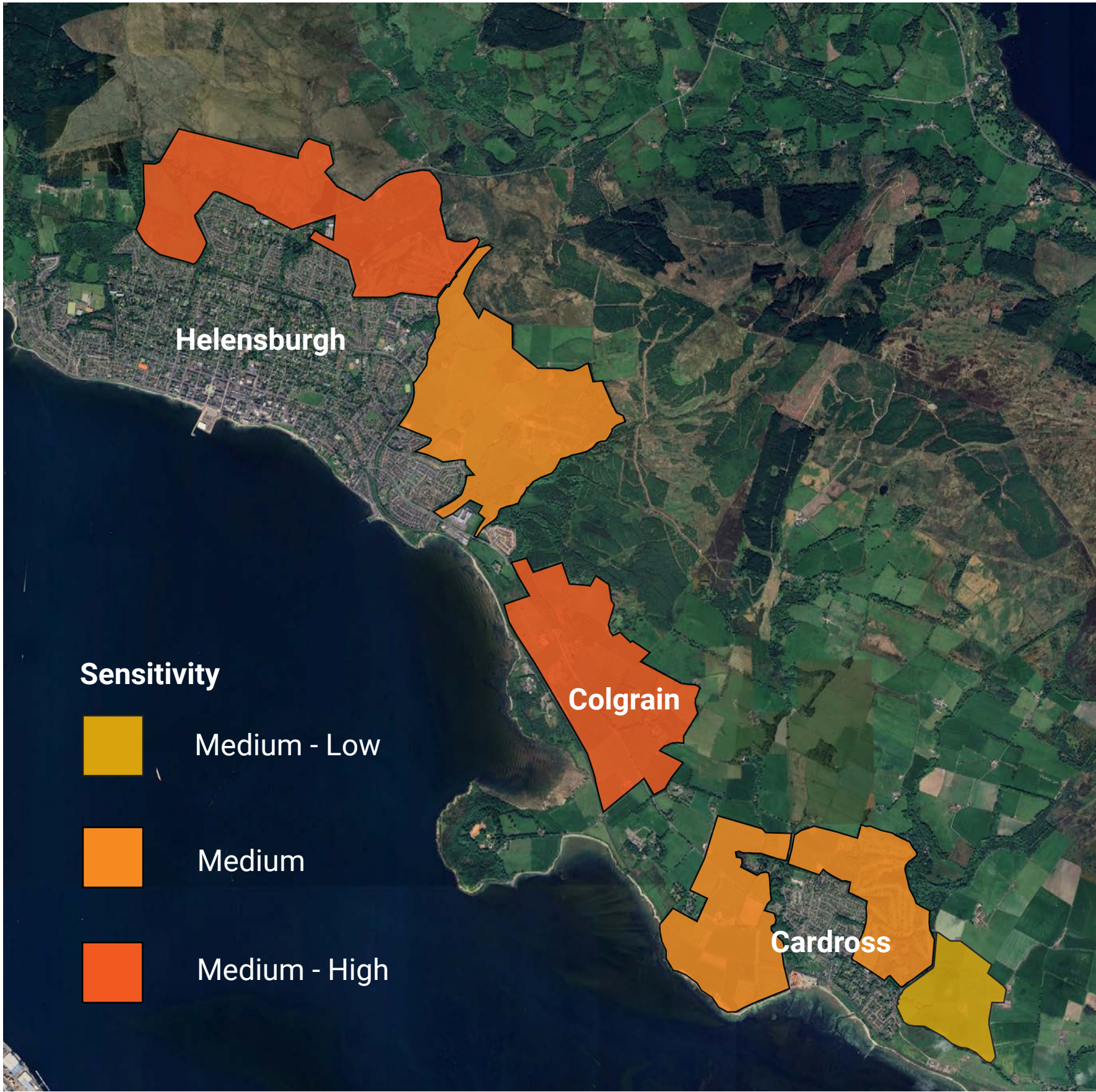
12.1 Cardross East

- 12.1.1 Located east of Cardross, this sub-area features rolling farmland on a west-facing, bowl-shaped hillside. It includes grazing fields, mature hedgerows, derelict drystone dykes, and scattered farmsteads, with a mix of maintained hedges and post-and-wire fences. It has a rural character, moderated by proximity to Cardross.
- 12.1.2 The overall sensitivity to development of Cardross East is Low to Medium. The area's well-contained landform, limited visibility, and lack of strong landscape or recreational associations reduce sensitivity. However, its role as a backdrop to Cardross in long-distance views and semi-enclosed farmland character slightly elevate its sensitivity.
- 12.1.3 There are limited close-range views of the sub-area, and containment by the bowl-shaped landform provides some capacity for development. The lower slopes near Cardross could integrate with existing settlement edges. Development however must stay within the natural bowl, avoid upper slopes, preserve core paths, and maintain the wooded ridge along the southern boundary to protect Cardross's landscape setting.

12.2 Cardross North

- 12.2.1 North of Cardross, this area features old country houses, estate policies, mature woodland, and a golf course. It includes historic elements like Victorian villas, follies, and ornamental planting, with the Kilmahew Burn and views of the Firth of Clyde. Part of it lies within the Cardross Conservation Area.
- 12.2.2 The overall sensitivity to development of Cardross North is Medium. Its historic estate landscapes, mature woodland, and role as a backdrop to Cardross's historic core increase sensitivity, though containment by tree cover and the golf course moderates this.

Any future development should enhance estate boundaries and biodiversity through woodland management that could support sensitive, low-profile development near the golf course or less prominent areas. However, the conservation area, listed buildings (e.g., Commonwealth War Graves), ancient woodland, and proximity to St. Peter's Seminary and Kilmahew Castle serve as constraints to development, especially in the north.



12.3 Cardross West

- 12.3.1 Situated on a ridge descending from Killoeter Hill, this rural landscape features medium-scale grazing and arable fields, hedgerows, drystone dykes, shelterbelts, and ancient woodland (e.g., Geilston Burn SSSI). Traditional farmsteads and expansive Clyde views contribute to its scenic value, though urban elements like a crematorium are present.
- 12.3.2 The sub-area has a Medium sensitivity to development. The raised beach landform and lower slopes are more sensitive due to openness and their role in Cardross's western approach, but containment by topography and tree cover reduces sensitivity in some areas.
- 12.3.3 Less sensitive areas on contained slopes could accommodate sensitively planned development respecting historic patterns and rural character. However, the raised beach, historic estate landscapes, and long-range Clyde views require preservation, limiting large-scale or visually intrusive development

12.4 Helensburgh East

- 12.4.1 On the lower slopes of Ben Bowie, this area features rolling farmland, semi-improved grassland, wooded ravines (e.g., Garraway and Red Glens), and policy woodlands around Camis Eskan House. Traditional farmsteads, modern agricultural buildings, and ancient woodlands contribute to its rural character, however the sub-area is also influenced by Helensburgh's edge.
- 12.4.2 The sensitivity to development of the sub-area is Medium. Upper slopes and wooded areas are more sensitive due to visibility and ecological value, while lower slopes near Helensburgh's existing settlement edge have lower sensitivity and greater capacity for change.
- 12.4.3 The lower slopes, being less prominent, could support development tied to Helensburgh's "Garden City" aesthetic, leveraging existing paths and natural assets. However, higher elevations, ancient woodlands, and core/ long-distance routes to Loch Lomond require careful consideration and conservation

12.5 Helensburgh North


- 12.5.1 A plateau above Helensburgh (beyond the 100m contour), this sub-area includes rough grassland, raised bogs, regenerating birch woodland, and the Blackhill Plantation. It features a golf course, old reservoirs, and panoramic views, with minimal built development except for pylons and a depot.
- 12.5.2 The sensitivity to development of the sub-area is considered Medium to High. The open ridge and plateau are highly sensitive due to their natural character, visibility, and role as Helensburgh's backdrop, while the golf course and areas below Blackhill Plantation have lower sensitivity.
- 12.5.3 Lower areas south of the 100m contour/ Blackhill Plantation could support development, with potential for reservoir-based recreation. However, the undeveloped ridge, peatlands, and ecological value limit development above 100m, preserving the urban-rural transition.

12.6 Colgrain

- 12.6.1 Along the Firth of Clyde between Cardross and Helensburgh, this sub-area blends coastal flats (west of A814) with sloping farmland (east of A814). It includes grazing fields, ancient woodland, traditional farmsteads, and the visually dominant Hill of Ardmure, with industrial and equestrian elements reducing scenic quality in parts.
- 12.6.2 The sensitivity to development of the sub-area is Medium to High. Open coastal flats, rising farmland, and the Local Nature Conservation Site (LNCS) are sensitive, while areas with existing infrastructure are less so.
- 12.6.3 The flatter, contained areas west of the A814 near existing infrastructure could accommodate development with less visual impact. However, the slopes east of the A814, LNCS, ancient woodland, and Green Belt separation between Cardross and Helensburgh limit development, requiring preservation of views and habitats.

12.7 Conclusion

- 12.7.1 This study, conducted as part of the Argyll and Bute Council's Strategic Development Framework, focuses on assessing the landscape's sensitivity and capacity to accommodate built development while preserving its character and visual quality. The study area encompasses land around the settlements of Helensburgh and Cardross, specifically within the Argyll and Bute Green Belt, and includes six sub-areas: Cardross East, Cardross North, Cardross West, Helensburgh East, Helensburgh North, and Colgrain. Its primary purpose is to provide a strategic assessment of landscape sensitivity, guiding sustainable growth and ensuring alignment with local infrastructure and environmental considerations.



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